

Theatre and AutoBiography

Writing and Performing Lives in Theory and Practice

Edited by

Sherrill Grace & Jerry Wasserman

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Theorizing the Gendered Space of Auto/Biographical Performance via Samuel Beckett and Hans Bellmer

Richard J. Lane

The slash placed between “auto” and “biography” indicates a contemporary awareness, as Sherrill Grace has pointed out, of the chiasmus between autobiography and biography: in other words, notions of authorial self-presence and biographical command are undermined by giving all forms of life story equal epistemological status (Grace 2005). With performative auto/biographics, Grace also notes that the concept of a “version” of a life story *detaches* it from prior notions of the auto/biographical performance perceived as a secondary event, i.e., these notions are deconstructed. In relation to the diverse, relatively new theories of performative auto/biographics, there are two main questions that I will explore and attempt to answer: first, in the wake of numerous theories of the divided subject, and in some ways the subject’s *self-inaccessibility*, which element or component of *autos* is performed? Second, while we may *read* the English “auto” as *autos*, do we also *hear* the sound “auto” which is commonly used as shorthand for that other Greek word, *automatos*, acting independently, spontaneous, and self-moving: in other words, the automatic? Is it possible that life writing can be translated as “automatic writing,” and, furthermore, that auto/biographical performance can be translated as “automatic performance”? If so, then there is a radical shift away from conceiving of auto/biographical performance as the performance of an authentic self, and a concomitant move towards conceiving of auto/biographical performance as the expression, via specific theatrical strategies, of the divided, *eccentric* subject. Various “theatrical resources” (Grace 2003, 122) can be deployed to create a zone of hybridity, a transformative space which happens in the present time of the performance yet also presents other times, places, fantasies, or memories on stage. In this chapter I will focus on the spatial and temporal aspects of the zone of hybridity—the term, of course, comes from Homi Bhabha’s work on postcolonial theory, i.e., the “third space”—especially where the use of masks, veils, and puppets generates the uncanny: appearing both dead and, through artistic manipulation, profoundly alive, these veiled figures, masks, and/or puppets function

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via synecdoche (a part for a fantasized whole), transference, fetishization, memory, and, problematically, sadism. Is this *substitution* of the human subject in the zone of hybridity gendered? Can there be a neutral deployment of uncanny theatrical resources in the production or performance of the auto/biographical subject? Or is the auto/biographical subject always "subject to" gender performance? By juxtaposing Beckett and Bellmer, I will foreground the chiasmus between Bellmer's artistic manipulation of puppets or dolls and Beckett's manipulation of his female protagonists to attempt an answer to these theoretical questions.

The Auto/biographical Subject Is Not I

Beckett's plays occupy an unusual position in the study of auto/biographical performance: they are regarded in one theoretical tradition (loosely called liberal humanism) as auto/biographical and in another, more recent tradition (loosely called poststructuralist) as deconstructive of auto/biographical concepts. Working critically within the first tradition, Katherine Kelly argues that Beckett's "Mouth" in *Not I* is one in a series of "autobiographers," the others being Krapp (*Krapp's Last Tape*), Hamm (*Endgame*), Maddy (*All That Fall*) and Winnie (*Happy Days*) (122). However, these "autobiographers" or "fictionalizers," as she also calls them, do not form a unified continuum: "In contrast to these earlier fictionalizers, Mouth's storytelling is not metaphorical. The elements of her story, from her premature birth to something very like death, constitute the actual shape of her life in her consciousness" (123). There is a struggle going on in this play: between the projection of a third person subject and the actual shaping and manifestation on stage of the first person "I." Kelly argues that while Mouth wants to be "not I," the deployment of theatrical resources forces a coincidence between the third and first person: "In spite of all her efforts to insist that she is not telling her own story, the identity of Mouth with 'She' comes slowly into focus in the first part of the monologue" (123). Kelly puts this another way by arguing that the coincidence is a failure of the fictionalizing process: "Mouth fails in her attempt to fictionalize herself by revealing, perhaps unwittingly, that her heroine's predicament is identical to her own as the audience perceives it" (124). Finally, Kelly provides a key formulation of the experience of Beckett's "heroines":

One of the effects of Mouth's transparent denial of her fragmented self is to attach to that denial the aspect of suffering; to give her, even in this eccentric and austere work, the status of a feeling being. The first person pronoun, in itself unimportant, is associated with a series of hurts and disappointments; specifically, with the absence of love and the exception that "tender mercies" will alleviate the pain of existing. The particular kind of hell inhabited by Beckett's heroines is created by their eternally thwarted desire for love, mercy, and renewal. (124)

I will return to the notion of a Beckettian "hell" being a particularly gendered experience after a detour through an example of the second critical tradition through which Beckett is read, that of poststructuralism. Simon Critchley, in his *Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*, asks, "Who speaks in the work of Samuel Beckett?" (172). It is via this question that I wish to interrogate the first critical tradition:

[T]o ascribe the voice that speaks in the work with the author Samuel Beckett, or to identify the narrative voice with a controlling consciousness that looks down upon the drama of Beckett's work like a transcendent spectator, is to fail to acknowledge the strangeness of the work under consideration and to read the work as an oblique confession or, worse still, a series of case studies in a reductive psycho-biography. (Critchley 172)

For Critchley, there is a strangeness and then there is a strangeness: the liberal humanist recognition of strangeness is ultimately defused by the reining in of its effects/affects (say, the Classical or canonical tradition which enframes and encloses Kelly's essay); the poststructuralist recognition of strangeness is, allegedly, completely open to a subsequent overpowering force, perhaps the dispossessing "I":

This is Blanchot's hypothesis—in Beckett's work we approach an experience, a literary experience, that speaks to us in a voice that can be described as impersonal, neutral or indifferent: an incessant, interminable and indeterminable voice that reverberates outside of all intimacy, dispossessing the "I" and delivering it over to a nameless outside. Beckett's work draws the reader into a space—the space of literature—where a voice intones obscurely, drawn on by a speaking that does not begin and does not finish, which cannot speak and cannot but speak, that leads language towards what Blanchot calls with reference to *Comment c'est* "an unqualifiable murmur." (172–73)

In other words, "I do not speak, it speaks" (174), this spectre or ghost that constantly and continually disturbs the desire for a self-present voice (Spivak 1976). At this point in Critchley's analysis of this spectral voice in relation to *The Unnameable* and Beckett's work as a whole, *Not I* interrupts or punctures his text: it forms a "connection" between itself and *The Unnameable*, and it is "a distilled redrafting of *The Unnameable*" (Critchley 174); but it is also quite different: "As Beckett laconically points out in the only note to *Not I*, the Mouth is engaged in 'vehement refusal to relinquish the third person.' Although it should be noted that this third person is 'she' rather than 'he,' and it is here that one might want to raise the question of gender and challenge the alleged neutrality of the narrative voice" (174–75). The auto/biographical voice in *Not I* is both eccentric and "outside" of the control of the humanist self-present subject: now the subject is spoken by "the insomniac narrative voice that opens like a void in the experience of literature" (175). What both of these exemplary readings from antithetical critical traditions recognize is that the space of auto/biographical performance in or through *Not I* is

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gendered; it is also a hellish space, one of sadism and torture (see O'Gorman). The latter is not an arbitrary interpretation or reading of the play, rather it is based upon the recorded experiences of the women who have played Beckett's characters.

Another figure in *Not I* that I argue is of importance here is the "Auditor": "[D]ownstage audience left, tall standing figure, sex undeterminable, enveloped from head to foot in loose black djellaba, with hood, fully faintly lit" (Beckett 376). In James Knowlson's insightful biography of Beckett, *Damned to Fame*, this figure is quite specifically traced (quoting Enoch Brater) to Beckett's visit to El Jadida: "Sitting in a café, Beckett observed: 'a solitary figure, completely covered in a djellaba, leaning against a wall. It seemed to him that the figure was in a position of intense listening.... Only later did Beckett learn that this figure ... was an Arab woman waiting there for her child who attended a nearby school'" (Knowlson 589). While Beckett's Auditor in the published version of the play is of "sex undeterminable" and, as noted intriguingly, appears to be based upon an "Arab woman," the majority of the commentators on the play shift *her* back to the masculine pronoun "he." The Auditor is a compassionate figure, who watches the tortured Mouth, but this torture is not metaphorical; for example, Jessica Tandy "found the experience of acting *Not I* terrifying" and "had to be wheeled on [to the stage] in a sort of black box.... In this 'contraption,' she stood holding on to two iron bars on either side of the box" (Knowlson 592). Knowlson writes more approvingly of Billie Whitelaw's acceptance of the physical constraints of the play—Tandy modified the "technology" to "fit her needs as a person" (597)—noting that she sat on a chair which "looked disquietingly like an electric chair and, in late rehearsals, it seemed as if she was being prepared for some medieval torture.... [H]er body was strapped into the chair with a belt around her waist; her head was clamped firmly between two pieces of sponge rubber ... and the top part of her face was covered with black gauze with a black transparent strip for her eyes" (597). During rehearsals, because of the strain and family problems, Whitelaw had a "breakdown," although she "quickly pulled herself together," Knowlson writes (597). Rosemary Pountney, in her essay "On Acting Mouth in *Not I*," notes that

When eventually we began to rehearse on stage, my head was encased at our first attempt at blacking out the face in a Ku Klux Klan-type hood, with a hole for the mouth alone. This proved hot, claustrophobic, and enormously difficult (with eyes gone) to judge how much voice was required to fill the auditorium. We therefore removed the hood, working up to what we felt to be a satisfactory pitch and pace for the performance, while I simply sat on stage. But I was aware of reinforcing mouth with eyes—and dreaded being blacked out again. (84)

Auditor and Mouth can be regarded as fragmented doubles: Mouth in this case is a synecdochic double of Auditor, a part for the veiled or covered whole, be that part a mouth or a vagina (O'Gorman 88).

If Auditor and Mouth are considered as entirely separate entities, radically different readings occur. An agonistic relationship between the two has been posited by critics; for

example, John Calder argues that Mouth is actually being interrogated by Auditor (36). Richard Begam suggests that the sense of interior disconnection expressed in the play "is further dramatized by the framing device, in which Mouth and Auditor appear as distinct entities"; thus the resistance of the first person "is an emptying out of the *cogito*, an admission not of self-knowledge but of self-ignorance" (29). For Ulrika Maude, the important process at play in *Not I* is that of memory and "phantom limb experiences" where "what is distinctly Beckettian about the memories is the plainly corporeal nature of the recollections" (119). Maude's argument returns conceptual models of Beckett to the body:

Triggered not by mere intellectual memory but by the body's own recollection of sensory experience, the strange time and place sequences in works such as *Company*, the four novellas, *That Time* or any other Beckettian haunting of the present by the past, become explicable in so far as the past is sedimented in the body itself, in a perpetual present continuous tense that leaves what has once been experienced and what can never truly be left behind irreversibly echoing in the characters' bodies. The bodies in Beckett seem not only to exist in several tenses, but to have both a time-arresting stative aspect and an active, dynamic one that is almost time itself. It is as if the paradoxes present in Beckett's account of involuntary memory were in fact aspects of continuity and discontinuity embedded in the very notion of bodily existence. (119)

The "subject" in *Not I* has a bodily experience regardless of the critical models brought to bear (see Gray); further, the women who play Mouth do not just have to train themselves to speak rapidly, they are in turn constrained, strapped in, bound, fragmented, and in many respects sadistically tortured. The "babble" that bursts forth from this tortured Mouth functions like a piece of disembodied automatic writing: it is both eccentric to the body and somehow, arguably, more essential. The automatic writing repeatedly returns Mouth to her formative experience of premature delivery, and it is in turn bound and marked or divided by the four auditing interventions, the silent *witness* in the play (Lane 2002, 175).

Performing Gender: Beckett and Bellmer

Automatic writing does not liberate the subject, rather it embeds her in a repetitive enunciative compulsion (Foster 11). The controlling *cogito* is replaced and surpassed by the "mouth of unreason," to use Victor Hugo's phrase (quoted in Polizzotti 103). As André Breton puts it in his *Manifesto*: "we were trying to obtain ... a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as

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closely as possible, akin to *spoken thought*" (23). In *Not I* the "mouth of unreason" is gendered—perhaps she is an "Irish bag lady" as diverse commentators suggest—and, as I argue, perhaps the Auditor is an Arab woman; both women are manipulated as if they were puppets or dolls, or to use the German surrealist Hans Bellmer's term, *poupées*. As Hal Foster notes, Bellmer's *poupées* were "made of wood, metal, plaster pieces, and ball joints" and they "were manipulated in drastic ways and photographed in different positions" (102). While Bellmer is sometimes placed on the margins of critical accounts of Surrealism, Foster presents his *poupées* as having far more importance; they are

uncanny confusions of animate and inanimate figures, ambivalent conjunctions of castrative and fetishistic forms, compulsive repetitions of erotic and traumatic scenes, difficult intricacies of sadism and masochism, of desire, defusion, and death. With the dolls, the surreal and the uncanny intersect in the most difficult desublimatory ways—which is one reason why Bellmer is marginal to the literature on surrealism, devoted as it mostly is to the sublimatory idealisms of Breton. (101)

The representation, manipulation, dismemberment, and repositioning of the female subject via the *poupées* create an aesthetic of sadistic intensity; Bellmer audits his own scenes by appearing, ghostlike, in some of the photographs, where he is no less mastering the scene than witnessing the dissolution of the female body. Such an aesthetic has been related to Bataille, especially the "play of *altération*" whereby "the formation of an image is its *deformation*, or the deformation of its model. For Bataille, then, representation is less about formal sublimation than about instinctual release" (Foster 113). Foster suggests that this can help explain Bellmer's *poupées*, which are driven "not by sublimatory *transpositions* but by desublimatory *altérations*" (113). In the case of Beckett's *Not I*, the recourse to the subject (Adorno 30), either as a resisting subject of traditional auto/biographical expression, or as a fragmented subject deconstructing auto/biographical self-presence, may be more accurately perceived as an enactment of fluctuating intensity, what Pierre Klossowski calls in his *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* a "tonality" (vii). In other words, to argue, for example, that Mouth's own *assertion* that she has "no idea what she's saying" (Begam 28) is proof that she really does have no idea "what she's saying" is still to assert a self-present interpretive subject, even if she is denying her self-presence via the eccentric, always separated, third person.

I regard the linguistic outpouring as a fluctuating intensity that situates Mouth within the sadistic scene of the play, whereby Mouth and Auditor are constricted and disarticulated. Relating such a disarticulation to Bataille's theories of representation and eroticism, especially the link to the death-drive, Foster asks, "But again, why is it played out on the compulsively (dis)articulated image of a female body?" (114). Even Lacan's description of the fragmented body, as exemplified for him by the paintings of

Hieronymus Bosch and described by Lacan in gender-neutral terms as the appearance in the form "of disjointed limbs, or of those organs represented in exoscopy, growing wings and taking up arms for intestinal persecutions" (4), gets transmuted into the unacknowledged gendered space of *Not I* in Wright's commentary: "Mouth is reliving the trauma of the primordial moment when the body senses its split from the Real. This experience can neither be included in the Imaginary, the realm of illusory wholeness, nor can it be part of the Symbolic, the domain which grants a conditional identity" (5). What appears to be foreclosed in this transmutation of Bosch into Beckett is gender difference itself, as nowhere does Wright mention that Mouth articulates a particular woman's experience. This may be due to an earlier binary opposition constructed in Wright's text, where Beckett is opposed to Artaud: "The plays of Samuel Beckett graphically present us with images of bodies, or parts of bodies, sometimes comically, sometimes desperately, struggling to channel their desire through speech. Conversely, the theatre of Antonin Artaud assaults us with images of the body's violent refusal to become entrapped in language" (5). There is no doubt that Mouth is part of a body, but Auditor is a whole (covered, veiled) body that presents us with a minimal but nonetheless active presence on stage; Mouth appears to be separated from the subject of the stream-of-utterance, refusing to be "entrapped" by the identification with one's self that would occur with the use of the first person. This refusal may be a resistance to *being spoken*: the fluctuating intensities or levels of memory have an existential import that a stream-of-signs undermines or reduces in vitality.

My reading therefore opposes Klossowski's "tonalities" with his "everyday code of signs" (1997, vii–xiii), where the latter, to put it simply, represents Lacan's Symbolic order, and the former his Imaginary. The Symbolic is the realm of language and the law of the father; Foster tentatively argues that Bellmer's *poupées* are aimed at the law of the fascist father and state, leading to a notion of "second-degree" reflexive sadism. As he says, this may not render the *poupées* "any less problematic (the ground of this 'Oedipal' challenge remains the female body, and 'woman' remains a trope for other things), but it does suggest what they seek to problematize" (115). Bellmer's assault on fascist "armouring" via his *poupées* also links them with the "degenerate art" of modernism(s) that the Nazi male (body and psyche) had to be shielded from (Foster 115–20). Is it possible that the performative self-denial of the auto/biographical narrative in *Not I* is representative of a combined foreclosure of gender and a "second-degree" reflexive sadism in Beckett's work as a whole? If so, this may have further implications for both humanist and poststructuralist readings of auto/biographical performance, suggesting that a "third space" is needed here.

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The Conjectural Order: The Auto/biographical "Third Space"

Nisha Sajnani, in her essay "Strategic Narratives: The Embodiment of Minority Discourses in Biographical Performance," argues that Bhabha's concept of the "third space" is useful for understanding hybrid auto/biographical identities: "This space represents the in-between zone, in which individuals who were born between cultures or raised in a multicultural environment can articulate their lived experience in order to create the meaning of their multiple and contingent identities" (33). While it has become commonplace in postcolonial theory to automatically refer to the "third space" without necessarily examining what Bhabha means by this term, it is still a productive and useful concept: the "third space" of enunciation is *a general condition of cultural production*: "It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable" (Bhabha 37). Bart Moore-Gilbert expresses the conundrum this way: "Precisely because of his attempt to avoid polarities, to stress contiguity and the productive dynamics of cultural 'translation,' as well as on the grounds of plain common sense, Bhabha is forced to admit that *all* cultures are impure, mixed and hybrid" (129).

If hybridity and the "third space" are a general condition of cultural production, one which is complicated further by focussing on "the parallel processes of Othering of women and subordinate classes in the domestic sphere" (Moore-Gilbert 129), and if theatre critics such as Sajnani have found these concepts useful in exploring auto/biographical minority discourses in performance, can the "third space" be applied to a general theory of auto/biographical performance? Bhabha regards an "enunciative split" as central to expression within the "third space," quite simply, the subject's enunciation being constituted, disrupted, and made eccentric via writing, literally the necessary shift via *différance* to the "not I": "The implication of this enunciative split for cultural analysis that I especially want to emphasize is its temporal dimension. The splitting of the subject of enunciation destroys the logics of synchronicity and evolution which traditionally authorize the subject of cultural knowledge" (Bhabha 36). In other words, it is important to think of the "third space" not just as a complex interlacing of identities and a spatial mapping-out of these new formations, and not just as something that occurs in writing (since the speech/writing opposition is here deconstructed), but also, if not primarily, as a complex temporality:

It is often taken for granted in materialist and idealist problematics that the value of culture as an object of study, and the value of any analytic activity that is considered cultural, lie in a capacity to produce a cross-referential, generalizable

unity that signifies a progression or evolution of ideas-in-time, as well as a critical self-reflection on their premises or determinants....

The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. In other words, the disruptive temporality of enunciation displaces the narrative of the Western nation which Benedict Anderson so perceptively describes as being written in homogenous, serial time. (Bhabha 36-37)

Through this "disruptive temporality of enunciation" then, the "third space" of auto/biographical performance can be perceived as a desublimatory convergence of fluctuating intensities or tonalities with the auto/biographical investment. In other words, instead of regarding auto/biographical performance as a liberal humanist attempt to re-stage and recover the "truth" about a subject, *and* instead of the subject being regarded in the poststructuralist sense as being spoken or performed by language, I suggest that there is a third position where the creation of the auto/biographical subject is a creative experience *and* a proleptic investment: what the subject *was* coincides with what the (representing, or acting) subject wants, desires, or could be. This experience is not purely representational: it is a *lived experience* for the actor, the performance of situations and intensities that also functions as a form of cathexis or *Besetzung*, in the Lacanian sense of investment. The auto/biographical performance is thus a "proleptic investment of energy in a representation" (Ragland-Sullivan 218), where the desire to structure the past meets the intention and existential action of staging this desire itself. As Ellie Ragland-Sullivan puts it, "the link of Desire to signifier as trace [is] a narcissistic action that aims at constancy, mastery of the body, and recognition" (218). *Besetzung* is both the commonplace "concentration of psychic energy on a single goal" (*Collins Dictionary*) and a "discharge" of fluctuating intensities in the auto/biographical performance as investment. I call this "third space" of auto/biographical performance the "Conjectural order," that is to say, it crosses Lacan's Imaginary and Symbolic orders (or it functions by traversing both orders), but it is always an investment *and* a projection, in other words a *creation* of the auto/biographical subject through this combined investment/projection. Re-staging the subject is a process of re-staging subjectivity *per se*, one which occurs in everyday life when a crisis point has been reached or a transformational event occurs.

Does this Conjectural order account for the fragmented body, especially the *sadistic manipulation* of the fragmented female body? To use Deleuze and Guattari's phrase concerning Beckett here, "*everything divides, but into itself*" (76). In the desublimatory convergence of fluctuating intensities or tonalities which occurs with the

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auto/biographical investment, perception is in turn divided, sometimes fragmented, at other times simply interrogated, and then folded back upon itself. Deleuze gives, as a concrete and more structured example of this, Beckett's *Film*, which appears to be about an attempt to escape perception. Deleuze structures the "Condition of the Problem" in Beckett's *Film* according to a fold whereby the unbearable fact of being perceived by a third party is replaced by a recoil that ends with self-perception (1998, 23). This recoil goes through three phases: Action, Perception and Affection. In the first phase the perception of action can be simply "neutralized" by stopping action; in the second phase the perception of all objects, i.e., their uncanny ability to double and in turn perceive the human subject, is neutralized by a process of veiling and expulsion; in the third phase, the camera "surpasses the angle" (which maintains an acceptable distance between subject and camera) to reveal its "perception of affection, that is, the perception of the self by itself, or pure Affect" (Deleuze 1998, 25). It is this revelation that is terrifying: "that perception was the perception of the self by itself" and which is also the terror of Mouth in *Not I* (25). In *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Deleuze names these three phases of Beckett's *Film* the perception-images, action-images, and affection-images. Together, they comprise the "assemblage" or "centre of indetermination" that is the human subject (1997, 66). With their extinguishing in *Film*, Deleuze argues that "Beckett ascends once more towards the luminous plane of immanence, the plane of matter and its cosmic eddying of movement-images" (68). This extinguishing action is also regarded as the condition of possibility of experimental cinema. In the notes to *Film*, Beckett writes that with "[a]ll extraneous perception suppressed, animal, human, divine, self-perception maintains in being" (323). Deleuze goes beyond this maintenance to arrive at the "pure" movement-image; in the auto/biographical investment, the shock value resides in the third phase: the recognition that the "biographical" performance coincides with the perception of the self, however much the latter is constrained, disfigured, or resisted. The desublimation processes that Foster regards as at work in Bellmer also lead to a resistance of the perception of the fragmented body as being necessarily a projection of patriarchy; in postmodernism, which should also be considered here, this desublimation is key. As Linda Nochlin argues, "The female sex organ is irrevocably de-fetishized in the entirely apotropaic prothesis [sic] photographs of Cindy Sherman and the desublimation—and, dare I say, domestication—of the male organ effected in the seductive and fragmented photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe" (54–55).

Towards a Theory of "Third Space" Auto/biographical Performance

The "third space" of auto/biographical performance perceived as a desublimatory convergence of fluctuating intensities or tonalities has been revealed as a gendered space, and one which negotiates two antithetical critical traditions. A poststructuralist reply to

this summary would be to say that there is still a trace of the metaphysics of presence at work in this "third space." This is correct, as Anthony Easthope has pointed out: "I would invoke Lacan's notion of the imaginary to sanction the view that some provisional identity is necessary for the subject, that the ego must maintain for itself some permanence, some identity, some unity, some presence, some fixity of position" (147). For the purposes of auto/biographical performance, this "provisional identity" is *each* theatrical event, the necessary repeat play of identity, repetition, and difference. Easthope compares Derrida's and Lacan's competing concepts of the subject and notes that "while Derrida begins with a subject *already* foreseen from the side of language, a subject as a proper name, Lacan starts with a 'particularity' which precedes language altogether" (148). In asking how this Lacanian position can be possible, linking Darwinian science and the mirror-stage, Easthope argues that "[f]or Lacan, scandalously, there is indeed a pre-linguistic self, the particular materiality of the body as shaped by its place in the family. The subject is defined by the attempt to re-find this self within culture and language" (149).

There are a number of directions which a new theory of auto/biographical performance could take at this point: for example, creating a synthesis of the Conjectural order with Kristeva's concepts of geno- and pheno-text (and the relevant feminist gyno-criticism), or countering the law-of-the-father as a limit or boundary-experience and a shift into the Symbolic with the often understudied and marginalized formative mothering relationships that occur during this stage and beyond (see the critical essays edited by Abbey & O'Reilly). Work on "testimony" could also be dovetailed here (Anderson 126-133), and more literal notions of performance and law considered (Lane 2003b, 275-76). However, to conclude this chapter by remaining focussed on Beckett and Bellmer, I will return to the "not" in *Not I* and its homophone, or "knot," which Derrida explores at the beginning of *Glas*, that of *Sa* (*savoir absolu* or absolute knowledge), *Sa* (*significant* or signifier), and *Ça* (Id). This "knot" is an "interweaving of philosophical discourse with its 'remains' or 'debris'" (Lane 2003a, 106). As Hartman notes,

That the word "knot" may echo in the mind as "not" is one of those small changes that analyst or exegete are trained to hear.... There are so many knots: Donnean, Penelopean, Lacanian, Borromean, Derridean. At the beginning of *Glas*, the similarity in sound of *Sa* (acronym for "savoir absolu") and *Sa* ("signifiant") is such a knot with a positive philosophic yield. Yet because of the equivocal, echo-nature of language, even identities or homophonies sound on: the sound of *Sa* is knotted with that of *ça*, as if the text were signaling its intention to bring Hegel, Saussure, and Freud together. *Ça* corresponds to the Freudian Id ("Es"); and it may be that our only "savoir absolu" is that of a *ça* structured like the *Sa*-signifiant: a bacchic or Lacanian "primal process" where only signifier-signifying-signifiers exist. (60-61)

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Hartman's performance of Derrida here is exemplary, with the philosophical-theoretical knot—Hegel, Saussure, Freud—being transformed into the Lacanian “primal process.” I argue that in performing auto/biography the humanist desire to gather absolute knowledge (*Sa*) of the subject is countered with the postmodernist and poststructuralist play of difference, the arbitrary Saussurian signifier (*Sa*). With my contention that there is a recovery of the *automatic* in auto/biographical performance (the performance of Surrealist automatic writing, or the automatic enunciation which “speaks the subject,” and so on), the unconscious is perceived as structured like a language, or, as Hartman puts it, “*ça* structured like the *Sa*-signifiant.” The concept of a Conjectural order stops the knot from being a new binding which would otherwise replace a contradiction (humanist vs. poststructuralist views of the auto/biographical subject) with a new chain of slippery signifiers (Lacan’s “primal process”). Instead, the Conjectural order (the re-staging of the subject, of equal power to the mirror-stage but as occurs in later life) treats each auto/biographical performance as a determinate event, and it binds competing theories of subjectivity together. In Lacan’s use of the Borromean knot, for example—“three rings, no two of which actually intersect, but which are kept knotted together”—the analogy was made with his three orders: “if one ring is cut, all three fall apart” (Wright 112). Similarly, in the Conjectural order, a new vision of subjectivity is produced, however fragmentary or broken, yet still as a determinate event.

This is not just a spatial theory, since as noted in relation to Bhabha, time is reconceived here—in the plays of Beckett linear time is reconceived via *life-rhythms*: “eating, breathing, sleeping-waking, night-day, the seasons, the phases of the moon, etc. These rhythms do not have beginnings, middles, and ends in the Aristotelian sense. One rhythmic cycle is completed only to begin again: nothing is resolved” (Schechner 21–22). These pulsations, these fluctuating intensities, are not decoupled or left unbound. The subject is not sublimated in *Not I*, or in Bellmer; rather the utilization of a “rhythmic cycle” is a desublimation. Gender in Beckett can be covered or veiled (Auditor), or reduced to an essentialist sexual difference (Mouth), but it is not in itself repressed. Gender is ejected, foreclosed by the critical denial of sadism in the performance of *Not I* and other plays, but this is to exile gender difference to the Lacanian Real, not to simply ignore it. As Spivak notes, it is the foreclosure of difference that is needed to charge the “reflexive judgment” of *Sa* (*savoir absolu* or absolute knowledge) and send it off in its homogenous, serial time or teleological movement (1999, 6).¹ As Laplanche and Pontalis note, such foreclosed signifiers re-emerge in the Real (166). In other words, not only does the “exile” of gender in the critical denial of sadism *not* lead to its total effacement from the critical scene, but this “exile” becomes the condition of possibility for the recuperation and re-examination of the role of gender in performing auto/biography.

Spivak's wider point is that the voracious dialectic of "absolute knowledge" (i.e., Western systems of knowledge) can be interrupted and re-engaged from a feminist and/or postcolonial perspective precisely through an awareness of the foundational nature of those subjects that are foreclosed.

Adorno's comment that Beckett's plays "put meaning on trial" (and "unfold its history") (153) is relevant to the auto/biographical Conjectural order: the investment here is not simply generative of meaning or signification (as an existential experience), but it places "meaning" under erasure; i.e. the word is crossed out but it remains of necessity legible (see Spivak 1976). This is less a bracketing-out of "meaning" and more a suspicion of the production of any universal truth in the theatrical event. The auto/biographical subject is thus brought to, or immersed in, a limit or boundary situation, where new creative possibilities both present themselves and are made (Jaspers 179). These situations are not arbitrary, and they are not commutable (although they can be repeated in performance, re-lived *and* re-performed). With Beckett and Bellmer, the sadistic play also approaches a limit or boundary situation, which, as with the work of de Sade, may simply reinforce conservative gender formations and relations as normative (Klossowski 1992, 20–21), or may have a more transgressive objective (as in the work of Bataille).

Another way of formulating this heightened creativity and intensity of the boundary situation in Beckett and Bellmer is via Benjamin's interpretation of Surrealist "profane illumination" (Benjamin 1999a, 209), that is, not an attempt to transgress, but dialectically and materially to transfigure the subject (see Lane 2005). Modified by Benjamin with his "dialectics at a standstill," "profane illumination" becomes *Das Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit* or the "now of knowability" or (re)cognizability. In other words, Benjamin picks up on the Surrealist shift from aesthetics to politics, just as Foster regards Bellmer's "second-degree" reflexive sadism as a critique of the fascist law-of-the-father and state. But again, is this use of Jaspers and Benjamin somehow too metaphysical, even as it draws attention to the potential political import of the auto/biographical performance? I argue that the "third space" of auto/biographical performance perceived as a desublimatory convergence of fluctuating intensities or tonalities is also one which utilizes a *radical metaphysics* in the sense of Fanon's development of Jasper's work. For example, Fanon refuses to re-stage the colonial subject as normative, so in *Black Skin, White Masks* he begins with embedded situations and deconstructs them via a constitutive, *disturbing, dislocating* series of propositions, statements, and questions concerning being and identity. The deconstructive-destructive (Benjamin 1999b, 470) analysis of the psychoexistential complex of colonialism is also an analysis of the "time of" subjectivity. This brings us full circle (again) to Bhabha's comments concerning temporality in the "third space."

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In conclusion, the performance of auto/biography presents a formidable challenge to theorists, regardless of the critical tradition they work within; by focussing in this essay on Beckett and Bellmer, I argue that gender formation and performance re-emerges from the Real in complex, disturbing, but always central ways. I have shown how the divisions of the *eccentric* subject in the "automatic" expression of life writing and performance are not arbitrary; rather, they function via gendered processes that can be explored using post-Freudian concepts, as with the work of Foster and/or Spivak. Theorizing the gendered space of auto/biographical performance has also led me to the notion of a *radical metaphysics*, whereby questions concerning lived experiences coincide with a reworking of contemporary theory from a feminist and postcolonial perspective. Thus Beckett's and Bellmer's female "characters" or puppets emerge from a sadistic "zone of nonbeing," to use Fanon's term, via an interrogation of the aesthetic traditions within which they have been embedded and via which they have been foreclosed.

Notes

1. As with the previous links established between Bhabha's work and performing auto/biography, Spivak's notion of foreclosure is also drawn from work on postcolonial theory. In this case, Spivak's adoption of "foreclosure" in relation to the "native informant" and the ways in which the erasure of the latter, for Spivak, is an exemplary Western move (creating a condition of possibility for Western thought), followed by the re-emergence of the "native informant" in the Real. The gendered space of auto/biographical performance is therefore closely linked with notions of ethnicity and race.

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