



Miranda

4 (2011)

Samuel Beckett: Drama as philosophical endgame?

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Confining, Incapacitating, and Partitioning the Body: Carcerality and Surveillance in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, and *Play*

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Electronic reference

Victoria Swanson, « Confining, Incapacitating, and Partitioning the Body: Carcerality and Surveillance in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, and *Play* », *Miranda* [Online], 4 | 2011, Online since 24 June 2011, connection on 09 February 2016. URL : <http://miranda.revues.org/1872>

Publisher: Université Toulouse 2 - Le Mirail

<http://miranda.revues.org>

<http://www.revues.org>

Document available online on:

<http://miranda.revues.org/1872>

Document automatically generated on 09 February 2016.

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Victoria Swanson

Confining, Incapacitating, and Partitioning the Body: Carcerality and Surveillance in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, and *Play*

- 1 Beckett's works are often said to reflect the human condition. Certainly, such claims are reinforced by his dramatic oeuvre, within which Beckett populates his theatrical landscapes with whittled-down remnants of people such as ashcan dwelling amputees, partitioned heads, or a disembodied mouth. The development of such isolated consciousnesses, existing in a meaningless world that sets them at physical odds with their surroundings, are inextricably linked to and influenced by the historical moment in which Beckett writes. In both a historical and a philosophical sense, many of his depictions and the ways in which he presents images of subjectivity reflect the widespread disillusionment that followed in the wake of World War Two. Because he writes in the shadow of The Holocaust, Beckett knows firsthand the horrors of an unchecked power structure. He was, by all accounts, an integral participant within the most prolific intellectual and artistic circles in post-World-War-Two France—at a time when philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Althusser, and Claude Lévi-Strauss were parsing issues of existentialism, Marxism, and structural anthropology.
- 2 Most thinkers in France, including Beckett recognized the war as a socio-cultural rupture. Indeed, no one operating within proximity to Europe could have gone untouched by its violence and destruction. Therefore, it is not surprising that similarities can be traced between various schools of French thought and Beckett's works. In *Beckett and Poststructuralism* Anthony Uhlmann finds that there are “numerous and striking points of intersection” between Beckett's works and the concerns of French philosophers in post-World-War-Two France; as he puts it, “they discuss the same problems because these were the social and intellectual problems inherent in the world they encountered” (34). Uhlmann addresses what he refers to as “the problem field” (35) through which, he suggests, Beckett and post-World-War-Two French philosophers can be aligned as writers who:
- [W]rite in response to common problems [...] certain common antecedents, and thereby develop similar themes, similar responses. This, then, might provide explication of how works, apparently unrelated and belonging to different disciplinary traditions, resonate with one another within a given milieu. (35)
- 3 In this article, while acknowledging points of philosophical intersections, particularly between Sartre's and Beckett's treatments of subjectivity, I focus on the ways in which Beckett's partitioning of the subject and the dispersal of the self is mirrored in Michel Foucault's work. Beckett's preoccupation with confined bodies is expressed across multiple dramatic texts. For example, being trapped, entombed, buried alive, crippled, blinded, or held captive are universally terrifying scenarios which the characters populating *Endgame* (1957), *Happy Days* (1961), and *Play* (1963) are forced to endure to varying degrees. The carcerality imposed by or upon the characters in these plays is central to Beckett's development of the dramatic trajectory of repetition, confinement, constraint, and immobility. This, I argue, demonstrates how Beckett's drama utilizes subjectivity in a way that both engages and resists Sartrean themes. The connections between the methods used by Beckett and Sartre are significant; however, it is my contention that parsing panoptic constructions with Beckett's portrayals of subjectivity, fragmentation, and debilitated physicality and/or consciousness in *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, and *Play* demonstrates both the parallels and disparities within the constructs of carcerality and subjectivity present in Beckett and Foucault's respective milieus and works.
- 4 Beckett's work, given its historical context, reflects the existentialist thought of his time; therefore, his plays and novels are often read through a Sartrean lens. That Sartre defines

the human gaze as a paralyzing, objectifying construct that denies subjectivity and freedom captures an important feature of Beckett's drama. Sartre sees the objectifying gaze of the "Other" as something that is always already internalized by the subject. The organizing consciousness, the consciousness of the observer, displaces and objectifies the subject. Sartre and Beckett both present the gaze of the "Other" as violent and subjectifying. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology* (1943) contemplates the visual apprehension of an Other by illustrating an encounter:

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

- 5 Yet, this existential framework overlooks a significant part of Beckett's work. Sartre presents subjectivity as a dilemma, but he grants the subject the possibility of a kind of existential heroism whereby the subject can achieve authenticity by willing his or her own absurd existence. Diverging from Sartre's existential model, Beckett's drama does not make possible the authentic act, will, or existential heroism—those movements of authenticity towards which the Sartrean subject aspires. While Beckett's works are understood as framed by a Sartrean milieu, where being precedes essence, it is reductive to read Beckett exclusively through a lens that insists upon reaching for the meaning and tragedy of language's failure. By contrasting Beckett's methodologies to those later developed by Michel Foucault, it may be argued that Beckett embraces the impossibility of meaning as liberation from the confinement inherent with predicaments of subjectivity, power, and the limitations of language.
- 6 As Deleuze so aptly reminds us, Beckett "exhausts the possible" (Deleuze 7), and this is indeed true of subjectivity for Beckett's characters as his characterizations magnify the dilemmas of Cartesian duality. Beckett often places each character's consciousness in stark contrast with the substantial self on which it reflects. In so doing, he presents subjectivity as a predicament of self-consciousness. For Beckett, the Sartrean vision of subjectivity is a trap that can only be escaped, if it can at all, by the kind of self-violence that leads to self-dissolution. Sartre sees the subject-object relation in terms of exteriority whereby one sees while also being seen and where only through being seen does gazing actualize a relation which remains outside the self. Indeed, there is no escape from the Sartrean gaze, from the hell of other people¹, and for Beckett this condition cannot be resolved except through dissolution of subjectivity itself. In this way, Beckett both appropriates and resists Sartrean themes.
- 7 While Beckett's subjects are bound by the gazes of "Others" and struggle, unsuccessfully, to escape these gazes, what makes these gazes so powerful and inescapable is the way in which they are internalized. Beckett's works often present subjects straddling the line between subjectivity and subjugation. In Beckett's cosmos, subjectivity is, in itself, subjugation as self-consciousness becomes its own worst enemy through its internalization of power. For instance, in *Endgame*, Clov epitomizes the internalization of power as he allows himself to be both subjectified and subjugated by Hamm. Through this self-conscious internalization of authority, Beckett employs subjectivity and subjugation interchangeably, often simultaneously.
- 8 Such structures in Beckett's dramatic works extend beyond the character-subject to reflect larger social and historical implications. His emphasis on the internalization of authority stretches beyond the dilemmas offered by Sartre's interpretation of subjectivity and anticipates poststructuralist explorations of carcerality, entrapment, confinement, and incapacity. Beckett's focus on portraying both internalized and externalized forms of subjectivity diverges from Sartrean examples. Furthermore, Beckett's mingling of internalizations of authority with depictions of both corporeal and psychological entrapment demonstrates how his vision in transforming Sartre anticipates the works of Michel Foucault. Where the Sartrean gaze objectifies, Foucault insists that the gaze creates the subject. Michel Foucault, who attended the university at the École Normale Supérieure following the war (1946), reacted to the post-war intellectual environment through his own forays into the marginalization of the subject.

For example, Foucault's explorations in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) and *The Order of Things* (1966) take previous accounts of subjectivity to task. Like Beckett, Foucault also diverges from Sartre's position that the subject is a centralized figure, recognizing, instead, the marginality of the subject. Foucault locates power in structures of observation in the carceral machinery and this renders the subject peripheral. For Foucault, power is internalized; it is within the system and the subject is the peripheral effect of the system.

- 9 Both Beckett and Foucault see a world of stasis that seems designed to create and control human desire. Beckett's imagery of confinement and claustrophobia finds its theoretical counterpart in Foucault's theories of carcerality. Although the sources for inspiration may differ between these two thinkers, it is evident—through Foucault's quotations of Beckett in both the "The Order of Discourse" and "What is an Author?"—that Beckett's work resonates with Foucault. Further, there are similarities between the methodologies that Beckett and Foucault employ in their conceptualizations of subjectivity. Both Beckett and Foucault recognize the constraints of subjectivity, most palpably; they both call into question the personal and public functioning of the subject, the ways in which order impacts meaning and the reliability of subjectivity. Foucault himself acknowledges that Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952) served as a catalyst from which he developed a new critical perspective:

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

- 10 Foucault's admission indicates that Beckett provided the impetus which led to the "break" he sought from accepted praxis. Clearly, given Foucault's statement and his philosophical preoccupations, even a casual familiarity with Beckett's work reveals the importance of the imagery of confinement and surveillance to Foucault's thinking. Beyond such fortuitous connections, both bodies of work present the stark account of human subjectivity that emerges in post-war France which is, consequently, also the subject of Sartrean existentialism. Within the dialectic of comparisons, it is reasonable to assume that the connections between Beckett and Foucault have not been more rigorously explored because the existentialist noir that epitomizes Beckettian constructs seems, in many ways, vastly different from Foucault's highly technical language of structuralism. However, for Foucault, subjectivity, while not desirable, is *productive*—serving purposeful functions within the constructs and operations of Power. Alternately, Beckett's work posits subjectivity as a failure of Power.

- 11 Beckett does not acknowledge the predictability that is required for subjectivity to succeed. Rather, he recognizes the potential for a chaotic function of the subject that, once initiated, can disrupt the machinations of Power. Perhaps the chaotic potential of the subject is demonstrated most effectively in Beckett's short prose piece "The Lost Ones" which portrays an "Abode where lost bodies roam [...] Inside a flattened cylinder fifty meters round and sixteen high for the sake of harmony" (101). The abode is described as being "Narrow enough for flight to be in vain" (101), and the "harmony" mentioned in the opening of the piece is achieved by the subjects' queuing up for their turn at a climb up and then back down a system of ladders to convey the "searchers" or subjects into and then back out of a series of niches and tunnels. Should an "unprincipled climber [...] engross the ladder beyond what is reasonable [or] fancy to settle down permanently in one of the niches or tunnels [he would leave] behind him a ladder out of service for good and all" (208). Beckett's narrator concedes that

This is indeed strange. But what is at stake is the fundamental principle of forbidding ascent more than one at a time the repeated violation of which would soon transform the abode into a pandemonium (209).

- 12 This example suggests that the power structure would be disrupted if the subjects in question attempt to challenge the fundamental principle that governs rules of motion as such violations would lead to "pandemonium." For Beckett, subjectivity *produces* nothing and the "harmony" that Power hopes to achieve through subjectivity remains vulnerable to disruption, to the potentially chaotic function of the subject.

13 Beckett's use of carceral formations in his dramatic works confines and constricts both his theatrical subjects and his actors². In this way, Beckett demonstrates the kinds of containment, surveillance, and futility that Michel Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Foucault illustrates the reach of carcerality by first offering Bentham's Panopticon as an example of central Power and peripheral subjectivity:

An inspector arriving unexpectedly at the center of the Panopticon will be able to judge at a glance, without anything being concealed from him, how the entire establishment is functioning (204).

14 However, Foucault then expands Bentham's model, suggesting that its utility extends beyond the prison, becoming an institutional mechanism that exacts its subjective gaze across society as a whole: "The Panopticon, on the other hand, must be understood as a generalized model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men" (205). Foucault points to the complicit subject as a central construct of panopticism, whereby cooperation with the power structure becomes so ingrained and automatic that the subject requires little, if any, supervision. "The Lost Ones" illustrates this dichotomy as it is populated by a veritable swarm of enthusiastically self-policing subjects. For both Beckett and Foucault, the ultimate redemption lies in the undoing of the subject. Beckett's plays are full of images of physical confinement, but they anticipate Foucault in the most "dramatic" fashion in the way they illustrate the internalization of authority.

15 Michel Foucault's theories on carcerality, while echoing Beckett's use of confinement, also provide a framework through which to explore formations of surveillance, restriction, and carcerality in Beckett's dramatic works. Foucault's reference to the model of Bentham's Panopticon amplifies the wider implications of Beckett's theatricized variations of confining structures as Foucault's illustration of panoptic surveillance presents an institutionalization of the Sartrean gaze. Foucault finds that Bentham's model of Panoptic surveillance promotes interiority and ensures the inverse of Sartre's model in that seeing has no relation to being seen:

Bentham's *Panopticon* is the architectural figure of this composition [of Power]. We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheral building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building [...] all that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy [...] The Panopticon is a machine for dislocating the [Sartrean] see/being seen dyad: in the peripheral ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen. (200-202).

16 While Sartre's concept of the gaze and Foucault's rendition of panoptic surveillance diverge, they nonetheless resonate when juxtaposed with Beckett's writings. The immuration that frames much of Beckett's theatrical works foreshadows Foucault's insights on carcerality. Beckett's *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, and *Play* all offer characters circumscribed to either restrained movement or total confinement. Within these works Beckett uses paralysis and confinement as governing, subjectifying, and centralizing mechanisms. For example, Beckett's application of paralysis ensures his characters' vulnerability to observation; his people are often so restrained, so literally bound by authority, and so self-regulating that they might best be described as deriving their subjectivity from subjection. They are consistently undone by their own self-conscious obsessions. The effects of these obsessions are evident in both the character's dialogues and their physical confinement. Their limited physicality and consciousness marks them as fragments of beings rather than fully formed "people." Although these subjects are presented in varying degrees of fragmentation—figures buried up to their necks in earth or urns, disembodied lips, the elderly convalescing in ash cans—Beckett ceaselessly offers clues within the narratives which suggest that these remnant figures retain their corporeal origins. In so doing, Beckett depicts these individuals as corporeally vulnerable; however, there are few revelations within the narratives that illuminate what these subjects may or may not think about their own vulnerability.

17 Whereas Foucault finds that panopticism inevitably extends its reach beyond the prison until it is woven so tightly within the social matrix that liberation from its institutional gaze becomes an impossibility, Beckett demonstrates the aftermath of such constriction—the

remnant fragments of self and being, the trace that exists as the only evidence of a potential whole from which the self must remain severed. In *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*, Uhlmann asserts:

It is not by simple chance that Michel Foucault turns to the works of Samuel Beckett in order to illustrate his ideas [...] Foucault was not alone in developing a set of ideas related to these questions of the subject in France at this time [In Beckett's work] the critical eye focuses so fiercely on the self that the self disperses and flees, yet rather than the problem of the relation of the self to the work vanishing it becomes diabolically complex. (108-09)

- 18 Foucault's work, while providing insights into Beckett's manipulations of confined bodies and consciousnesses also illustrates the Beckettian challenge to Sartre's model of existentialism. For Foucault, desire is never pure or purely accessible. This is also true of Beckett, for whom desire may be expunged altogether as the natural world is forever at odds with the emptiness and failings of human consciousness. Certainly, Beckett demonstrates congruence with Sartre's model of the gaze which paralyzes and objectifies. However, Beckett diverges from this dyad, experimenting with mechanisms that Foucault would later identify as carceral, where violence—even the violence of the subjectifying gaze—is visited upon the body as an object and surveillance governs the body as subject. Foucault sees the objectifying gaze as being internalized. This internalization is productive and economical as it keeps the subject working. Beckett utilizes internalization as a duality between objectification and self-presentation. This is particularly evident in *Endgame* wherein Clov, who is mobile and could leave, and, in fact, threatens to leave, never does. Instead, he submits himself to do Hamm's bidding. Whereas Clov is the worker within the cosmos of *Endgame*, and Hamm sets himself up as warder, even though he is blind and crippled, he has no *real* control over Clov. Clov epitomizes Foucault's panoptic subject because he polices himself; he self-regulates. While Foucault embraces subjectivity as necessary for the successful functioning of Power, Beckett presents subjectivity as a site of vulnerability which marks a failure of Power. Foucault sees subjectivity as not only productive but also necessary for production. For Beckett the inverse is true: subjectivity produces nothing.
- 19 Beckett's use of incapacitation underscores the play's theme of repetitious misery wherein the characters remain utterly stuck. Beckett makes no attempt to extract dignity, love, or even a small amount of comfort from the stark nothingness of *Endgame's* bleak stage or characters; rather, he allows their handicaps to keep them physically and emotionally confined—sentenced to remain partitioned from the world, and in the case of Nell and Nagg, their ash can compartmentalization partitions them from one another. The desolation revealed in the repetitiousness of the perpetual immobilizing forces, which are either thrust upon or adopted by the characters, frames *Endgame* and mirrors the institutional carcerality of the prison where restrained movement and total confinement are coupled with constant surveillance. Beckett's version of carcerality in *Endgame* holds with panoptic discipline and clearly depicts a carceral system wherein no one is *really* in charge. All of the surveillance in *Endgame* is self-regulated by the characters, which is ironic, considering that throughout the play the antagonistic self-instilled warder is a blind man who manages to “watch” and regulate everyone and everything around him.
- 20 Throughout the play, physical disability, such as Hamm's literal paralysis, is juxtaposed against Clov's seemingly self-imposed position of paralyzing servitude—and in Clov's case, a combination of *outside* (Hamm's) surveillance and *inside* or self-surveillance. Not unlike the prison, levels of confinement and surveillance vary within *Endgame*. Hamm's wheelchair projects the potential for at least some movement, Clov's limp merely restricts but does not necessarily confine him, and the compartmentalizing of Nell and Nagg into ash cans bears a striking similarity to the prison and most specifically to the utter enclosure of solitary confinement. Levels of confinement and surveillance vary within *Endgame*. Foucault reveals that in moving beyond punishment to the system of discipline which remains evident today:

The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right

and as property. The body, according to this penalty, is caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibition. (Foucault 1975, II).

- 21 *Endgame* certainly depicts bodies that fall within Foucault's definition of "instrument or intermediary." For example, Clov, the only mobile character in the play, completes a constant itinerary of instrumental tasks. Clov is obligated by the incapacity of the others to wait upon them. Most often, Clov simply does as he is told, his servitude prohibiting him from autonomous action. Beckett's use of this form of disciplined servitude, whereby his characters simply do as they are expected without question or thought to do otherwise, is not far removed from the ideas of self-regulating instrumentation of the subject espoused in Foucault's chapter on "The means of correct training" wherein he writes:

Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise [...] the success of disciplinary power derives no doubt from the use of simple instruments [...]. (170).

- 22 Foucault describes "hierarchical observation" (170) which when utilized can suppress a group. While Clov is an individual subject, he consistently yields to the hierarchical observations of Hamm. In *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*, Ato Quayson remarks that impairment and disability in Beckett's works "[...] bring together an array of different images of corporeality [...]" (57). While the characters in *Endgame* remain partitioned from one another and whatever may or may not exist beyond their shelter, their collective non-movement presents containment as conditional *to* as much as a condition *of* their social system. The characters do lament their respective isolation—Nagg and Nell, for example, strain towards one another, hoping to kiss, but their physical distance prevents them from reaching one another (14). However, Hamm, at least, appears suspicious of what or who might exist beyond the confines of their shelter's walls: "[...] Old wall! Beyond is the ... other hell. Closer! Closer! Up Against!" (25-26). This scene mirrors Garcin's realization in Sartre's *No Exit* that "Hell is—other people!" (61). Hamm's reference to the "other" hell implies that he too equates hell with "Others". He also functions as a panoptic device as he is the absolute center and all else occurs at a peripheral distance to him. He imposes himself as the central figure by insisting that Clov, who is the only character who can move independently, place him in the physical center, literally center-stage:

Hamm: Am I right in the centre?

Clov: I'll measure it.

Hamm: More or less! More or less! [...]

Am I more or less in the centre?

Clov: I'd say so.

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

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

- 24 With Hamm at its center, directing the continuum of non-movement, the stage on which the play is performed becomes the *inside* or center into which the audience, the *outside*, concentrates its collective gaze. Like the containment prevalent in the prison, Beckett confines the characters to the socially and psychologically restrictive setting of their shelter. The litmus test for the Panopticon's effectiveness is its ability to cage and condition the mind into a state of self-regulation; in this way, the "cruel, ingenious cage" controls its subjects. The "control" in *Endgame* is presented as a mental cage, and the physical constraints endured by the characters ensure that they remain bound within that cage. By inhibiting spatial movement, Beckett frames his characters in such a way that all of their social and physical confines are

compartmentally observed by the panoptic gaze of the audience, whose view can only be hindered by props such as Nell and Nagg's ash cans, Hamm's handkerchief, and Clov's retreats to his off-stage kitchen. Physical sight for the characters is either non-existent or restricted. Hamm is blind, Nell and Nagg—whose ash cans are set side-by-side—can “hardly” see one another, and Clov's vision is poor. Only through the use of a prop—a “telescope”—can Clov turn his gaze onto the audience:

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

- 25 That Clov can only impose his gaze through the telescope denies him the capacity to see peripherally and implies that while he can extend his gaze, his agency in doing so must be asserted by means of an artificial substitution. This supplementation is not lost on Ato Quayson who observes:

Hamm's insistence on knowing what lies outside their desolate room is satisfied by Clov's spying out the landscape with the telescope, another prosthesis of vision that, significantly, also renders Clov himself dependent to a degree upon a notion of bodily extension. (67).

- 26 Clov's incapacities are more ambiguous than the ailments of the others. He can walk, although it is with a stiff limp and while he is the only character who is able to independently move about, he is physically unable to sit. From the very opening lines of *Endgame*, Clov communicates that he longs for an end: “Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished [...] I can't be punished any more [...]” (1). That Clov defines himself as “being punished” signifies that he senses his own confinement. Beckett depicts Clov as irrevocably stuck in a self-perpetuating cycle of carcerality; one in which the characters' compliance with their own subjectivity manifests as a mental bind, as evidenced through their self-regulation, rather than a punitive one. While physically able to leave, he remains trapped because he fears leaving and therefore ensures that his condemnation to the punishment he so grievously laments is never “finished.”
- 27 Foucault's explanation that punishment and correction “are processes that effect a transformation of the individual as a whole—of his body and of his habits by the daily work that he is forced to perform, of his mind and of his will [...] The prison [...] will at the same time be a machine for altering minds” (Foucault 1975, 125) illuminates Clov's self-regulating state of confinement. Clov, not unlike a machine, is constantly at task. Beckett presents Clov's mind and will as cycling, almost mechanically, through a litany of tasks which seem habitual. Just as the functions of a machine must be regulated by some outside operator, Clov's movements are regulated by Hamm's manipulations. Effectually, Clov's “punished” state signifies as a machine-like process that is partly supervised by Hamm and partly self-regulated. Thereby, Beckett situates Clov as the embodiment of a machine which allows for a comic portrayal of Clov's pseudo-tragic confinement.
- 28 Beckett portrays the characters in *Endgame* as suffering, and in doing so, he initiates a sociological commentary on the social dysfunction of passive compliance because in *Endgame* the characters are aware that they suffer, but they do not aspire to improve their suffering; rather, they seem resolved, as demonstrated by Clov, to improve *at* suffering “I say to myself—sometimes, Clov you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you—one day” (80). Why Nell and Nagg dwell in garbage cans is never addressed, but the fact that they are stored as one would store refuse is more than just a device Beckett employs to visually assail *Endgame's* audience. Beckett's use of debilitated or incapacitated characters ensures their further surveillance. Even though Hamm cannot see, he cannot avoid being looked at. While he externalizes his version of a gaze through Clov, he is simultaneously subjected to the formalizing gaze of the spectator, including Clov. Hamm's blindness binds him as he cannot gaze back, sealing him within a static framework of immobility. Likewise, the compartmentalization of Nell and Nagg corresponds to the isolating confinement of prison cells. The similarities between the panoptic prison and the *Endgame* stage are evident if we

recall Foucault's description of the panoptical cells, designed to hold within them "a madman [Hamm], a patient [Nell], a condemned man [Nagg], a worker [Clov]" (Foucault 1975, 200). Beckett's portrayal of these confined individuals mirrors the historio-sociological approach to the prison wherein Foucault reminds "the discipline-blockade, the enclosed institution, established in the edges of society, turned inward toward negative functions: arresting evil [...]. At first, they were expected to neutralize dangers, to fix useless or disturbed populations [...]" (Foucault 209-10). Regardless of Beckett's intent for the characters, the partitioning of Nell and Nagg serves, at the very least, as a microscope through which the audience can glimpse society's treatment of the old, disabled, and infirm.

- 29 Rather than expand his characterizations in *Endgame*, Beckett whittles them down to their essence and invites the audience to imagine the scarcity of contact and incapacitation that his characters endure. Hamm complains: "That's right. Me to play [...] You weep, and weep, for nothing, so as not to laugh, and little by little [...] you begin to grieve [...]" (68). Even the punishments endured by the characters are depicted as "natural" or, at the very least, second nature to them. He portrays Hamm as the "technical" overseer, endowing him with the 'technical' ability to discipline the others, particularly as Hamm has the combination to the larder, which gives him the ability to ration out or withhold food. In "Trying to Understand *Endgame*," Theodor W. Adorno defines *Endgame's* "abstract domination" as reflective of concentration camps—the dark side of human nature, "the domination of nature which destroys itself" (145). Here, again, "nature" is placed in terms of carcerality where either dominating nature or being dominated by nature paradoxically produces the same result: the destruction of nature. If this is the case, then it is arguable that Hamm's central dominant position, his "nature," forms the catalyst which dismantles his and, consequently, the "Other" characters' world. Adorno states

Endgame occupies the nadir of what philosophy's construction of the subject-object confiscated at its zenith: pure identity becomes the identity of annihilation, identity of subject and object in the state of complete alienation (128).

- 30 The character Nell, whose life is reduced to peeking her head out of the top of the ash can she lives in, is the virtual embodiment of "the identity of alienation," but she jests at her predicament, stating "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness [...]" (18). Her comment contrasts humor against the dismal setting in which she lives. Adorno postulates that Beckett's *Endgame* exists as "an expression of meaning's absence" (126). A sense of hopelessness within what Adorno calls its "organized meaninglessness" prevails in *Endgame*; as he states, "the prison of individuation is revealed as a prison and simultaneously as mere semblance" (127). The characters in *Endgame*, while partitioned from the world that may or may not exist just beyond the views of the earth and the ocean that at least Clov can take in, remain in every way stuck. They are bound to their place on the stage, constrained by debility, and confined to mutual subjugation.
- 31 Beckett continues to experiment with precepts of surveillance, incapacity and confinement in later plays. Perhaps the ash cans that contain Nell and Nagg in *Endgame* inspired the confining mound of earth in *Happy Days*. Throughout the play, Beckett's protagonist Winnie remains implanted within the inescapable mound. The play opens with Winnie, asleep, hunched over the ground, buried to her waist within a mound of earth. A bell rings, according to the stage directions, "*piercingly, say ten seconds, stops. She does not move. Pause. Bell more piercingly, say five seconds. She wakes. Bell stops*" (275). The piercing quality of the bell as described in Beckett's stage directions gives the impression that the sound should mimic an institutional or industrial ring not unlike the bell ringing in a school that directs students to move through its hallways, or perhaps a factory buzzer that rings at the beginning and ending of a work shift, or the clamoring bell that rings in a prison whenever a security or cell door opens. Like the characters in *Endgame*, Winnie also suffers from a physical malady. She starts off examining herself, inspecting the skin of her arms: "Ah well, no worse. No better, no worse, no change. No pain. Perhaps a shade off colour just the same" (278) and then rummages through her shopping variety bag to retrieve a revolver—which she kisses. Next, she pulls a near-empty bottle of medicine from her bag, pulls the bottle to her lips and swigs back the last drop. Satisfied that

she has used the last drop of pain reliever, she pitches the empty bottle over her shoulder. It lands at a distance behind her, and as Winnie cannot turn in that direction, any relief of her pain is cast away—literally behind her (278). Winnie's partner Willie is, like Clov, able to move about, but not without physical limitation. Beckett restricts Willie's movements to crawling between his hole and Winnie's mound. Unlike Clov, however, Willie does very little to aid his counterpart and barely speaks. Still, Winnie frets over what her life would become without Willie: "If you were to die [...] or go away and leave me, then what would I do, what *could* I do, all day long, I mean between the bell for waking and the bell for sleep?" (282). From Winnie's confined position, she can lead only a simplified existence: sleeping, waking, rummaging through her bag, cataloguing her things, brushing her hair and teeth and talking to Willie. She wonders, "Perhaps some day the earth will yield and let me go, the pull is so great, yes, crack all around me and let me out" (289). However, the second act opens with "*Winnie imbedded up to neck.... Her head, which she can no longer turn, nor bow, nor raise, faces motionless throughout the act*" (299). Again Winnie is summoned by the bell, but this time she expresses her resentment of the clamor and with her pain reliever gone, she laments her pain:

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

32 The bell holds sway over Winnie's waking and sleeping. While the bell lacks a panoptic "eye," it nevertheless functions as an apparatus of surveillance in that its ringing dictates the terms by which Winnie conducts her daily routine.

33 Winnie, who is in every way a prisoner, remains powerless to exact her freedom at the close of the play. Her imprisoned state is reminiscent of the solitary confinement of early prisons, which, ironically, inmates referred to as being sent to *the hole*. In "What Can a Foucauldian Analysis Contribute to Disability Theory?" Bill Hughes remarks, "The central contradiction of the human body is this: it is simultaneously a potential source of our enslavement and of our freedom" (89), and while Hughes may be correct in asserting that "Foucault would not see the body in these dialectical terms" (89), I would argue that Beckett certainly does. Hughes insists that "For Foucault, the body does not act in and on the world; rather, the body is docile" (86), and while Winnie's passivity and resignation to her plight exemplifies docile compliance, Beckett weaves hints within her dialogue which suggest a bodily *potential*:

I used to perspire freely. [Pause.] Now hardly at all. [Pause.] The heat is much greater. [Pause.] The perspiration much less. [Pause.] That is what I find so wonderful. [Pause.] The way man adapts himself. [Pause.] To changing conditions. (290)

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

35 As the bell for waking rings at the start of Act II, Winnie's response at waking changes significantly from that in Act I, wherein she quips, "Another heavenly day" (275), to Act II's almost prayerful, "Hail, holy light. Someone is looking at me still. Caring for me still" (300). While "Hail, holy light" mirrors the opening lines to the third book of Milton's "Paradise Lost,"³ here, Winnie's narration takes on clear subject/object overtones. That she is *hailing* the light and referring to it as *holy* suggests that she now holds what she earlier called "Hellish light" (277) in some sort of reverence. Winnie's sense that "Someone is looking at me still" implies that she is mindful of her own subjectivity. She considers herself an object of *holy* surveillance. That is not to say that Winnie thinks of that which observes her as having a divine origin, only that she recognizes herself at *wholly* surveilled—observed in every sense. Taking Beckett's sense of humor into account, the line "Someone is looking at me still" also serves as a double-entendre, suggesting that at the start of the second act, the audience—a veritable group of someone's, *is still looking at* Winnie. Beckett thus portrays Winnie as struggling with

her own crisis of identity: “To have always been what I am—and so changed from what I was. [Pause.] I am the one, I say the one, then the other [...] My arms. [Pause.] My breasts. [Pause.] What arms? [Pause.] What breasts?” (300). Winnie expresses her frustration at her resounding physical lack by itemizing what remains:

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

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

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

38 The figures in *Play*, which are far more otherworldly than the characters in *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, suffer a level of incapacity and captivity which mirrors Winnie’s entrapment by virtue of the urns in which they are implanted. Beckett’s stage directions instruct that the urns be placed quite specifically:

Front centre, touching one another, three identical grey urns of about one yard high. From each a head protrudes, the neck held fast in the urn’s mouth. The heads are those, from left to right as seen from auditorium, of W 2, M and W 1. They face undeviatingly front throughout the play. Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of the urns. (355)

39 The subjects in *Play* are trapped bodily and also in a stream of memory, wherefrom they issue a constant verbal regurgitation of moments from their past selves. While they are animate, they seem to have passed from the realm of the living. The method by which they are interred casts a hellish pallor that announces the insignificance of their bodies. The trio is encased, save from the neck up, within urns that trap them in a punitive stasis from which “*They face undeviatingly front throughout the play. Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns*” (354). The psychological entanglement between the three stems from a love-triangle-fueled-suicide that culminates in their purgatorial present. The partitioning of the subjects in *Play* punctuates their imprisoned status. Not unlike prisoners, the trio presents a collective—sharing a sentence, surveilled by the light to which they must respond and self-surveilling—Are you listening to me? Is anyone listening to me? Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all? (362)—in what might best be described as a communal cognitive fracture. Disembodied by virtue of their imprisonment within the urns, the figures present mere fragments of physicality. Their disjunctive narrations underscore their physical segregation. Like prisoners, the trio are

separated, yet confined only a short distance from one another. Unlike Winnie and Willie, however, Beckett does not allow for the three to interact with one another. Although they are constantly speaking, there is no discourse between them, and whether or not the trio is at all aware of one another remains unknowable throughout *Play*. In *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Foucault reasons that:

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

40 Here, Foucault's comparison between madness and death provides an avenue from which to explore the confinement of Beckett's subjects in *Play*. Clearly, the trio in *Play* no longer has the option of experiencing external relationships or livelihoods. They are caught within a system which prevents them from any external pursuit. The "nothingness of existence" that the trio endure is, in every respect, "experienced from within" as their respective woes can only be experience internally. All of their experiences must now take place "from within" the confines of their urns, and their imprisonment ensures that their respective anxieties form a "continuous and constant form of existence." Like a child placed on temporary restriction, (M) considers his external life—the "that" he refers to his life as having been—and wonders at the "this" (the present moment) within which he is trapped: "I know now, all that was just... play. And all this? When will all this—[...] All this, when will all this have been... just play?" (361). (M)'s questioning suggests some awareness on his part that *that* led to *this*. However, (M) minimizes any culpability for his part in *that*—that which led to suicide and led to *this*—maintaining that "was just...play".

41 In *The History of Sexuality, Volume I, An Introduction*, Michel Foucault discusses what he refers to as "the policing of statements" (qtd. in Norton 1648). Foucault ruminates on how the policing of statements regarding sexuality or sexual practices leads to an "incitement to discourse" meant to counterbalance the increase in sexual discourse (1648-49). Foucault deals specifically with discourses spawned from instances of infraction—breaches that instigated discourses of confession, discourses which required restrained language: "But while the language may have been refined, the scope of the confession—the confession of the flesh—continually increased" (1649). While the discourse of confession leads to self-reflection, for the system of confession to yield the fruit of its intended purpose, it should inspire penance:

[I]t attributed more and more importance in penance [...] to all the insinuations of the flesh: thoughts, desires, voluptuous imaginings, delectations, combined movements of the body and the soul [...] everything had to be told. (1649)

42 Not unlike prisoners, within *Play*'s trio none take responsibility for how they conducted themselves prior to their confinement, but they readily recount one another's faults. They readily confess, to borrow Foucault's terms, "all the insinuations of the flesh: thoughts, desires, voluptuous imaginings" and "delectations" of their love triangle. However, where Foucault points to penance as the counterpoint to confession, Beckett diverges: the subjects in *Play* confess, but they do not repent, nor do they atone for their sexual infractions. By separating the trio into urns, alienating their discourses and sundering them from their external lives or the "that" that led to "this", Beckett partitions the love triangle three ways: they are physically trapped, cannot interact, and have no existence beyond their constraints. While they appear somewhat conscious, somewhat aware of their constrained stasis, Beckett excises them and their respective narrations from any hint of conscience. Like prisoners refusing to confess, the three remain in the purgation of their binds, unrepentant despite their interrogation.

43 The carceral imagery and surveilling constructs that are woven within Beckett's works offer counterpoints of intersection when considered alongside both Sartre's and Foucault's theories of subjectivity. Indeed, Sartrean and Foucauldian themes are inextricably bound together in some of Beckett's major works. Within Beckett we see the objectifying Sartrean gaze appropriated and transformed. Beckett's theater both utilizes and diverges from Sartre's centralized subject/object configurations which see no possibility of the subject escaping the

formalizing, objectifying gaze. Sartre emphasizes exteriority of the subject, requiring the gaze to be reflected back between subjects. In contrast, in Beckett's theater seeing does not guarantee *being seen*, as is exemplified in *Happy Days* wherein Winnie hails the "holy" light she assumes is watching her even though she has no evidence that it does. Similarly, in *Play* the three urn-interred subjects wonder at the spot that blinks on and off like an eye observing them, asking "Am I as much... as being seen?" (366). The scrutinizing light which exists in both *Happy Days* and *Play* is an intensification of the Sartrean gaze, and, certainly, in *Play* the interrogative quality of the light presents an enacted version of the all powerful gaze.

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

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Notes

1 1 Refers to Sartre's *No Exit*, wherein Garcin recognizes that he has been eternally condemned to endure the scrutinizing, unblinking gazes of Estelle and Inez, proclaiming, "Hell is--other people!" (Sartre 61).

2 In "Tyranny and Theatricality: The Example of Samuel Beckett," H. Porter Abbott articulates the actor's plight in undertaking one of Beckett's roles: "Beckett is famous for his exactitude, for the precise realization of his will on stage. One should keep in mind, moreover, what Beckett does to his actors. He ties ropes around their necks and crams them in urns. He ties them to rockers. He buries them in sand under hot blinding lights and gives them impossible scripts to read at breakneck speed[...]" (Abbott, 82).

3 The third book of Milton's *Paradise Lost* opens with: "HAIL, holy Light, offspring of Heaven first-born!/Or of the Eternal coeternal beam/May I express thee unblamed? since God is light,..." (John Milton, *Complete Poems*, The Harvard Classics, 1909–14).

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Victoria Swanson, « Confining, Incapacitating, and Partitioning the Body: Carcerality and Surveillance in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, and *Play* », *Miranda* [Online], 4 | 2011, Online since 24 June 2011, connection on 09 February 2016. URL : <http://miranda.revues.org/1872>

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Abstracts

L'utilisation de la subjectivité par Beckett est directement liée à son archéologie des formations carcérales, restrictives et débilantes qui sont essentielles à la structure de ses pièces. L'obsession beckettienne des corps confinés est exprimée dans de nombreux textes dramatiques tels que *Endgame*, *Jours Heureux*, et *Jouer*, dont les personnages sont contraints de supporter ces restrictions à des degrés divers. La carcéralité imposée par ou sur les personnages de ces pièces est cruciale dans le développement de la trajectoire dramatique de répétition, de confinement, de contrainte, et d'immobilité. Cet article s'attachera donc à démontrer comment le théâtre de Beckett utilise la subjectivité de façon à ce qu'une fois confrontée à la carcéralité les deux concepts dialoguent et résistent à leur interprétation sartrienne. En outre, la division du sujet et la dispersion de l'être chez Beckett présentent des similitudes avec les travaux de Michel Foucault. Cet article se donne pour but d'analyser les constructions panoptiques que sont les portraits beckettien d'une subjectivité fragmentée et d'une faiblesse physique, et d'établir comment un tel traitement du sujet anticipe les explorations foucauldienne de la carcéralité.

Beckett's utilization of subjectivity is directly linked to his excavation of the carceral, restrictive, and debilitating formations which are vital to the structure of his plays. His preoccupation with confined bodies is expressed across multiple dramatic texts and the characters of *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, and *Play* are forced to endure such strictures to varying degrees. The carcerality imposed by or upon the characters in these plays is central to Beckett's development of the dramatic trajectory of repetition, confinement, constraint, and immobility and, I argue, this demonstrates how Beckett's drama utilizes subjectivity in a way that both engages and resists Sartrean themes. Beckett's partitioning of the subject and the dispersal of the self bears striking resemblances to Michel Foucault's work. This article parses panoptic constructions with Beckett's portrayals of subjectivity, fragmentation, and debilitated physicality to establish how his treatment of subjectivity anticipates Foucault's explorations of carcerality.

Index terms

Mots-clés : beckettien, carcéral, conscience, théorie critique, drame, emprisonnement, détention, restriction, subjectivité, immobilité, incapacité, panopticon, partitionnement, postmoderne, poststructuralisme, théâtre

Keywords : Beckettian, carceral, consciousness, critical theory, drama, imprisonment, confinement, restriction, subjectivity, immobility, incapacity, panopticon, postmodern, partitioning, poststructuralism, theatre

Persons mentioned : Louis Althusser