Representation and the Unpresentable

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Using the writings of Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau, the first section of this paper provides a theoretical analysis suggesting a means of approaching a problem that has characterized much of postmodern thought: the problem of representing the unpresentable. To substantiate this analysis, the second section of this paper will show the ways in which this idea circulates in the work of Samuel Beckett, in general, and in *Waiting for Godot* in particular.

In *The Postmodern Explained*, Jean-François Lyotard offers the following statement in his elaboration of the Kantian philosophy of the sublime:

> The postmodern would be that which in the modern invokes the unpresentable in presentation itself, that which refuses the consolation of correct forms, refuses the consensus of taste permitting common experience of nostalgia for the impossible, and inquires into new presentations—not to take pleasure in them, but to better produce the feeling that there is something unpresentable.[1]

This phrase is often referenced in order to situate discussions of the postmodern, but in its elements it also serves to open a discussion into the possibilities of engagement with the notion of representation and that of the unpresentable. The idea of the intersection of representation with the unpresentable does not begin with Lyotard, but his essay offers an opening point from which to explore these ideas.

Lyotard suggests that the issue of the presentation of the unpresentable is central in the constitution of the postmodern.[2] For Lyotard, it is the invocation of the unpresentable, the demonstration that there is a conceivable which is not presentable, which motivates and constitutes the ways in which various avant-gardes have "humiliated and disqualified reality by their scrutiny of the pictorial techniques used to instill a belief in it."[3] This is a committed effort to work against the mode of thought that produces a "nostalgia for the all and the one, for a reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, for a transparent and communicable

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experience."[4] Lyotard calls for a resistance to the accepted and acceptable. This demands that the artist "work without rules for what *will have been made*," attempting to create, without rules, new rules that will not be known until the work has been finished.[5]

Lyotard articulates the relationship of representation to the unpresentable as one in which the unpresentable is unknown and immobile. It is representation that must actively invoke the unpresentable. In a sense, the unpresentable must be defended against actions that would disguise it. "Let us attest to the unpresentable; let us activate the differends and save the honor of the name."[6] The battle then becomes one of modes of representation—between those that would attempt to create the illusion of unity between the conceivable and the presentable and those that work to "expose the artifices of presentation that allow thought to be enslaved by the gaze and diverted from the unpresentable."[7] The engagement of representation with the unpresentable is a one-sided movement of representation invoking the absence of the unpresentable. In so doing, this engagement exposes other mechanisms which claim to perform a reconciliation of the conceivable and the sensible.

Michel Foucault, in his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, suggests particular strategies for exploring such ideas as "representation" and "the unrepresentable" in their specific relations in discourse. Foucault's archeology analyzes relations among discursive practices in order to differentiate statements and show their dispersion.

> But if we isolate, in relation to the language and the thought, the
> occurrence of the statement/event, it is not in order to spread
> over everything a dust of facts. It is in order to be sure that this
> occurrence is not linked with synthesizing operations of a purely
> psychological kind . . . and to be able to grasp other forms of
> regularity, other types of relations.[8]

In avoiding the unities of tradition, influence, and the oeuvre, this development of Foucault's archaeology allows us to view discourse and discursive practices as elements surfacing unbidden in an open field where their relations with other practices become specifiable. The different ideas of the unpresentable can therefore be thought of as existing within a space, a "space in which discursive events are deployed."[9] This space will have aspects and attributes specific to a particular case of the unpresentable as it is revealed in discourse.

As characterized by Foucault, discourse is a practice which can be defined by specific relations.[10] Within discourse then, or as a series of practices, representation can be thought of as entering into a relation with this space of the

unpresentable. How this interaction is described, analyzed, interpreted, or identified will determine fundamental aspects of our thinking about representation and the unpresentable. "Identity freezes the gesture of thinking," Michel de Certeau asserts in *Heterologies*, "It pays homage to an order."[11]

The interaction of representational practices with the space in which the unpresentable is found can consequently be examined as a relationship of a space with the practices that open it to passage. Two further ideas elaborate this notion of passage through a space: Michel de Certeau's notion of tactics and strategies in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of nomad, or haptic space in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Michel de Certeau discusses the distinction between tactics and strategies in his sociological investigation, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. According to de Certeau, a strategy is:

> a calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed.[12]

A tactic, on the other hand, is:

> a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. . . . Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to *keep to itself*, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection . . . . It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow.[13]

A strategy "postulates a place." By assuming the truth of the place and claiming it for its own, a strategy imposes its own order upon the space in which it operates. A tactic "must play on and with a terrain imposed upon it." Tactics make no claim on the space they pass through because they lack the means of doing so. A tactic is an opportunity for action seized while in a space not one's own, a space that has been claimed by and "organized by the law of a foreign power."

The distinction involved in the definition of tactics and strategies intersects with issues of control and ownership. A strategy defines ownership, or what

does and does not belong to an evolving structure. By postulating a place, a strategy can begin to delimit what belongs to it as its own. The definition of an "owned" place allows breathing room in which to capitalize on acquisitions and prepare for the future. This "owned" place is therefore somewhat independent of the exigencies of time. A strategy is also "a mastery of places through sight."[14] The claiming of a place establishes a structure which determines what does and does not belong. Whatever does not belong can then be seen as an object which can further be subjected to a binary distinction: interior or exterior, included or excluded. Necessary to the existence of strategy is a certain power that allows the claiming of place and the division of interior and exterior. It is not possible to strategize without this strength.

A tactic on the other hand "is an art of the weak."[15] The greater the strength one has the less mobile one necessarily becomes. An army of thousands is stronger, but less mobile, than a small band of guerrillas. Conversely, the more mobility one has the lesser the strength. Without the strength to establish a place that is "owned" a tactic relies on opportunities that appear. Without the power to establish a claim there can be no time to plan or prepare. There is no mastery of place over time. Without its own place a tactic must continually move and operate only with immediate, local options. Without this place there can be no position from which to distinguish interior and exterior. There is no mastery of sight without an "owned" place.

The practices of representation that allow us to enter the space of the unpresentable vary in form, function, mode, and force as well as in number, style, and the extent to which they allow us access. They are tactical in their specificity to their particular historical moment of appearance. They do not have the unity or organizational strength to be described as strategic. The space of the unpresentable is too vast and changing for any practice or set of practices to establish a territory.

The space of the unpresentable these practices encounter and open to passage can be thought of in terms of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of nomad, or haptic space, as they discuss it in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In order to discuss two different kinds of space (the smooth and the striated), Deleuze and Guattari use nomad art as a model. Nomad art utilizes close-range vision and not long-distance vision; an abstract line instead of a concrete line; and haptic space, instead of optical space. Tactile, haptic space is opposed to optical space in that it is not oriented by the visual. Rather it is negotiated by a sense of touch, it is tactile space: "One is not 'in front of' any more than one is 'in,' (one is 'on' . . .)."[16] Haptic space requires contact and interaction with surroundings, consequently its orientation is absolutely local. Optical space, using long-distance vision, does not need this contact because of its visualized delimiting boundaries. "The nomad, nomad space, is localized and not delimited."[17]

Haptic space is smooth rather than striated. That is to say, the work of

nomad art is not arranged along lines of perspective: presenting an image which places the viewer as subject consuming or reflecting the art object. The work of nomad art is smooth: "orientations, landmarks, and linkages are in continuous variation." There are no lines that operate to divide and occupy the space. The nomad moves between multiple points and not directly from one to another. The movement is made possible by an absence of orienting striations. Like walking through a snowstorm at the North Pole, there are no stable landmarks which can be used to locate one's self according to an immobile outside representation like a map. One must use local orientations that shift from location to location. One must operate step by step. In a haptic arrangement of space there is no visual model of united reference points for an outside observer.

The passage through this haptic space of the unpresentable does not allow an overall view of its arrangement. The occurrences of the unpresentable are never seen as complete or in their entirety. Representational practices can be explored locally as they interact with the space of the unpresentable. By investigating the relationship of representation and the unpresentable as these ideas appear in places such as Lyotard's discussion of the postmodern, Gilles Deleuze's discussion of a Francis Bacon painting, or in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, further relations are revealed and other ways of thinking about this relationship become possible. This mode of investigation examines the possibilities of movement among the pre-existing relations in an open field of discourse.

Consequently, questions that would identify marks of status or identity—questions of perspective and position—retreat in the face of other questions concerning passage, momentary relations, and traces of previous movement. In this configuration, the relationship between representation and the unpresentable are specifiable; but the demands for authorization, legitimization, or justification that can accompany examinations of a more optic nature are replaced by investigations of the forces and practices that function within this haptic space. For example, in a specific instance of representation, which practices allow the unpresentable to make its presence known in the space of discourse? Which practices establish a mode of representation that can only reflect the accepted and acceptable? Which modes of representation allow movement to occur? Which practices work to situate or stabilize the unpresentable through representation? This mode of proceeding offers an investigation of such questions in order to begin to examine the possibilities of thought surrounding this relationship. The question of what responses are possible in representing the unpresentable might then be phrased: What movement is it possible to make in this turbulent space?

Two of the pre-existing relations in this space have been articulated by Jean François Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze. As suggested earlier, Lyotard's call for resistance in *The Postmodern Explained* describes a relation of representation to the unpresentable in which the unpresentable is unknown and immobile. Deleuze

examines the painting of Francis Bacon and his use of the violence of sensation.

Another set of relations between representation and the unpresentable is articulated in Gilles Deleuze's discussion of the painting of Francis Bacon. In discussing Bacon's use of sensation ("that which is directly transmitted and which avoids the boredom of a story to be told"[18]) Deleuze writes:

> To the violence of that which is represented (the sensational, the cliché) the violence of sensation is opposed. The latter is identical with its direct action upon the nervous system, the levels through which it passes and the domains which it traverses; being itself figure, it owes nothing to the nature of the object which is figured. It is as in Artaud: cruelty is not what we believe, and it depends less and less on that which is represented.[19]

This is more than a rejection of an aesthetic standard—and more than a rejection of representation understood as a doubling, or mirrored image. Deleuze suggests that Bacon's paintings do not paint the image of violence. Rather, he opposes the violence of sensation to the image of violence; a violence more easily ascribed to the relation between the work and its audience. The direct action upon the nervous system constitutes part of a mode of representation which would allow this violence of sensation to take place. The unpresentable is not located in an image of violence. It will not fit in the frame of figuration. Instead, it demands a different mode of representation to accommodate itself.

This mode of representation does not allow a relegation of the violence of the work to the figured objects, the painter, the viewer, or the paint. Deleuze writes, "Bacon has always wanted to eliminate the 'sensational,' that is, the primary figuration of that which provokes a violent sensation."[20] The violence is not to be found within the mirror of representation. It is always elsewhere. "When he paints the screaming pope, there is nothing that causes horror . . . ; it is rather the way in which the pope himself sees nothing and screams *in the presence of the invisible.*"[21] The cause of the violence of sensation, or that which causes the horror of the image, is invisible but present. This invisibility is not quiet or still. In fact, it is a force which makes its presence known.

Where the unpresentable can be found, or where it comes from, loses importance here. It is not a question of location, seizure and identification. It is not a lost object. The unpresentable nevertheless makes itself known. The images in Bacon's paintings often appear to undergo a violent movement. This violent movement that Bacon's paintings obtain does not explain the violence of sensation, the unpresentable. It is not an aspect of the unpresentable caught in a spasm frozen in time. Instead, "levels of sensation explain that which subsists of

movement."[22]   It is the unpresentable which impacts the space of representation and releases the violence of sensation as part of the violent movement. The invisible reveals its presence without becoming visible. The spasm in Bacon's painting, says Deleuze, this violent movement, is one which reveals *"the action of invisible forces on the body."*[23]

The scream of the pope in the presence of the invisible and the action of invisible forces on the body both suggest that the relationship between representation and the unpresentable is here one of an interaction of forces. Through Bacon's practices, the dimension where the unpresentable resides is prodded. Without becoming visible in the the optical space of the painting, the force of the unpresentable impacts the representational space. Its effects surface in this representational space and ripple outward. The invisible unpresentable releases a movement which is only apparent by its effects on the visible. The relationship is interactive but without contact, allowing the presence of the unpresentable to become known. But this presence of the unpresentable is made possible only within a particular mode of representation. Or rather, Bacon's practices establish and constitute a particular mode of representation which allows the unpresentable to surface.

The question of representing the unpresentable can here be opened to one of the relation between particular modes of representation and particular representational practices. An investigation of the possibilities of thought surrounding the subject suggests an investigation of representational practices in order to delineate a particular mode of representation. The function and nature of representation and the unpresentable can there be identified in their particular relations.

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My investigations along these lines will center on a work long considered a classic but which remains consistently alienating to many audiences: Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Since the first performance the play has received mixed reactions.[24]   Martin Esslin attributes this recurring phenomenon to the play's initial status as a succès de scandale.[25] The publication of the text in November 1952 and the radio broadcast in February 1952 apparently raised interest in the 1953 premiere performance as an intellectual/social event not to be missed.[26] Despite some good reviews however, attendance dropped off after the first night and, until its scandalous nature spread, those involved had to "drum up support for it among their friends."[27] The controversial nature of the first production is exemplified by a description of an outburst from the audience after Lucky's monologue:

> The curtain had to be brought down . . . as twenty well-dressed,
> but disgruntled spectators whistled and hooted derisively. During

a stormy intermission, the most irate protestors came to blows
with the play's supporters, then trooped back into the theater
only to stomp noisily out again as the second act opened with
the same two characters still waiting for Godot. . . .[28]

Accompanying this level of rejection, offers to translate the play and
produce it in different countries came in one after another. That fall eight
simultaneous productions were being staged in Germany; and the Paris production,
remounted in September, toured France, Switzerland, Italy and Germany.[29]

Waiting for Godot, now considered a dramatic cliché more frequently
than a model of contemporaneous engagement with the unpresentable, was written
in France in 1948-1949, in the years just following World War II. The easy
identification of this play with its accumulated and familiar themes and meanings
calls for a particularizing of Beckett's representational practices.[30]

Although an abridged version had been broadcast on French radio February
17, 1952, *En Attendant Godot* was first performed in Paris at the two-hundred-and-
thirty-seat Théâtre de Babylone on January 5, 1953. Directed by Roger Blin who
also played Pozzo, the cast included Pierre Latour as Estragon, Lucien Raimbourg
as Vladimir, Serge Lecointe as the boy, and Jean Martin, who was brought in to play
Lucky three weeks before the opening. Beckett attended almost all of the rehearsals
and made suggestions to Blin which were frequently incorporated.[31] Designed by
Sergio Gerstein, the set for the small stage consisted of simple and readily available
elements largely due to a lack of money. The tree was fashioned out of coat-
hangers and dark crepe paper with green paper leaves.[32] A light green cloth draped
the sides and back of the stage, and the lighting effects were minimal.[33] Three oil
cans with light bulbs were used to light the space: two from the back of the house
and one behind the stage to project both the sun and the moon.[34] This meant that
the first act was performed in near obscurity. Many of the costumes and set pieces
were found at flea markets or pulled from the garbage.[35] All the characters wore
bowler hats, Vladimir and Estragon in black coats and pants, Pozzo dressed as an
"English gentleman farmer," and Lucky wore a long white wig, a striped shirt,
long embroidered red and green coat, and had red eyes and lips.[36] The movements
of the characters were directed to include as much "stylized action" as possible.[37]
This included the abrupt hesitant movements of Vladimir and Estragon, what Beckett
referred to in his 1975 production as "approach by stages,"[38] as well as Lucky's
continual shaking.[39] Speech and movement were consciously separated. The plot
of the play is immensely familiar to nearly anyone who has heard the title: two
people, twice visited by two other men, wait for a man who never comes, twice.

Waiting for Godot was written according to Beckett "as a relaxation, to get
away from the awful prose I was writing at the time."[40] As if written without the
knowledge of conventional attributes of dramatic representation, *Waiting for Godot*

is conspicuously empty of the constituent elements of these systems—or seems to parody them. The characters, action, language, time and location in the play are not so much empty as they are drained of their substance. The play does not thematically present a process of decline from completeness, but rather seems to exhibit a state of continual entropy.

The action that occurs in *Waiting for Godot* is replete with futility. These actions are more specifically activities, enterprises without the history or impact of dramatic action. The play opens with Estragon attempting to pull off his boots. Giving up he declares, "Nothing to be done."[41] When a few moments later he finally achieves the removal, he is unable to find anything that would justify his discomfort. "Well?" asks Vladimir. "Nothing," is the reply. "Show," demands Vladimir, but "There's nothing to show."[42] The same futility of effort occurs with Vladimir's bothersome hat. From Vladimir's suppressed laughter to Pozzo's answering Estragon's question ("Why doesn't he put down his bags?"), from Pozzo's exit to Didi and Gogo's decision to leave, each activity with potential for significance has been drained of even its conventional import. Nothing in the play can achieve the status of dramatic action.

In *Waiting for Godot*, however, a reminder of a particular and constant occasion is repeated: Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for Godot. As redundant and inane as this seems in the face of the title of the play, it reveals an aspect of the activities that distinguishes their characteristic futility from that of Beckett's later *Endgame*. In the end all the activities are justified, determined or referenced to this fundamental tenet. Vladimir declares:

> What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed
> in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense
> confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to
> come—.[43]

This lies behind their being in this place and time, regardless of doubts concerning the accuracy of the convictions of these two regarding where and when they are located. As such, the waiting almost achieves the status of a dramatic action. The difficulty here is that "waiting" is so near to complete passivity. Even the centrality of this unlikely drama is undermined as either they are waiting for Godot—"or for night to fall," as Vladimir belatedly concludes the above monologue.

The enterprises undertaken in the play are only relatively ineffective, futile, incomplete, or aborted. They seem drained only in relation to actions of fulfilled import. In a play in which Godot arrives, there would be the theoretical possibility of substantive dramatic action because the importance of his arrival will form a means of justifying the characters' actions. These actions could then be assigned a value. In this play, where the premise of the characters' existence in time and

space is relative to Godot's arrival, all actions and activities, all motions and displays, are denied the relation with that independent observer which would provide the possibility of assigned value.

The characters in *Waiting for Godot* are reduced to figures, producing the activities as a by-product of their existence. Their pasts are less keys to their characters than material for present activity. Vladimir says, "We were respectable in those days. Now it's too late."[44] This change in fortunes does not deepen his character, as it might in a more conventional tragic character who has fallen from a past respectability, but neither does it serve to heighten the comedy. For although the characters have often been related to music hall, vaudeville, or silent movie comedians, here this change in fortune does not give the two a freedom of a movement (such as Chaplin's little tramp who lives outside social conventions) or turn them into objects of fun (such as Buster Keaton). Rather this speech is material with which Vladimir fashions a musing conversation to pass the time. "In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent."[45] He performs an activity with language which has only a tangential relation to character.

This effect is reproduced widely in the play so that characters seem reduced to figures. But where Vladimir and Estragon are traces of more solid selves, Pozzo and Lucky do undergo a transformation. At their appearance in the second act Pozzo is blind and Lucky mute. But again these transformations do not so much expand the figures into the fullness of characters, but instead seem unmotivated occurrences that signal a characteristic diminishment. The two are questioned about their infirmities but no clear development is linked to either the blindness or the muteness. In fact it is suggested that these might not be Pozzo and Lucky (or at least the same Pozzo and Lucky who appeared in the first act) as Pozzo does not remember having met them the day before. This too is subject to uncertainty because, "tomorrow," Pozzo says, "I won't remember having met anyone today. So don't count on me to enlighten you."[46] The result of these transformations suggests a diminishment congruent with Beckett's comment regarding why the boots of the second act are too big for Estragon where in the first act they were too tight. In a letter to Colin Duckworth, Beckett writes, "the second day boots are no doubt same as first and Estragon's feet wasted, pined, shrunk and dwindled in interval."[47] The Boy who appears near the end of each act—played by the same actor—nevertheless denies that he has come before. In terms of character, there seems to be entropic diminishment, with the far end of the spectrum represented by Mr. Godot, who never even achieves appearance. Coupled with the surrounding uncertainties, this entropic dwindling creates an instability. The diminishment does not end nor is it foreseen to end. Neither does it have a starting point. The action and characters are not complete at the start of the play nor empty at the end, rather they are in a career without beginning or end. It is such that its continuance is theoretically infinite.

The time of the play is also diminished in substance. "And is it Saturday? Is it rather not Sunday? (Pause.) Or Monday? (Pause.) Or Friday?"[48] Estragon's badgering uncertainties are paralleled in Pozzo's vociferous denunciations:

> Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you?[49]

Estragon's questioning of the day and Pozzo's rant articulate a sense of time that is uncertain—that might as well be all the same moment. The means of measuring time is unavailable. As time is relative, it passes meaningfully only with reference to a reliability outside the vagaries of time: a watch, the sun or stars (with a reliable sense of direction), atomic decay, etc. Without this measurement, time becomes a fluid force, at once endless and simultaneous. In *Waiting for Godot* there is no outside, independent entity that can be reliably referenced to mark the passage of time, even Pozzo's watch can't be found. The substance of time has been drained and diminished into uncertainty.

Frequently in this play, language is reduced to its mechanistic aspects. Vladimir and Estragon take part in exchanges reminiscent of Vaudeville chatter. From the exchange about "all the dead voices"[50] to Vladimir's song opening the second act to the exchange of insults, words are used with less regard for meaning than for their material function.

> Vladimir: Moron!
> Estragon: That's the idea, let's abuse each other.
> *They turn, move apart, turn again and face each other.*
> Vladimir: Moron!
> Estragon: Vermin!
> Vladimir: Abortion!
> Estragon: Morpion!
> Vladimir: Sewer-rat!
> Estragon: Curate!
> Vladimir: (*with finality*) Crritic!
> Estragon: Oh! (*he wilts, vanquished, and turns away*)
> Vladimir: Now let's make up.[51]

There is less concern for the effects of these insults than for the function of the game that the exchange forms. The language is not empty, meaningless, nor nonsensical—merely without any but an aesthetic function. Vladimir and Estragon

are not insulting each other in the way one might expect from a fighting pair, but the words are not completely senseless. Rather they fulfill a particular function: the language is used as a game.

This diminished function of words should not be confused with Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of "language games." For Wittgenstein, the meaning of language resides in its use. He uses the term "language games" to talk about the confluence of rule-bound, situational, contextual and historical factors during and in which language could be said to have meaning. Language is a relative phenomenon, subject for its significance to a range of correspondent references and links that extend beyond a sole reliance on the syntactical. According to Wittgenstein language acquires its meaning through its utilization in a complex of verifiable relations.[52] In *Waiting for Godot* language becomes a game because it is denied the reliability of independent verification.

The "exchange of insults" in the play cannot be said to take part in what might be called an exchange of insults between a fighting pair in actual argument not only because it is a theatricalized representation. That is, this difference does not depend on the comparison between a staged exchange and a "real" exchange. It is a game of a different nature, as well, from what such an exchange might be for George and Martha of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

In Albee's play, although game-playing abounds, the language game for their exchange is played according to the rules of their tangled relationship and the rules of language. This does not mean grammatical rules, but rules of communication—rules by which language functions in everyday life. So when Martha says "You pig!" to George, he has several possible options for reply including "Oink! Oink!", but his options do not include "Brick!" Such rules can be easily deduced from the script of *Virginia Woolf* because its use of language can be independently verified. Even though the characters play games, they are games with rules drawn from life—verifiable with reference to a larger reality.

Vladimir and Estragon have no such luck. When Vladimir says "Curate!" the rules say Estragon must respond with another insult, but the rules of this game are only verifiable with reference to the two players. The rules of this game are not correspondent to a larger reality. This creates a sense of "falseness" to the exchange. True, Vladimir and Estragon seem to be aware of the "falseness" of their exchange, but this is only "false" in relation to a "true" exchange that has no place in the play. The self-awareness of the game does not make it any less a game. The function of this exchange is a reduction from the potentially full and expressive function that language has in everyday life, or in such a play as Albee's. The function of language in *Waiting for Godot* then is a (relatively) diminished one to the extent that it lacks the stability of the verifying relations that would establish its significance.

The appearance of diminishment is a relative phenomenon, proportional to the fullness and depth of a doubled representation. It is important to note that

the reductions of the play's elements (action to activity, character to figure, time to a fluid moment, language to game) can generally only be seen as such in their relations with more conventional dramaturgy. Reduction requires a capacity for fullness, for absolutes. The diminishment of these aspects within the play is not a digression from full to empty. There is no point in the play where they appear, in any real sense, fuller. Within the play the diminishment is a constant direction rather than an unfinished movement.

In relation to more conventional dramatic devices, these aspects of *Waiting for Godot* appear reduced or bare, shorn of all but the minimal requirements. The play might then be seen as, for example, a minimalist manifestation of a humanistic thematic. This perspective, however satisfying, can obscure the movements on the play's surface by construing them as indicative of its depth. This depth constructs the play as signifying: a representation of human misery,[53] a model of anti-theatre,[54] and a doubling evasion of presence.[55] From this perspective the play becomes a subject capable of producing statements. For example: the play marks a place within a shift in consciousness as delineated by twentieth century thinkers,[56] it reveals the shapes of archetypes,[57] it makes an antagonistic renunciation of the relations on which art's redemptive value is structured,[58] it is an inventory and a defense of Beckett's Irishness,[59] or it is in an involved relation with his biography.[60]

The diminishments of *Waiting for Godot* can be seen to produce a surface, not of meaninglessness or cliché, but of representation. When the representational surface is examined, the practices articulated, the apparent motions on the surface can be seen as the matter out of which dramatic products are formed. These substances are in a process that might more accurately be described as a vector of direction rather than of movement. This is a directional signpost rather than a journey. Nobody wastes away, they are merely becoming smaller. Time and motion do not stop, but merely become more indeterminate and effect-less. Language does not become nonsensical, but collapses upon itself in repetitive games. These aspects are the results of practices which can be said to create a trapped surface of representation.

In the context of astrophysics, a trapped surface is "a two-dimensional surface . . . on which the gravitational field is so strong that light rays directed outward from its surface 'fall back inward'. "[61] A star becomes a trapped surface before it becomes a black hole. A phenomenon implied by Einstein's general theory of relativity in the formation of black holes, this occurs when the radius of a collapsing body such as a star decreases past a certain proportional distance known as the Schwartzschild radius, or event horizon. "After this stage, nothing further that happens to the collapsing body can affect the region outside the Schwartzschild radius."[61] Because of the density of the mass inside the event horizon, spacetime is curved by its immense gravitational pull. Light, too, is affected by gravity and as the density reaches a certain point light cannot radiate beyond the event horizon.

The collapsing body reaches infinite density and infinitesimal mass and becomes a singularity. An outside observer could never see anything once the event horizon has been crossed because any light pointed into the black hole would not reflect back, and because of the immense gravity no light from this surface could escape. A trapped surface occurs at just the point when the size decreases beyond the event horizon and nothing escapes the collapsing body. It is an aspect of the geography of spacetime.

The practices utilized by Beckett in *Waiting for Godot* can be said to create a trapped surface of representation. Representation occurs at the point of diminishment beyond which there is no possibility of independently verifiable observation. The aspects of the play affected by Beckett's practices are in a state of diminishment. Character, action, time, and language seem reduced because they have been taken beyond the representational event horizon: there is no possibility of independent observation because nothing that would serve as a message is allowed to escape. The futility and incompletion of the play are always observed from a relation denied the stability of independent measurement.

This trapped surface is an aspect of the geography of representation. It is a surface, impossible to reach beneath. It is not in complete collapse, neither does it re-expand; yet it is always diminishing. Things are continually winding down. It is alone and being lost, out of reach and silent. But it is not unknowable. Aspects of its texture and composition interact with forces of its construction and its degrees of stability. It is the density of its gravity which precludes the possibility of verifying any organizing motion beneath the surface. We are left with the only recourse available to the astrophysicist: to judge the attributes of the object by the effect it has on its surroundings. This does not mean we are left with nothing to say, only that our knowledge of what lies below the surface cannot be discovered through optical examination. To think about representation in this mode is to be forced to approach this space on its own terms.

Representation and the unpresentable meet in *Waiting for Godot* in the way that Beckett's practices allow the unpresentable to mark the space with its various effects. Beckett's representational practices in this work are not encumbered with the obligation to imitate or transfer. This absence, or perhaps more accurately this smoothness, is not one half of an equation between the author and the audience awaiting the completing process of transfer from one to the other during performance. The non-appearance of Godot is not an unresolved question demanding the resolution of interpretation. It is part of a collection of practices which smooth the representational space so that the unpresentable can texture this surface and make its presence known.

The unpresentable in Beckett's play lies beneath the representational event horizon. As with Lyotard and Bacon the unpresentable is not directly depicted. As

in Deleuze's reading of Bacon, the representational space is made sensitive to the movements of the unpresentable. However, in the case of *Waiting for Godot* the unpresentable is not prodded into a movement whose force marks the representational space. Here the unpresentable remains hidden and quiet, as for Lyotard. But Beckett's practices do not directly address or make an active invocation of the unpresentable. Instead the immense gravity and weight of the unpresentable—unidentified and in its silence—is revealed in the strength of its acknowledged existence. It is this strength which gives the unpresentable its presence in *Waiting for Godot.*

Its density is what prevents the direct transmittal of information. The information that it is possible to glean from approaching this work never seems to accumulate—or it accumulates in such profuse detail that it overwhelms efforts to give it a meaningful shape. Lucky's speech can be and has been mined for such information, but in the end it is a single muddled speech, broadcast in performance at great speed. The importance of its information is brought up against the means of its production and these aspects seem to be both striving for and struggling against any notion of significance. What one can say about information transmitted directly through this play seems always to be made from a position that has been hesitantly built of delicate material upon a shifting ground. Beckett's practices have left no stable structure from which to defend a proclamation of received information. To build a shelter of the scattered objects that remain requires nailing the wind to the door.

The immense gravity of the unpresentable is also what redistributes the geography of surrounding phenomena to appear distorted, meaningless, or empty. Beckett has a reputation in some quarters as a dark prophet of human misery.[63] Rather than see the emptiness of *Waiting for Godot* as a sign or aspect of a represented condition, it is possible to see this meaninglessness as a ripple in the representational space. This is not to claim that Beckett's works are somehow misunderstood, and are actually light. The emptiness here is of the representational space, not necessarily the depiction of a condition of human emptiness. An investigation of Beckett's practices reveals the textures of a surface that was thought to be empty. If this emptiness is allowed to remain so, without the imposition of our interpretive stance, this surface reveals the textures created by the force of the unseen. This emptiness is a testament to the power and weight of an unpresentable.

The effects of the unpresentable on the representational space, which can appear violent or extreme, are without ostensible cause but leave a complex and delicate texture. The textures of the representational space—the results of Beckett's representational practices—are intricately involved with the time and place of its manifestation. The historical, social, political, economic, and cultural conditions that inevitably surround the production of this work are manifested in the audiences and spaces for which this work is performed. The specific circumstances of each

production inhabit the fabric of performance and inform the textures of its realization. The negotiation of the textures of this representational surface will include a negotiation of the specific circumstances in which the performance appears. To begin to discuss the aspects of this texture is to begin to discuss the multiple relations that exist in a specific time and space. For example, the time and place of *Godot*'s premiere suggest relations between the texture of *Godot*'s trapped surface and the aspects of post-World War II Paris. These relations may speak more clearly to the nature of the weight and silence of the unpresentable which makes itself known through Beckett's practices than will the words of Didi, Gogo or the others. The broken surfaces of the internal and external European landscapes become part of the texture of the premiere of Beckett's play. Movements through this turbulent space become possible only by a careful navigation through its textural geography.

Notes

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8. Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972) 28-9.

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11. Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986) 194.

12. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984) 35-36.

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16. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987) 493. Intensive discussions of nomadology and haptic space can be found in *A Thousand Plateaus* 351-423 and 474-500.

17. Deleuze and Guattari 382.

18. Gilles Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas and Jacqueline Code, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia UP, 1993) 188.

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24. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996) 349.

25. Martin Esslin, "Is it All Gloom and Doom?" *New York Times* 24 Sep. 1967, sec. 2: 1.

26. Deidre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, (New York: Harcourt, 1978) 429.

27. Knowlson 349.

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29. Bair 435-6.

30. *Waiting for Godot* has been widely discussed and interpreted. For interpretations of Beckett's play, see, for example: H. Porter Abbot, *Beckett Writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1996); James Acheson, *Samuel Beckett's Artistic Theory and Practice* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1997); Alan Astro, *Understanding Samuel Beckett* (Columbia, South Carolina: U of South Carolina P, 1990); Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard UP, 1993); Enoch Brater, *Why Beckett* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989); Marius Buning and Lois Oppenheim, eds., *Beckett in the 1990s: Selected Papers from the Second International Beckett Symposium Held in The Hague, 8-12 April 1992* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1993); Lance St. John Butler and Robin J. Davies, eds., *Rethinking Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990); Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1962); and her *Samuel Beckett: Waiting for Godot: A Casebook* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987); Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory, and Text* (New York: Blackwell, 1988); and his Waiting for Godot *and* Endgame (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992); Thomas Cousineau, Waiting for Godot: *Form in Movement* (Boston: Twayne, 1990); Mary Aswell Doll, *Beckett and Myth: An Archetypal Approach* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse UP, 1988); Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 1980 ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1961); Paul Foster, *Beckett and Zen: A Study of Dilemma in the Novels of Samuel Beckett* (London: Wisdom, 1989); Stanton B. Garner, *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Modern Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994); S. E. Gontarski, ed., *The Beckett Studies Reader* (Gainsville, Florida: UP of Florida, 1993); Jane Alison Hale, *The Broken Window: Beckett's Dramatic Perspective* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue UP, 1987); John P. Harrington, *The Irish Beckett* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse UP, 1991); Mary Junker, *Beckett: The Irish Dimension* (Dublin: Wolfhound P, 1995); Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance.* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989); Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (New York: Grove, 1961); Breon Mitchell, "Samuel Beckett and the Postmodernism Controversy," *Exploring Postmodernism: Selected Papers Presented at a Workshop on Postmodernism at the XIth International Comparative Literature Congress,*

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31. Knowlson 349.

32. Bair 422.

33. Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre: Volume 1: From Waiting for Godot to* Krapp's Last Tape (New York: Riverrun P, 1988) 82.

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36. McMillan 71, 77.

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41. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove, 1954) 7.

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47. McMillan 62.

48. Beckett 11.

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52. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd edition (New York: Macmillan, 1958). See, in particular, remarks 7, 27, 65.

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61. Robert M. Wald, *Space, Time, and Gravity*, 2nd ed. (Chicago & London: U of Chicago P, 1992) 86-7.

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63. See, for example, his many obituaries including: Bruce Davidson, "Merry Messenger of Doom" *US News and World Report* 8 Jan. 1990: 18; John Bemrose, "Terrible Beauty" *MacLean's* 8 Jan. 1990: 47; John Carey, "Looking Deep Into the Soul of Sam" The Sunday Times, Books, London, 15 September 1996, Section 7, page 4; David Gates, "Stories Against the Silence" *Newsweek* 8 Jan. 1990: 43; William A. Henry III, "Giving Birth 'Astride of a Grave' " *Time* 8 Jan. 1990: 69; Hugh Kenner, "Samuel Beckett, RIP" *National Review* 22 Jan. 1990: 19; and Jim McCue, "Resisting or not with life and Beckett" *Times Literary Supplement* 1 Apr 1994: 18.