

**Character Consciousness in Modernist and Postmodernist Plays:
An Exploration Through Playwriting**

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as a thesis for the degree of
Master of Philosophy in Performance Practice
In September 2012

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Abstract

In the following practical study the question of specific authorial conventions employed to achieve the effect of theatricalised character consciousness is examined in the specific recognised dramatic forms of modernism and postmodernism of the latter half of the 20th century.

Through analysis of pre-existing works of drama of playwrights including, but not limited to, Samuel Beckett, Tom Stoppard, Richard Foreman, Peter Handke, and Robert Wilson – and scholarship related thereto from such academics as Elinor Fuchs, June Schlueter, Lionel Abel, and Philip Auslander – the aim of the textual investigations lies in identifying specific writerly methods used to produce characters of drama that might be perceived as having a consciousness that transcends the circumstances of the plays in which they appear.

In extracting the textual basis from which these effects are derived, an examination of the literary and social context in which these works emerged is likewise offered as a means of gleaning a sense of why such characters emerged as they did in this period of theatre's evolution. Resulting from this dissection, a taxonomy of these specific traits have then been compiled as a sort of template upon which to build characters or a similar effect and affect through the practice of playwriting.

Ultimately, these components then serve as the foundation for two original dramatic works meant to represent these abstractions made through analysis in the practiced form of playwriting. Each dramatic work is accompanied by a reflective analysis of the process of creative writing and an assessment of discoveries made about the construction of character consciousness.

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INTRODUCTION

The Conscious Impetus

When at eleven years of age, I experienced what might be termed a crisis of identity. The particulars of this experience are better suited for the pages of memoir than scholarly writing, but relevant to my discussion and examination was my Father's response to this personal conflict by offering consolation in the form of an introduction to the writing of René Descartes and Cartesian philosophy on the limits of perceptual reality – whether this was to my peril or blessing I remain uncertain. It was not long thereafter that I found solace in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, identified by Lionel Abel as 'one of the paradigmatic examples of metatheatre' (2003: 21), a form that allows an observer the sensation of their own actuality within the fictional world.

In *Hamlet*, there seemed to be a conscious being seeking an understanding of itself. It was in that literary effect of consciousness that I found companionship. Had the author of the piece not seemed to me so introspective, the character he offered most certainly was, and while the character was fictive that did nothing to diminish the sense of the existence of this putative consciousness that I found not dissimilar to my own. Indeed, it made little difference to my attribution of empathy with and for the character whether the character emerged as the product of a theatrical text or a personal memoir: within the perceived consciousness lay the rub.

It stood to reason that I was drawn in years to come by the works of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Jean Genet, Jean-Paul Sartre among other contributors to the modernist canon, whose work seemed to expand upon and distill the conundrum of the theatrical effect of consciousness. In these modernist writers the effect of consciousness was not necessarily grounded in a reality meant to duplicate our own. These plays – in particular *Waiting for Godot* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* – affected me profoundly, depicting characters also struggling with their own sense of self and the context of their own reality, at times seeming to be aware that they were the agents of circumstances over which they could assert no control. The characters seemed to have some sense, having been written to do so, that

they were themselves characters of play. As a playwright and scholar, it cannot be denied that my work has not merely been influenced by, but perhaps owes its existence to, these authors.

These plays that I later came to read, these plays that had confounded so many, made an instant intuitive sense to me. Struggling as I was with the question of what constitutes a definitive identity, these plays – the work of Beckett, Genet, and Sartre among those most influential – offered an answer with absolute clarity. The circumstances of these plays seemed to me to be a microcosmic representation of the world as I perceived it to be. Though not so fatalistic as my assessment of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as Martin Esslin, I was consumed by these plays that Esslin writes of conveying a 'sense of mystery, bewilderment, and anxiety when confronted with the human condition, and [a] despair at being unable to find meaning in existence'. (2005: 45) The characters of these plays convey such a bewildered attitude; it was with them that I found a certain kinship which, again, was not diluted by their being bound to the page or the stage and inextricably divided from me. Before I knew the 'wide acclaim' with which these plays had been received, I knew, as Esslin did, that these plays 'so often superciliously dismissed as nonsense or mystification, *have* something to say and *can* be understood' (2001: 21).

Eventually, a curiosity grew in me when examining more encompassing theories of perceptual reality and the limitation of human understanding, by way of Hume and Kant among other ontological philosophers, as to whether there might not be a literal awareness among these characters in these 'prisons of many rooms' as the young Prince of Denmark claimed his world to be. It struck me that as much as the hyperbole might refer to Hamlet's feeling ensnared and confined no matter where he found himself, it might also be an allusion to the script in which he was written and in which he was imprisoned. In the greater ambiguity of a reality about which I have long felt we can have only limited certainty, could one confidently differentiate between 'Real' and 'Fiction'? This question grew as I read later modernist and postmodernist plays that made a point of unsettling this dichotomy between the 'Real' and 'Fiction'.

As my studies progressed, I began to consider the practicalities of how these seemingly conscious characters were crafted in such a way as to leave me so engaged with what seemed a consciousness not so far removed from that of others with whom I had day-to-day contact. Might it be a worthy exploration to examine the techniques

employed by a playwright in order to produce the suggested awareness possessed by the characters of these plays most dismiss as fiction? It was a flight of fancy to entertain the notion of these characters having an autonomous existence of their own, independent of actor, author, or audience, but this was nonetheless the impression made through their creators' technique, and as a writer this especially intrigued me.

There was an uncanniness then in how these characters whom I conjured in my imaginative reading seemed to peer from the pages on which they had been typed. Later, when exposed to a wider breadth of theatre in which character was so much the focus as to dissolve the divide between stage event and passive observer, this phenomenon of characters seeming to have an awareness of my presence as their observer was compelling, and I wanted to examine it practically in my own process as a playwright. There with them occupying a common space, it seemed this kinship that first struck me in my reading should exist in a more literal dimension beyond the metaphysical, in the observation of process and in the material written itself. Such has become my line of enquiry: by what methods can an audience and a writer be brought to imaginatively submit to the notion of characters possessing a consciousness of their own? To what extent is the reversal of role registered when a creation is presented as a creator, a puppet as the puppeteer, and the observer as the observed? Where does the 'liminal divide', as Gerard Genette dubs it in his 1980 *Paratext: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997: 7), fall between character and witness of character (author, performer, or audience) when this character is given the quality of self-awareness?

Though my immediate familiarity with postmodernist theatre was not so broad as its modernist predecessor I did not want my study identifying the authorial techniques used to convey the effect of character conscious, to ignore postmodernism. Playwrights associated with this period such as Peter Handke and Richard Foreman, and performance makers such as Robert Wilson, The Wooster Group, Tim Etchells and Forced Entertainment, appeared to employ similar methods in their expression of a represented stage-consciousness. I was curious to explore how these patterns of character consciousness that I sensed in modernist work survived the transition in postmodernism. This, however, was not without glaring complications as postmodernism itself and those responsible for its production seemed to reject the notion of character and so too by implication any presence of a depicted character consciousness. As Katherine Arens rightly observed in her 1991 essay on the subject:

A major rubric in [...] criticism is postmodernism, that which is "more modern than modernism" and generally cynical about the upcoming end of the Millennium. The term is largely defined by example, appearing in everything from New Yorker cartoons to architecture. A "postmodern gesture" is particularly aimed at freeing areas of social practice from the shackles of tradition. (14)

Though approaching the agents of postmodernist theatre with some circumspection, my examination of postmodern technique would focus upon analysing these non-characters and how the effect of a theatrically represented consciousness was communicated if, indeed, these techniques were still being employed even in the absence of character.

As my studies evolved, it became increasingly clear that my endeavour would be an issue of deconstructing elements in each of these two modes – modernist and postmodernist plays that I found most contributed to achieving this effect. Then, through practical application of these elements in my own work, I could observe to what extent these characters would be made to seem to “speak for themselves”.

The Playwright’s Place in Practice

In designating my research as practical, as the focus of my study is underpinned by the act of the creative writing of plays, it is essential that some context be given for the comparatively fledgling, evolving, and amorphous field of practice-led research. While there seems, as yet, no critically absolute definition of what constitutes practice-led research, many scholars have in recent years devoted themselves to clarifying and defending its emergence. Anne Brewster offer two definitions of practice-led performance, the first adopted from Carole Gray, and the second her own:

- 1.) Research that is initiated in practice...[and] carried out through practice.
- 2.) Research that does not necessarily proceed along a linear trajectory or chronology – that is with research ‘initiated’ and carried out through practice, [but] (experiential) practice being initiated by (theoretical) research. (2012: 130)

For sake of my practice-led research, the latter of these two definitions seems to apply best.

It seems, however, as will be a test of my research, that creative writing as a form or practice has found an accepted if somewhat precarious foothold in the discipline. Though academic programmes are beginning to emerge which provide courses in which creative writing in drama is offered on the postgraduate level as practice-led research such as The Playwriting Institute of Sydney (Freeman 2009: 168), Lancaster University (220), and the University of Warwick (211), in all these given institutions, playwriting in practice has been integrated into a wider collaborative field rather than being treated as an independent practical discipline.

Addressing this growing method of research, John Freeman writes in his 2010, *Blood, Sweat & Theory*, that ‘the widespread adoption of practice-based study has done much in the way of viewing the in-the-moment ontology of performance rather than the epistemology of post-performance (post-practice) reflection’ (196). With playwriting as the act of practice not being so fully assimilated into the practice-based paradigm as the resultant performance in production, however, this act would seem to precede both the ontology of practical performance study as well as the epistemology of post-performance study, making it unclear as to why active analysis of playwriting methodology has not been more fully embraced within the field. It does, however, as scholar Hazel Smith writes, offer ‘many other relatively untapped possibilities for research to feed into creative writing’ (2010: 8) and exciting opportunities for ‘playwriting-as-practice’ contributions to the field of practice-based study. It may be asserted that the practice of writing as the focal point of study illuminates a process that exists prior to ‘in-the-moment’ production in performance but without which this moment could not exist.

There remains an admitted nebulous shadow cast over playwriting-in-practice in its distinction from mere textual analysis, as it might otherwise have been designated before wider acceptance of practice-led research. With few playwrights codifying their process of writing, the practical elements of this thesis cannot be structured on a pre-ascribed, documented method of authorial production. As Smith writes:

Currently, there is an increasing trend towards documentation and self-description of creative work – as well as growing recognition of self-critical awareness which is always a part of creating artwork – whether or not it is externalized. Nevertheless, there may be certain aspects of the work that practitioners do not want to talk about, such as possible

interpretations of it and the role of the practitioner in these respects remains distinct from that of the critic. (25)

With this being the case, it may well be the task of those pursuing playwriting as practice-based research to produce a structure for the works studied through practice where the practitioners who laid the foundation of these methods with no aim towards research did not. Roger T. Dean defends this position stating:

Disciplines are also changing in response to the greater incorporation of practice. Literary studies, for example, has been shaken up by the inception of creative writing programmes which put the emphasis on process rather than products, writers as much as readers...the idea that both creative writing and critical writing are research. (2012: 35)

For all this, I shall make clear that in whatever fashion playwriting as practice may eventually fall within the field – which is to suggest that it as yet has not and is without a cohesive theory on which to base the practice – my practice is one that would proceed, as Brewster defends as a valid course, from research leading to experiential practice.

The Landscape of Character Consciousness: Modernist Drama of the Mid-20th Century

It is largely to those playwrights of modernist theatre whose work was most prolific in the mid-twentieth century that my own inspiration must be attributed, and it is from their example that my practical study has taken its cue. In the wake of the Second World War, there seemed in art to be a surge in work produced that turned its focus inwards, perhaps attempting to derive sense from contextual events or expose their inherent senselessness for which no set of circumstance were so accountable as the humanity that precipitated its occurrence.

Consequently, many characters of theatre came to be written as equally inquisitive of their own behaviour and tendencies, with their playwrights affected no less by this symptomatic trend towards self-reflection. Postponing discussion of definition, it bears noting that 'since its inception as a category of literary study during the 1930s, Modernism has been notoriously inhospitable to definition' (Blair 1999:

331). Indeed, those artists who seem by definition modernist were deliberately attempting to defy conventions and definitions. As scholar Peter Gay has asserted, modernist practitioners shared in 'the lure of heresy that impelled their actions as they confronted conventional sensibilities' and 'a commitment to principled self-scrutiny' (2007: 5).

Though taking issue with this characterization, scholar Marianne Dekoven recognizes in her 1999 essay that modernism at its inception was grounded in 'a retreat from, or rejection of the failed, degraded, violent world of twentieth-century society and politics' (332). As the poetry of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg cast aside conventions in their form, experimenting with a rawer type of language, and the visual artists such as Jackson Pollock abandoned pre-existing assumptions of the structure of art in order to allow for a more unrestrained abstraction of the human experience, so too were playwrights of the time striving to penetrate to this core. In using theatre as the medium of this expression it followed that the characters of these plays served as agents of this examination. As a result, the product was an embodied expression of this inquisition turned inward, and in stripping away the external influences that might have otherwise bound this exercise what was revealed was an interrogation of consciousness and identity.

Among the first of these theatrical explorations into the essence of the human experience (and in so being, it may be said to be the character experience), was Jean-Paul Sartre's 1944 *Huis Clos*. In fact, this may well have been the advent of this artistic query, first staged four months before the Liberation of Paris. Though the play at its surface concerns three characters condemned to serve the eternity of their afterlife in a parlour room, thematically the play is an illustration of self-examination, the thread running from the events of the character's life before dying to an abstraction of the nature of human consciousness itself. At its conclusion, Sartre's thesis as pronounced by the character of Garcin resonates with the determination at which the play arrives, and passes a sentence on a brutal humanity to which the playwright had been so directly exposed: 'Hell is other people' (Sartre 1989: 45).

Later, Samuel Beckett's 1948 *Waiting for Godot* would similarly continue this trend. In this instance, however, Beckett appeared to abandon the artifice of the literal confines of a locked room for the figurative confines of the characters' inability to sever themselves from their own inert circumstances. Likewise reflecting a certain societal mindset, that these characters are bound by no more than their own stasis

would also seem to comment on the recent events of humanity locked in its own self-imposed destructive tendencies. In a short time following both these plays, lessons unlearned would give evidence of this trend. As the Western presence in the South Pacific would again precipitate what modernists might have considered an inevitable next phase in this cycle self-destruction, and the recognition of repeated senseless human behaviour on an enormous scale would give rise to postmodernism.

The aim shared by both the modernist and postmodernist writers might be said to be an exploration of the ambiguity of life and the human consciousness. Yet, modernist drama achieved this representation through the use of character, rather than a professed rejection of character. Turning to the second act scene of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* Martin Esslin in *Theatre of the Absurd* writes:

Pozzo and Lucky return, and the two tramps try to identify them, Estragon calls out, 'Abel! Abel!' Pozzo immediately responds. But when Estragon calls out, 'Cain! Cain!' Pozzo responds again. 'He's all mankind', concludes Estragon. (2003: 40)

While a clear use of satire, the exchange also demonstrates how Pozzo, and indeed all the characters of *Waiting for Godot*, in themselves embody the transcendent consciousness of the human paradox (the whole in the individual, the individual in the whole). This illustration of character consciousness succeeds as much as the varieties of obfuscating postmodern theatre that would attempt to do the same without use of character.

Shifting on Common Ground: Postmodernist Break from Character

At or about the mid-1960s there seemed a paradigmatic shift in dramatic discourse with the advent of theatre since termed postmodernist. Dramatists seemed now to include a rejection of the very components that comprised theatre including character itself. Among such practitioners and using his position to illustrate this rejection, Richard Foreman takes abrupt issue with, and exception to, character. In a section of 1992's 'Unbalancing Acts' entitled 'Foundations of Theatre', Foreman writes, 'Character...[this is] a straightjacket imposed on impulse so it can be dressed up in a fashion that is familiar, comforting, and reassuring for the spectator. But I want a theatre that frustrates our habitual way of seeing...' (1993: 4).

Foreman, and many practitioners deemed postmodern, would seem to suggest that it is somehow less frustrating for an audience to accept or resist the notion of characters being presented in plays of their own context. If, as his statement implies,

his desire is to rid his plays of character, it seems peculiar to then use actors in a representative capacity. What do these actors become, what are they performing if not characters? If a concept, why is there such resistance to a character's personifying a concept? Foreman uses the term theatre, as a category readily embraced; to what extent, then, does character differ from theatre? In later writing, despite its denunciation, Foreman refers regularly to character as the representation of consciousness in his plays (not 'impulse' or 'origin' as he does when theorizing on his disagreement with character).

Foreman suggests that '[one loses] interest in the level of "personality," because you recognize it as a product of the conditioning of the social world'. He remarks later on the subject that 'character and personality are accidents of circumstance...we arrive in culture by chance...but in my plays I want to evoke the deeper ground of being' (1993: 6). It seems to me then that Foreman dismisses the fact that his writing does not result in the creation of 'non-character', but characters that are liberated from the social restraints and the conditioning towards which he feels such objection. Foreman is not condemning consciousness as a whole, as this forms part of the philosophy of his Hysteric-Ontology of performance, merely the means by which it is represented.

Similarly in several essays, interviews, and instructional texts of Tim Etchells' *Certain Fragments* (Etchells 1999) on the history and methodology of the performances of Forced Entertainment, rarely does the term 'character' appear, nor is the concept addressed with regards to his performances or practice. It is, however, names and circumstances of characters and not those of the improvisational performers of 'Forced Entertainment' that appear in the text of their work: (from '12am Awake & Looking Down) 'THE EX-WIFE OF THE EX-PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, A BLOKE WHO'S JUST BEEN SHOT, A 9-YEAR-OLD SHEPHERD BOY, AND EU TRADE NEGOTIATOR and A BOXER WITH A TORN RETINA' (1999: 54).

Etchells in his introduction to the performance text of Section II of *Certain Fragments* opens by writing that 'these texts are ghosts' and later that the 'ghost texts are clues' (1999: 133). Perhaps tangentially it might be worth noting that all save for one of the four included plays (*Let the Water Run the Course to the Sea that Made the Promise, Emanuelle Enchanted, Club of No Regrets, and Speak Bitterness*) credit Etchells as the sole writer and the primary writer of the fourth. More significant

though is the reasonable assumption that the ‘ghosts’ to which Etchells refers when taken out of their abstract, metaphorical context are characters.

If indeed it is the intention of such postmodern practitioners as Richard Foreman and Tim Etchells to illustrate the so-called ‘death of character’ there seems to remain no less an element of character consciousness. Though unconventional, when set beside its realist or modernist predecessors, the illustration of these postmodern concepts are no less reliant on character consciousness than its precedent form.

Insisting on a Presence: Consciousness Through Character

Since masks were donned in ritual, character has been an intractable component of theatre that transcends, gives meaning, binds, and gives consciousness to theatre in all its forms. From the most conventional plays of realism to post-modern performance that proclaims the death of the characters represented on its stage, character serves as the mode of delivery of dramatic consciousness under all theatrical banners, transcends, and serves as the foundation of theatre at its very core. No matter its variant genre, the human presence, the consciousness first penned by author and given dimension through its stages of process, remains. The convention of a stage agent thus nonetheless serves as a departure point of the consciousness of all theatrical communication including those characters regarded as ‘non-character’. It is the defining of a method by which that consciousness is practically achieved through writing that is of greater concern to my study than any argument that might be had as to the presence or absence of character.

The Oxford English dictionary offers the following as definitions of character as regards theatre, as ‘a person represented in a drama, story, etc.; a part or role, as in a play or film’, and further defining the concept as:

Theatre

a.

(of a part or role) representing a personality type, esp. by emphasizing distinctive traits, as language, mannerisms, physical makeup, etc.

b.

(of an actor or actress) acting or specializing in such roles. (2005: 159)

If it is the *connotation* ascribed to character with which postmodernist practitioners take issue, this is not the connotation which my practical study will address, but rather how the consciousness of these non-characters are represented on stage. Perhaps a more encompassing definition serving both ‘character’ and ‘non-character’ might be:

The personified agent and/or representative of conscious theatrical expression that serves as the driving temporal medium of theatrical performance (assumed fictional)...

Leading Literature in Review

I have before – in analysis and research conducted prior to this dissertation – and will once more return to an elegant assessment made by Bettina Knapp in her 1980 review of June Schlueter’s *Metafictional Characters in Modern Drama*:

When going to the theatre spectators enter into complicity with the stage happening; they accept that they are experiencing illusion as reality.

Although [the audience] may be disturbed by the duality before them, they are aware of the conflict between reality and illusion and, therefore, their practical experience is more profound than that of persons who merely absorb theatrical happenings. (1980: 127)

It is from this vertiginous notion that my drive towards analysis of how characters are presented in theatre described as metatheatrical arises, and from this develops into a practical study of how to incorporate these components into my own playwriting.

Arriving at a Definition of Written Character Consciousness

In conducting this practical study of consciousness of characters of modernist and postmodernist texts, I will focus on those characters who, when examined, appear to turn back a glance of recognition. In the case of these plays, though, definition of this self-consciousness has been debated, unified, fragmented, rejected. Before providing my own definition, it would be remiss and imprudent not to reflect on the pre-existing terms offered by scholars whose work has striven to arrive at established definitions of forms of theatricalized consciousness. And secondly I will attempt to penetrate the component parts of character consciousness as they relate to my own efforts to isolate and derive from them a cohesive methodology for playwriting.

As it has been suggested by scholars and philosophers, we think those

thoughts we have words to express. Though not meaning to limit the potential of communication or 'thought' merely to written or spoken language character consciousness may be defined on some level as being language, without which we would be incapable of coherent thought. It is not on a philosophical basis that the practicalities of technique emerge, however, philosophy's influence is observed overtly or by implication in the works of modernist and postmodernist playwrights through techniques. Quite fittingly then, by this approach a play becomes the physical suspension of thought, the alternate means to verbal expression by which thought or consciousness is preserved and transferred. Therefore writing, such as that of a script and the characters therein, and verbal expression, such as that in performance, is at its essence a means by which to express conscious thought. When doubled with characters who are written in such a fashion as to suggest they are aware of being characters in a play, this effect of consciousness to which my study refers, emerges.

Rene Descartes' dictum: 'I think, therefore I am' (1960: iv), though an aphoristic platitude, also provides a fairly direct illustration of the way in which the depiction of a character's consciousness is transferred from playwright to audience in performance. In both these, one may find the essence of character consciousness: consciousness relies on one's ability to articulate one's awareness of being—verbally or otherwise—whether to oneself or others, which is precisely the function of these theatrical characters to be examined.

Metatheatre and the Effect of Character Consciousness

Coined by scholar Lionel Abel, 'metatheatre' has been a popularized definition for these plays that explore characters written with a degree of self-awareness. This is not a definition to which I shall strictly adhere as it seems not to fully encompass the technique by which character consciousness is represented and lacks a specificity of method by which it is achieved: a character represented as having an awareness of itself as an agent of play need not necessarily be—and is often not—an examination of theatre. However, being that this is so often the case, the effect of character consciousness cannot escape being considered through a metatheatrical lens. By Abel's definition, metatheatre (as opposed to tragedy, he stresses) concerns itself with 'the world of the imagination' rather than the 'real world' (2003: v). It is 'theatre about theatre' as seen in the conventions of a play-within-a-play. However, far more cryptic

is Abel's definition when asked what metatheatre is, to which he responds 'life is a dream and all the world's a stage' (2002: 89), drawing from Calderon and Shakespeare.

This second definition seems to offer far more subtle if nebulous implications as regards extracting an authorial technique in the writing of character consciousness. If life (which may be regarded as the 'real world') is a dream and all the real world is a stage, where then is a distinction drawn between the metatheatre of the world of imagination and the tragedy of the real world? More to the point of my enquiry is the question, where does this leave the characters of either? If by deconstruction a playwright might blur the dramatic distinction between the 'imaginary' and the 'real' of theatrical fiction, what does this portend for the characters of these worlds: how might and by what means is their world and by turns are they themselves made to give the effect of being 'real'?

In this, however, there are abundant inconsistencies in the characters Abel identifies as possessing an awareness of self, one such being Hamlet. Regularly cited as the quintessential example the self-aware character, many scholars have turned to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as one, if not the first, development of this esoteric brand of character. This is an assertion I am reticent to embrace in my analytical practice as the play does not fall within the landscape of the modernist or postmodernist genres being examined, and secondly as a precursor of the phenomenon, it does not carry the same connotation of awareness as I hope to illustrate in my practice. As a point of origin, however, it merits consideration since Lionel Abel regularly identifies Hamlet as the paradigmatic representative of the advent of metatheatrical character consciousness (2003: 43).

Its place in, and the degree to which it is removed from my practice may be seen in Abel's essay *Hamlet QED*. In this essay the mantle of self-awareness is bestowed on the young prince of Denmark, citing it as demonstration of his ancillary function as theatrical director and critic, for example in his instruction to the players prior to their performance of 'The Death of Gonzago'. Abel has written extensively on the character's introspection as an indication of his awareness of self, though for my part this offers less parity with characters representing their own consciousness than with those characters of more conventional realism. Neither does the concept of 'play-within-a-play' give an indication of this effect of self consciousness, as Abel has asserted, since the characters within the play are not aware of their status as characters

performing a play-within-a-play *and*, further, of the play within which they are playing being a play: they themselves are not *players* but *characters* in a play. Yet, as *Hamlet* was among those plays that spurred my interest in this practical line of enquiry, it should not be dismissed (nor plays dating back as far as those of Aristophanes, in which likewise the play-within-a-play gives rise to a blurring of the fictive and the actual). In part the broader sweeping application of metatheatre as a description for plays whose focus might not be on the representations of consciousness makes *Hamlet* of limited use in my practical examination. It is certainly not without its place and duly acknowledged as being potentially among the components of an authorial methodology of achieving the effect of character consciousness.

Beyond Metatheatre

As observed by Thomas G. Rosenmeyer in his essay 'Metatheatre: The Theatre of Overload', specifically examining and deconstructing the writing of Lionel Abel, metatheatre is one in which, '[characters] are self-conscious, both about themselves as characters and about their status as actors playing characters' (2002: 88). If one of the defining precepts of Abel's definition of theatre, how then can he so ardently propose *Hamlet's* self awareness? It may be that Abel is extrapolating his meaning from the ruminative disposition of the character, one who meticulously examines his every action and agonizes over what potential consequence it may bring. While this is so, however, there is not textual support to suggest *Hamlet* as a character being aware of the actual nature of his existence: a character in a play entitled *Hamlet* written by William Shakespeare. In developing a methodology by which character consciousness is achieved, it shall be a specific variety of self-awareness with which my research concerns itself.

Since defined by Abel, metatheatre has become synonymous with all theatre that serves as a commentary on theatre. As result, according to Abel, the term has been misinterpreted and misapplied. Indeed, Abel has acknowledged that he has been the subject of scholarly criticism due to his definition of his own terminology being loose and unclear...and has since offered the concept of 'life seen as already theatricalised' (2002: 89) as the definitive attribute of his metatheatre. Yet, Abel also in much of his writing pays particular attention to *Hamlet*. The value of Shakespeare's

Hamlet in the scope of literature and in particular drama, I do not and will not deny, yet neither would I (even under the auspice of Abel's definition) consider it a narrative in which life is theatricalised. Abel's definition, as mentioned, therefore seems one supportive of my proposed enquiry, though the plays to which he has applied it necessarily do not.

Before, following this line of enquiry to its extremity, let there be an examination of the source of these characters: the author. Though Abel goes to great lengths to differentiate between the writer of tragedy and the writer of metatheatre, the 'real' versus the 'imaginary', given the contradictions that his own definition illustrates I will address his examination of character without respect to whether he is referring to tragedy or metatheatre, as it seems to me they are one in the same.

On the function of the author's relationship to character Abel issues this comment: '[the author's] creation then is a communion with us, in the experiencing of a view of things which we could not have without [the author], but which he in turn can only have insofar as he is capable of extending it to us' (2003: 54-55). This is preceded by an assertion of Abel's that 'the very great probability is...that the writer of tragedy is no more endowed with a tragic sense of life than are we to whom he makes it available' (55).

In reviewing this, I am struck by a certain generalisation. The 'us' and 'we' to whom Abel refers (the audience) as well as the writer (playwright) seem very much to have a unified and nearly predetermined response to material with which they are being presented. In many cases of what Abel would term either tragedy or metadrama, I would argue that the author may be seeking an audience with as specific and unique an experience base as him or herself. Thus the communion sought may be with those who have, indeed, experienced such tragedy and personal conflict. There is, I hope to demonstrate through my practical study, a potential for a common experience that an author may share with his or her audience – in the case of the characters being examined, one concerning an awareness of self – without presuming the consequence of that commonality.

Arriving at a uniform definition for sake of individual textual analysis has been attempted by a wide variety of scholars. Lionel Abel can without opposition refer to specific plays as being metatheatrical or metaplays, Martin Esslin dubs other plays Theatre of the Absurd, scholars may refer to modernism or postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon identifies self-reflexive forms as 'Narcissistic Narrative'. Far more

difficult is the isolating of a collection of attributes and conventions of character consciousness that might give clarity and designation to the broad range of this esoteric variety of theatre. If adopting in part Abel's stance, for my part, the term *metatheatre* seems better suited to components of the convention that I seek to illustrate rather than its definition in whole.

Even more a source of heated discourse, semantic debates have raged over the highly contentious definition of modernist and postmodernist theatre of the last century. The discrepancies seem to lie not in the definitions themselves, but in the wide variety of definitions being gleaned from or ascribed to forms that are not inert nor the product of an identifiable single ideology. Each scholar confronted with these forms will derive from them a unique significance as would be expected of an audience for whom these pieces are performed. Without intending to return to the debate of interpretive criticism versus literary theory, these definitions, I posit, cannot be necessarily reduced to an assessment of their accuracy, but of what specifically the scholar in question is individually seeking to elucidate.

'Scholars have frequently preferred to focus of the local rather than the larger domain...or on such intermediate domains as the Theatre of the Absurd, the Theatre of Commitment, The Theatre of Protest and Paradox, the Theatre of the Marvelous, and so on', writes Austin Quigley in *The Modern Stage and Other Worlds*. Added to this are the confounding attempts to lend category to a form that by its own definition seems to reject definition. Quigley continues to identify three factors in a definitive 'Theatre of the Whole' being so problematic: 1.) 'the field is still developing', 2.) 'the theatre metaphor acquires an uncertain status in this larger context, 3.) 'the field seems to be characterised more by its variety than by any underlying, overarching, or emerging consistency' (1985: 17).

An Absurd Notion

Since being published in 1961, Martin Esslin's *Theatre of the Absurd* has undergone several editions, enduring as a lexicon of modernist theatrical theory. Esslin adopts his definition from Ionesco's use of the word taken from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, as:

That which is devoid of purpose...Cut off from his religious,

metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his action become senseless, absurd, useless. (2001: 23)

Further, Esslin writes, 'this sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition is, broadly speaking, the theme of the plays of [these authors]...theatre of the absurd strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition [...] by open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought' (2001: 24). I would argue that if attempting to translate the circumstances of the plays to corollaries that can be seen and clearly identified in what Abel has termed the 'real world' this may be so and therefore both these positions take account of developing characters written with conventions that allow them to be perceived as knowing of the 'real world' in which the plays they are presented are performed.

However, the circumstances of the characters of these plays are their own. That they would be reduced to mere allegories limits the intricacies of their situation to which many the authors would likely object. As example, the 1984 Broadway production of Beckett's *Endgame* set the action of the play in a subway and was met with outrage from the author who then fought to have the run of the production terminated. As Beckett's actions seem to imply, the circumstances of many modernists plays are those presented on stage not to be found elsewhere; in the of *Endgame*: a bare interior. Though they may be said to be one and the same, a practical examination of examples of character consciousness might give greater weight to an unhindered examination of the *character* condition as defined by their author (and in its application, as defined by me).

As Martin Esslin proposes in *Theatre of the Absurd*, audiences, 'critics', and reviewers' bemusement at such plays may 'come from the fact that they are part of a new and still developing stage convention that has not yet been generally understood and has hardly ever been defined' (2001: 21). Thus academia has found itself with a select number of specialized scholars on the subject, all assigning plays to the 'emergent' or 'developing' form, yet without lending definition or terminology from a coherent vantage point. Therefore Theatre of the Whole cannot be claimed by any to have been defined in any absolute terms.

With each offered definition conveying a multitude of subtly varied and often conflicting elements and connotations, the dilemma is not an inability to distinguish unique characteristics with these forms, but rather the absence of shared perspective amongst those studying them. As example, I offer an examination of the solitary

mention of Lionel Abel in Martin Esslin's *Theatre of the Absurd*. As Peter Boxall identifies, in discussing the 'meaning' of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* Esslin calls attention to 'Mr. Abel's' contention that the roles of Hamm and Clov function as a literary satire on the style of James Joyce's writing. To this Esslin retorts:

Such an interpretation reduces [the play] to a trivial level...if *Endgame* really were nothing but a thinly disguised account of the literary, or even the human, relationship between two particular individuals, it could not possibly produce the impact it has had on audiences utterly ignorant of these particular, very private circumstances. (2001: 68-69)

These theorists seeking to define a structure for a form so often (as in this example) attempt to derive the significance and the meaning from influences external to the play. It seems most attention is in this fashion paid to the specific circumstances of the experience of these plays' characters, and it is towards this that an examination of the effect of character consciousness redirects focus.

One stark deficiency in the camp of theory and criticism lies in its lack of discourse between theorists and practitioners, leaving the dialogue to argumentative speculation on the part of scholars who (as the example above seems to indicate) often seem less concerned with the substance of their stance as who is better able to articulate his or her position. By proposing to operate as both theorist and practitioner, it is this rather sizeable divide that I hope to ford in my practical examination.

As Quigley asserts, 'there is, we must recognize at the onset, an incipient conflict between the desires of the playwrights, who usually wish to emphasize their individual contributions, and the desires of those critics who wish to generalize about the shared achievements of a large group of playwrights' (1998: 22). It may be, therefore, by advancing this 'emergent form' that I seek on some level to develop a methodology for identifying characters and the effects of consciousness. I shall submit that this practical examination, in addition to serving as a method by which represented stage consciousness is achieved, might also demonstrate the similarities of the sub-genres of theatre whose attributes are shared in part but not in whole by the scholars and their definitions.

The challenge in the case of my study arises, then, in reconciling the separation of, or to put it more accurately the inability to separate, playwright and critic as the nature of my research requires that I operate as both creator and critic of the original works produced and their influences. The solution it seems must be as

scholar to focus on my influences without bringing myself under the pale of one pre-existing defined schools of practice. Rather, it shall be through operating within several identified modernist methods that this effect of character consciousness will emerge with both scholar and playwright bearing witness as one.

The defining characteristic of this proposed character consciousness is its being one that does not seek a sense of detached spectacle of its agents, but as an entry point whereby the characters transcend the circumstances that bind them. As opposed to a Brechtian style of theatre in which there is commentary on character, the variety of consciousness I seek to explore is one that does not offer its audiences entry into its reality but pleads for release into our own. If, for example, one were to borrow as a point of departure Lionel Abel's definition of metatheatre, my interest lies in those moments in which the dream confronts the dreamer and the world of the stage envelopes its audience.

Abel's definition of metatheatre is largely rooted in the occurrence of play-within-play, whether explicit or implied. This is indeed a common motif that does unify in many cases the content of the specific plays, though does not account for the wide diversity of plays that do not use this convention. However, he is quick to acknowledge the fact that this does not define the form so much as it is a device thereof. Rather he more specifically designates those plays that fall under his banner as those 'about life seen as already theatricalised' (2003: 134). From an actor's perspective, then, the character becomes the identity associated with 'reality' and the actor the character, the fiction, that of the 'other world'.

To this extent, my study and Abel's share in a similar focus. Though the specific device of play-within-play does not hold relevance to my examination, the phenomenon of characters 'appearing on the stage...because they themselves knew they were dramatic before the playwright took note of them' (2003: 134) fundamentally does. In its application to my own practical study, represented consciousness does hinge on characters who 'are aware of their own theatricality', though may not necessarily themselves serve as a means through which theatre as a whole is commented upon.

An assertion of Abel's theories that I will call into question is his insistence on there being an 'obligation [on the part of the playwright] to acknowledge in the very structure of his play that it was his imagination that controlled the event from beginning to end' (2003: 135). This may well be so, but in the process of writing

these characters into existence the characters of *Waiting for Godot* are uncertain of the identity of the person for whom they are waiting, so too is their creator, Beckett, as he remarked to Allan Schneider, 'if I had known, I would have said so in the play' (44). Does the process of writing into being such characters raise a question about the extent to which one (writer or character) knows more or less than the other and to what extent are they of one consciousness? It is this, perhaps, that most concerns my enquiry and the point from which I will take departure and extract relevant findings from my predecessors.

It is therefore my aim in identifying previously written works and in writing work of my own in which characters exhibit a quality of autonomy, of presenting themselves as operating independently of their creators, of characters imbued with a consciousness of their own accord, is to interrogate how far beyond the scope and control of their origins these characters may be taken within an imaginative construct. In this, my practical enquiry asks where the line falls in this construction and the actual reality in which it at last comes to exist. In a space such as we occupy, communicating through language (whether spoken or otherwise), how does one divide 'actual reality' from 'fiction' when both are being presented as indivisible?

Addressing the Postmodern Conundrum

At the foundation of my examination may be a reflection of and on the ongoing debate identified by Linda Hutcheon between interpretive criticism and literary theory. As Hutcheon concedes herself in her attempt to define the "poetics" of what we seem determined to call *postmodernism*...it is clear that any poetics of the contemporary must take into account both the literature and the criticism or theory being produced at this time' (1991: xi). Hutcheon's reflection on the sheer ubiquity of postmodernism in theatrical discourse notes how heavily its influence has been attributed to the modern avant-garde. Yet despite its widespread adoption, for all the constraint as the postmodernist paradigm imposes, Hutcheon is also quite insistent on her preference to avoid its use (2). My position on this at the time of my writing is that the mere mention of the supposedly opposing stances of interpretive criticism and literary theory serve to further muddy waters. My torch, if you will, shall endeavour to cast light on the character experience and experience of character in all its facets and less the context in which many other scholars have attempted to restrain them.

I will disregard most of those contentions raised by postmodern theorists as they relate to the significance of the characters of modern theatre. This has namely to do with a pervasive position of many of those writing on the subject that suggest that 'character' is a dated concept from the realm of modernist drama. In defining character consciousness, there occurs a vexing paradox when oppositional argument invalidates the very concept one is seeking to delineate. For example, Elinor Fuchs in *The Death of Character*, suggests that theatre has become widely divergent from the efforts towards realist verisimilitude and naturalistic techniques of human representation derived from a deconstruction of such concepts of individual identity, temporality, and spatial existence, that emerged largely in the philosophies of the early twentieth century. In her writing, Fuchs dismisses contemporary examples of character, 'modernist character comes to the stage partly de-substantiated' (2002: 20).

It seems, however, that most of this philosophical de-substantiation revealed by postmodernist theory of the 20th century pertains to human experience, or humanity itself, than to its theatrical representative, character. If *humanity* is desubstantiated, how does that threaten the existence of its dramatic agent-counterpart, character, and how is their correlation any less diminished than when there existed a 'substantiated' humanity? Rather than suggest the desubstantiation of post-modern characters, might it be that there is a development of postmodern character that reflects this new human experience of having been desubstantiated?

John Barth asserts in his definitive commentary of postmodernism 'The Literature of Exhaustion' that the trend of self-reflexivity and literary auto-referentiality that has emerged over this possibly ill-defined period of modernism as consequence of literature (and for sake of this examination I give concentration to *drama*) having exhausted all other material than itself. It has thus traced all available paths and found itself at its beginning with no recourse but to retrace already known terrain and examine its own journey made before (1982: 32). Here it seems there is an implicit acknowledgement of, or inadvertent concession to, the presence of a consciousness without which this journey of reversal would not be possible: what journey can be made without an observing journeyer?

Though not wholly removed from these notions, Linda Hutcheon seems less to surrender the concept of her *Narcissistic Narrative* for want of originality or lack of alternative, but to the introspectivity inherent to the artistic impulse. By Hutcheon's definition, use of the term 'narcissistic' does not carry the negative connotation which

many would ascribe to it. Rather, she derives her use of the designation from the term's meaning as it was applied by Sigmund Freud who 'conferred on narcissism the status of the *universal original condition*' (1991: 4). Neither does Hutcheon direct this classified narcissism towards the authors of the works, but instead towards the 'critically neutral' works themselves. In so doing, Hutcheon seems to allude to *narcissistic narratives* being entities potentially divorced from the authors' responsible for their creation, operating and communicating beyond the author's scope as the controlling force behind the narrative. If a narrative can possess neutrality not shared by its author, it must then be one that is to some extent divorced from its origins. This seems to me a fascinating proposition and one more concerned with advancing theatre's evolution than managing its decline, as Barth's 'exhaustion' would suggest. Granted, with the rather humorous tone of Barth's essay it may be that the piece in itself was meant as an example of the form and not its condemnation (or, perhaps, this is what the essay communicates without its author's knowledge). Therefore, *Narcissistic Narrative* as defined by Hutcheon would seem to be one that exists neutrally for its own sake: a piece of literature that that represents, comments upon, and seeks to be no more than its existence as literature. In a theatricalised context with respect to character consciousness, a narcissistic character would thus be one neutrally aware of its existence as a creation of play written with an ability to comment on this theatricality and without aspiration to be more than the product of the author's imaginings.

Identifying the Dividing Line

In my research, my issue has been not so much with the philosophies underpinning and put forth by 'postmodern' dramatic theory as with the insistence of many of its most prolific and vocal proponents towards its incompatibility with notions of character and thereby character consciousness, such as those to be later discussed, posited by Elinor Fuchs.

Postmodern theatre is demonstrated through example, as John Barth in his 1980 essay 'The Literature of Replenishment: Postmodern Fiction', suggests. Hutcheon approaches the term with scepticism choosing not to use the label in her own writing. She explains:

The reasons for this choice are many, and not the least important is that the term 'post-modern' seems to me to be a very limiting label for such a broad contemporary phenomenon as metafiction...the 'post' of 'post-modernism' [suggests] not 'after', so much as an extension of modernism and a reaction to it. (1980: 2)

I would propose that similarly challenges might be made towards the term modernism of which Hutcheon suggests post-modernism to be an extension,

Narcissistic Narrative, a term coined by scholar Linda Hutcheon for the meta-literary phenomenon represented in the plays discussed here are fundamentally so as a result of their self-focus. However, as Hutcheon writes, one must distinguish her use of narcissism from the negative connotations of its more modern common usage:

'Narcissistic' - the figurative adjective chosen to designate this textual [and theatrical] self-awareness - is not intended as derogatory but rather descriptive and suggestive...nor are the inevitable psychoanalytical connotations to be taken negatively...in fact, it was [Sigmund] Freud who conferred on narcissism the status of the 'universal original condition' of man, making it more than mere pathological behaviour. (1980; 10)

Therefore these are plays that are in their 'narcissistic narrative' concerned exclusively with themselves in Hutcheon's view of metatheatrics. It thus stands to reason that an appropriate enquiry be made of the plays' specific circumstances and the experience had by these characters, without regard for the varied allegorical significance that numerous scholars have constructed and concentrated on.

Thus 'modernism' both word and category may be modern merely in the context of its relative emergence in the Western theatrical paradigm (Hutcheon draws attention to these dialectics being received altogether differently in the 'Latin American frame of reference'), and thus I should make clear that my writing springs from what is a 'Western' theatrical tradition, without diminishing the validity of other perspectives.

If we might address the nature of both modernism and postmodernism as being constituent of the avant-garde, scholar David Kennedy suggests that the notion of adequately defining its properties is impossible. This conundrum resides largely in both forms, according to Kennedy, in the fact that both are 'advanced necessarily' in their obscuring 'oppositional position'. Kennedy writes, 'whatever I am, says the avant-gardists, I am not what has gone before. I am far ahead of custom, I deny the

pressure of the market, and I disdain the common audience who cannot be expected to understand my work since I am part of the future' (2009: 49). Kennedy may be assuming the position of the avant-gardist to a large extent, but as further evidence will demonstrate, there is an accuracy to this position of this invented avant-gardist for so aloof as many of the playwrights hereafter discussed are in offering of themselves any particular definition of the mechanics of their work.

David Harvey identifies some of the chief categorical differences in postmodern criticism in his 1988 work *The Condition of Postmodernity*, comparing critical approaches to modernism in its passage to postmodernism:

'Modernist' literary critics did tend to look at works as examples of 'genre' and to judge them by the 'master code' that prevails within the 'boundary' of the genre, whereas the 'postmodern' style is simply to view the work as a 'text' with its own particular 'rhetoric' and 'idiolect', but which can in principal be compared with any other text no matter what sort. (44)

Thus Harvey seems to suggest that postmodernism's function expanded the relevance of the work produced beyond what might have been previously regarded as a self-contained genre. The encompassing nature of postmodernism in its intent to transcend the specifics of the artists work to a more universally comparative point of departure both defines and on some levels convolutes the meaning of postmodernist drama.

Mapping the transition from a modernist to postmodernist dramatic paradigm, Jonathan Kalb uses the influence of Beckett and Brecht on the latter work of Heiner Müller to illustrate the shift in trends between the two conceptualizations of theatre. Citing a interview given by Müller, one of the specific intents of postmodernist drama becomes quite clear as it was seen that, 'Theater must find its minimum once again, its zero point, from which outward steps can be taken again' (1994: 7).

Drawing comparison between precedents set by Brecht, Kalb likewise identifies specific traits of Müller's postmodern theatre that may be seen in other playwrights and practitioners of the time such as Richard Foreman and Robert Wilson (later to be discussed in fuller detail). On this Kalb writes:

From the ground of this regenerative Brecht-critique involving a radical expansion and elaboration of *Lehrstück* ['learning play'] ideas, such as the use of non-professional performers, the priority of process over product, and the questioning of individual identity through choral staging and the

exchanging of roles - Müller went on to develop an aesthetic of assemblage and collage that he called "the synthetic fragment". (2000: 76)

Thus through observing those practices carried forward from the modernists, a clearer notion of certain trends and intentions of the postmodern paradigm becomes increasingly evident.

Drawing Out a Rationale

It is largely from what can be seen to be a contentious and largely convoluted field of theatrical study that directs the rationale of my study: a comprehensive practical examination of character consciousness and the means by which it is exhibited through analysis and practical playwriting. In this, as a writer, there is a value in approaching pre-existing scholarship and creative works intending to distil how this effect of character consciousness is achieved and in turn test their elements through application to my own writing.

Since the first primitive ritualized performances, character has been a quintessential component of theatre and indeed it may be argued to the whole of art. Character is the conduit of expression without which, I would claim theatre ceases to be. Yet, theory on the subject of character has resided primarily in the literary sector, with what attention paid to the concept in theatre reserved still for textual analysis with scarce emphasis given to the concept of the consciousness with which these characters are infused and is transferred from author to staging and staged performance to audience.

The Means of Practice (Method and Methodology)

As previously discussed, there seems a relative dearth of widely recognized theory as it applies to the practice of playwriting alone, and to some extent with focus given specifically to notions of character consciousness this dissertation may serve that lack of scholarly investigation. This is not to suggest a lack of awareness of creative writing as practice, though far more commonly it is a component of a wider methodology than the principal practice in and of itself. Here, with regards to my practice, I should establish that it is writing-as-act that constitutes the basis of my practice which is drawn from the established product (plays) of selected authors'

practice, though not the methodology by which they were produced. Certainly there are aspects of production that ultimately impact this product, one in particular being that the works examined were either written in or - whether by the author or an authorised source - translated to English.

My analysis and the basis for my practice was a process of extracting and applying practical elements of the product rather than the production. Therein lies the distinction between method and methodology as I define it. It is not the process by which these plays were developed, but the ultimate written result. Through dissection of this, distilling the observable components of the written work, it is then possible through practice that I aim to produce the effect of character consciousness gleaned from example.

Fundamentally, it is the text-based literary components that my study primarily concerns itself. However, as opposed to a strictly literary analysis, as the plays' research is intended for performance, ultimately I do not presume to divorce the intent of a playwright to have his or her work staged in the theatrical process. Rather, it is with specific attention to this outcome of performance that I consider these works and through practice attempted to use written character consciousness as the means by which to achieve theatrical character consciousness drawing on modernist and postmodernist paradigms.

Ultimately, the aim is to answer the question as to whether, I can identify and define the pragmatic production of conventions of theatricalised character consciousness in established works of modernist and postmodernist playwriting and then test and extend these conventions in my own original writing. Attempts to simulate the conditions under which many of the works of modernist and postmodernist theatre were written are made all the more impractical by their authors' reluctance to disclose or in many cases so much as consider their meaning. Indeed, previous academic and artistic emphasis on 'experience of negotiation rather than explication' has been a source of difficulty when approaching certain written pieces of modernism and postmodernism with 'the conventional refusal of the experimental artist to explain their work' (Quick 2010: ix).

For this reason, it is upon the product that I rely for my practice rather than production. Without definitive statement on the part of these authors, I cannot claim that it was with the intent of producing a represented consciousness that these plays were written. However, analysis of these plays and the identification of evidence of

the effect of character consciousness will be the basis upon which I build my taxonomy of such conventions and in turn apply them with precisely that intent.

My active process may be said to be one of Textualisation or Retextualisation (*terminology my own*): the practice by which the plays produced consist of the identification of conventions, as stated, and the conscious application of these conventions and their function in creating the effect of character consciousness and, in practice, retextualising them as a means of verifying whether those effects might be similarly achieved when used in original pieces of drama within the context of their artistic paradigms. It is a process of literary analysis and dissection, which in turn leads to an active reconstitution whereby these effects might be reproduced as a useable dramatic method, on which I base this study.

Ahead

In the chapters that follow, the structure I give to my analysis very much adopts the second of Brewster's definition of practice-based research in which the practice is guided by a comprehensive analysis of the works from which I draw my own categorical conventions of character consciousness, accounting for the context in which they were written and how this in turn informed their place within their respective historical context (whether modernist or postmodernist). On that basis, I then offer a taxonomy that illustrates in greater detail these conventions gleaned through my analysis and on which I base the practice of my writing. In critical reflection, I provide evidence of the application of these conventions, gauging the extent of their success against the aim in using the conventions identified and how they came to be represented in writing.

Additionally, included in the appendices of this dissertation are both the plays written to which I shall regularly make reference. Also included in these appendices are two compendium DVDs: these two being video recordings of productions of the plays, again, not as a supplement for the writing but as an aid in observing how this written practice translated to performance. Being that the focus of my practice is in the writing, I do not refer to points in the recording as reference for fear that it would distract the fluidity of reading this dissertation. If choosing to view the companion material, it might be recommended that it be done prior to the reading of each their respective chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

The Emergence Of Character Consciousness in Modernist Drama

Introduction

Before embarking on my analysis to glean what literary and theatrical components serve in the construction of the 'self-aware modernist character' and my own resultant work, This Go 'Round, to which I applied these components, I shall define the concept of modernism and self-awareness for the purposes of this examination:

In Robert Alter's *Partial Magic: Novel as Self-Conscious Genre*, the scholar writes that our modernist culture is 'more and more driven to uncover the roots of what it lives with most basically – language and its origins, human sexuality, the workings of the psyche, the inherent structures of the mind, the underlying patterns of social organization, the sources of value and belief, and, of course, the nature of art' (1979: 200). Thus in the matter of 'modernism', it shall stand that the reference is to the period of the early 20th-century in which art turned from mimetic functions of representing an externalized world and became more focused on itself. However, this does not necessarily elucidate the crux or phenomenological shift that underpins the theatrical characters I seek to examine. For this a far more appropriate definition is offered by Irving Howe, writing in 1967:

Modernism... keeps approaching – sometimes even penetrating – the limits of solipsism, the view expressed by the German poet Gottfried Benn when he writes that 'there is no outer reality, there is only human consciousness, constantly building, modifying, rebuilding new worlds out of its own creativity'. (20 – 21)

The implications of this for theatrical manifestations of modernism are the emergence of characters who relate to themselves and one another as fictional characters rather than remaining within a constructed fictional world referring by implication to a realm outside the performance space. The many varieties of this self-regarding character I shall outline in my taxonomy of these unique characters.

The notion of self-consciousness or self-awareness within modernist texts is distinct from mere self-reference. Among other scholars, Shakespeare's Hamlet has been cited by Lionel Abel as 'the quintessential self-conscious character' (2003: 119). It is of utmost importance that I clarify that the variety of self-consciousness to which

I refer is the representation of an effect of consciousness of the character's literal self. While Abel's application of the term is not in direct contradiction to this, there is a connotational disparity. Thus by demonstration: Hamlet's self-awareness (in any sense of literality) is patently not so. Hamlet may well be self-conscious in the context of the narrative of the play; one set in Denmark's fictionalized Castle Elsinore. He (or she depending upon casting), however, is not aware of the actuality of his theatricalised self, one performed upon a stage with an observant audience. It is to these latterly examined characters that I limit the use of 'self-aware' at any point of its use in this text.

A Dramatic Seismic Shift

The impact of the modernist playwrights of the mid-20th century is arguably unprecedented in the history of theatre, so widespread was its influence. American dramatist, Edward Albee, speaking of Samuel Beckett, remarked in 1990's documentary *Waiting for Beckett*:

Back in the late 1950s, an entire generation of us playwrights were suddenly hit with a five year period...and it was a wake-up punch that changed the face of American Theatre.

Whether Beckett's work solely could be recognised for this revolution in theatre is a debatable, though of more importance was the revolutionary trend in the number of plays where audiences were introduced to a variety of theatrical character hitherto unseen in such abundance. With the study focusing on notions of character consciousness and the representation of character experience in modernist drama, this proliferation within modernist drama underpins the whole of this analysis.

Some of the defining characteristics of a particular kind of character that was being written in this period were those being presented as characters without the artifice of an identity removed from the fictive. The characters were instead represented as aware their position as written characters of drama and often written to comment on the nature of their own theatricality. As scholar Lionel Abel considered in *Metatheatre*:

The plays I am pointing at do have a common character: all of them are about life seen as already theatricalised. By this I mean that the persons appearing on the stage are there not because they were caught by the playwright in dramatic postures as a camera might catch them,

but because they themselves knew they were dramatic before the playwright took note of them. (60 – 61)

Abel's assertions would seem on some level to suggest an independent consciousness possessed by these characters of self-referential play, a theme that will emerge repeatedly in my line of enquiry.

However, for these characters to have known they were dramatic before the playwright took note of them, as Abel clearly states, implies their having existed (if perhaps merely as concepts yet realized by their author) prior to their being written. It may be that Abel meant this awareness figuratively, though the questions that reveal themselves upon closer examination of the circumstances of these self-aware characters are manifold. In the plays to be examined, characters are presented within a paradox endemic to the modernist era. In these circumstances audience and actor are drawn into the character's world but they also constitute that world, a world defined by: 'the relativity of truth, since reality is a projection of man's consciousness; the use of role-playing and masks to hide the essential self; and the self-reflexivity of modernist art' (Adler 1980: 272).

In this reflection upon the play's own reflexivity what are the implications for audience, actor, and character? Does the meta-character of meta-drama compound the cyclical nature of the narrative (meta²)? This ambiguity of the context of these plays and their characters begs a question of any (audience, actor, or scholar), who might encounter these characters. The characters on which I focus gives rise to an expansion of abstract imaginative potential. What is not so clear, and that forms the basis of Roland Barthes' article 'The Death of the Author', is the creator or author's place in this equation.

The Modernist Playwright On the Authority of Authorship

Let us consider Barthes' definition of author in terms of *sequence* of the writing process. Barthes' identifies a tendency to think of the author as preceding and more significant than the work, as he writes:

Book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a before and an after. The Author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation

of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. (1967: 4)

Rather Barthes wants readers to separate the author from the full 'explanatory' force of preceding and producing. In order for a character to be perceived as having its own theatricalised consciousness that once having reached performance, it is essential that the presence of the author be absent from the event. It is the separation of author from subject – or in the context of this analysis, playwright from character – that allows the effect of character consciousness to be registered by an audience as it separates the conscious presence of the playwright from his or her characters. Addressing this within the frame of Greek tragedy, Barthes illustrates this sequence and the multi-faceted nature of the negotiation of a piece of writing:

In this [spectatorship] is revealed the whole being of writing: a text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination; but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted. (1967: 8)

While the full meaning of a text can only come into being in relation to the reader, or spectator, in this argument, the function of the writer and the production of the text remain. In terms of temporality, the writer and the written exist interdependently, both in simultaneous partnership, the absence of one negating the presence of the other. Being that *The Death of the Author* was produced in what might be considered the period of transition between the modern and the postmodern (a temporal shift unto itself), the essay itself might be regarded as a retrospective critique on the place of the author prior to and in the midst of this paradigmatic reconsideration. On the subject of the notion of the rise of the modern author as the origin of meaning in a written work, Barthes finds this emergence to be a consequence of the reverence given to the individual artist at the time of European Imperialism (a subject that was at the time of Barthes' writing the object of harsh criticism).

Yet, according to Barthes, the explanatory identity of the author – though its product, an author's work – does not originate from him or her, but in the act of the

writing itself. Barthes suggests this might always have been the case:

Once an action is recounted, for intransitive ends, and no longer in order to act directly upon reality — that is, finally external to any function but the very exercise of the symbol — this disjunction occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters his own death, writing begins. (1967: 2)

Barthes' analysis focuses heavily on the function – and it may be claimed 'consciousness' – of language set apart from he or she first responsible for its utterance: 'language knows a "subject," not a "person," and this subject, void outside of the very utterance which defines it, suffices to make language "work," that is, to exhaust it.' So too, perhaps arguably more so than a piece of pure literature, is drama written with the explicit intent to be exhausted by the performance of its text' (1967: 10).

Indeed, in asserting the fact that, 'it is language which speaks, not the author', that 'to write is to reach, through a pre-existing impersonality [...] that point where language alone acts, "performs," and not "oneself"' (3), there seems already a certain disconnect between he (the writer) and its subject (literature, language, and the uses of language) to a point of language itself seeming to become to some extent a character in Barthes' discourse. By virtue of Barthes' regular reference to literary works in such a fashion as to intimate their being independent entities, it is difficult not to similarly adopt an anthropomorphic approach to his analysis of literary work in his proposed separation from its creator.

A work is realized and its creator's part in making possible its realization is not a pre-ordinance, but a simultaneous birth whereby the act of writing makes both the he or she writing into a *writer* and the piece written into the *work*, creator and created interdependent upon the act at the moment of creation. As Barthes' writes:

The modern writer (scriptor) is born simultaneously with his text; he is in no way supplied with a being which precedes or transcends his writing, he is in no way the subject of which his book is the predicate; there is no other time than that of the utterance, and every text is eternally written here and now. (1967: 4)

It is interesting to consider – as many of the plays to be examined including my own do – whether in the moment of writing, in which both the writer and the written exist in a certain symbiosis: is the writer responsible for the existence of the writing or is

the writing responsible for the writer?

Greetings of the Self-Aware

To emerge from this modernist trend are those metacharacters seemingly aware (whether overtly written or subtextually insinuated) of their theatricality. In these cases where it may be said that the observer serves likewise as the observed, what implications might this portend in the unique experience of those witnesses to such productions?

In a play where characters are seen to exist in the same time, space, and relative circumstance as their audience, is the behaviour of both character and audience influenced by the other? Might it then be asserted that the play, in its circumstances, is inclusive of the audience and in its being so achieves a certain interactivity whereby the theatre event is not one detached from its witnessing audience but one in which these observers are as essential and integral to the events of the play as the characters on which they are textually focused:

These plays absorb an audience, imposing an interactivity between 'reality' and illusion, life and art, varied approaches to truth, [and] the many-sidedness of personality. (Knapp 1979: 280)

Further still regarding this relationship between audience and characters of these play's turned inward, taking with them their observers, Bettina Knapp, citing June Schlueter, observes in the writing of Samuel Beckett:

In [his] plays, audiences are frequently aware of what is taking place; they also know 'that living is playing, and, consequently, all that is left to modern man is illusion'. (280)

In continued citation, Knapp elaborates that 'it is only in play and art that universal man can find justification for his existence, for play and art offer him the illusion of meaning' (Knapp in review of June Schlueter's *Metafictional Characters in Modern Drama*: 1979).

Turning Inward

What plays in this vein offer is an alternative to a world in which abstract thought was increasingly stifled by seemingly definitive scientific findings. More and

more denied an outlet for abstract hypothesis, plays such as these challenged audiences 'with all the answers' by offering none. The subject, therefore, imploded upon itself, art turned to itself and declared itself sovereign from scientific dissection: it was quite capable of that itself. As Linda Hutcheon writes:

The artistic self-consciousness with which we are concerned here is a persistent and pervasive inward turning which, when pursued to the extreme, results in the form of the work of art becoming the content. The self-conscious art with which we are concerned is supremely aware of itself as artifice and is unabashedly self-reflective. (1979: 3)

From this it is important to note my distinction in applying the term 'self-aware' (referring to the dramatic character's awareness of self as a dramatic character) and Hutcheon's use of 'self-consciousness' (in which an artist comments on his or her art through the use of his or her art). However, the one is not so far removed from the other, for the self-aware character is frequently the mode of self-consciousness for the author on the subject of dramatic art. Thus, in the course of this modernist inversion it might be said that the self-aware character with which we are concerned is supremely aware of itself and unabashedly self-reflective. With the modernist turn, many authors and directors of dramatic characters became less interested in turning the mirror, to nature and more to holding it to itself.

Consequently, while there have been a plethora of interpretations and explanations from critics, many claiming to be definitive, it seems that these plays are meant to function without a referential or externally legitimated meaning, but rather are an exercise in the circumstances of the unresolvable, or which return the spectator explicitly to the confines of the play world itself. It is thus valuable that an interrogation be made of the experience of these characters that lend the possession of a representative consciousness. I refer to the character's literal existence, physically not begun until in performance as opposed to those characters of high naturalism whose circumstances may be considered to have been precipitated by a putative life before the play's opening.

For all the argument that has been posited with regards to the significance of these characters as social metaphor, it is more valuable to view them in their own context – on stage. In the case of characters written with either a directly referenced or suggested sense of their own theatricality, all their world is quite literally a stage; they see the audience, the audience sees them, and the parameters of the play are

equivalent to the very playing space they occupy. As far as their physical existence is concerned, they are represented nowhere but in plain view of the audience with life beginning at curtain's rise and concluding at its fall.

Taxonomy of Representations Of Character Consciousness In Modernist Drama

Undoubtedly it may be claimed that all manner of other kinds of characters emerged as a direct result of the advent of modernism. It is not so much modernism, as such, that I have been compelled to examine as these particularly self-aware characters, yet, trends towards modernism in drama of the mid-twentieth century offer as subjects the characters about whom I find myself most interested.

For my part, however, the categories of character hereafter described and analyzed constitute those varieties of modernist characters that raise questions about representation of fictional beings' consciousness through writing and staging. The taxonomy that follows builds upon the convention of allowing those primarily responsible for the character's creation (playwright/ director/ actor) and audience to perceive an effect of the character as character. The taxonomy addresses the ways in which these notions of character consciousness had not been evident, so prevalently, prior to the arrival of modernism.

Moreover, it is primarily with the three designations *Character Consciousness of Journey*, *Suggested Self-Consciousness*, and *Direct Consciousness*, with which have I concerned myself in terms of my own practical construction of the characters of *This Go 'Round*. I have expanded my study beyond these three categories, identifying characters that while not demonstrating any suggestion of a literal awareness of self, are aware of themselves as characters in a play. This was to provide a certain landscape of modernist character and to suggest ways in which these character traits have manifested themselves within the larger modernist milieu. It is with that category of direct consciousness, in which I include *This Go 'Round*, that I conclude and which serves as something of a bridge to an analysis of the literary and theatrical components of self-aware characters of *postmodernist* drama.

Representative Character Consciousness

Self aware characters that are not directly conscious include those plays such as

Six Characters in Search of an Author in which, while not aware of their being characters within this play's performance are nonetheless represented on stage as being aware of their existence *as* characters. This give the opportunity to illuminate their *not* actually being conscious of self in the strictest sense but aware of a certain facet of self not present in characters of conventional realism.

Hypothetically, the story told might be one of any number of variations, and the central discourse would remain, in which self-aware characters argue to those putatively thought 'real' of their (The Character's) having 'infinite advantage over flesh-and-blood actors and writers, for while real-life persons may appear to have concrete and vital form, their reality is one that changes from moment to moment' (Radcliff-Umstead 1978: 298). What prevails, in spite of the particulars, are the levels of a three-tiered consciousness represented both explicitly and implicitly in the play's fabric: fictional characters aware of their being characters (1) approaching fictional characters thought by play characters to be the more real (2) and the passively observing audience for whom the play is performed (3).

In terms of varieties of recognizable awareness of self among characters, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* serves a choice example with a wide range of layers of awareness, both in claims made by The Characters of the plays and the actuality of the limitations of this awareness, as revealed upon closer examination. What is fascinating in attempting to differentiate between the levels of awareness of (The) Characters and (The) Actors of this play is the realization that ultimately the two are no more aware of themselves than the other, or are equally mistaken in terms of the nature of themselves and fundamentally share precisely the same plane of fictionality as the other. This is illustrated by The Characters never referring to their presence in the play being a product of the play itself. It would seem, no less so than the company of actors, that they are unaware of their being characters in the play being performed. This is confirmed by the arguments had between the Characters and the Actor characters playing the Characters as to the accuracy of their enactment (Pirandello 1979: 21). Their enactment is, in fact, perfectly accurate as the events of the Characters' origins does not exist save for in their telling of it, and however represented in performance cannot actually be separated from the events described as they occur nowhere but in the context of the performance.

To clarify: the accuracy of the Actors' performances cannot be definitely claimed by the Characters as both Actors' and Characters' performance are just that, *performances*. Nowhere do the Characters occur but in the performance, despite the dispute as to accuracy of the performance or the objection to locations raised by the Characters. The reality claimed by the Characters and the accuracy insisted upon in their performance exists no more on the stage than in their telling of it. While aware of being characters, a consequence of the form given to them by their author, they are no less oblivious to their lives as character in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* than the company of actors by whom their own metaphysical existence is virtually ignored. Abel writes with regards to this conundrum, that the characters of Pirandello's play tell the stage manager that they are in search of an author, but once on stage and given a chance to enact their roles, show that they do not need a play at all (2003: 167).

Within this structure of character and audience consciousness there arises one of the central paradoxes of the play as a play: the Characters, while presented as being aware of their status as fictional beings are completely unaware of their being theatrical entities. In being in search of an author, they fail to recognize their having an author just as the company of actors fails to recognize that they are no less characters in this written play, this preordained and set course as the Characters whose story they seek to dramatize. Both are all the while dramatized, and are a convoluted reflection by none other than the author himself. Therefore an audience is presented, as it were, with characters as characters, and yet **not** the characters of the play in which they are seen but a fictional play-within-that-play.

Similarly, plays such as Michael Frayn's 1982 *Noises Off* occur within a theatre with the play's director character, Lloyd Dallas, positioned discretely in the auditorium. Yet it is not a rehearsal of *Noises Off* being depicted onstage, nor is there acknowledgment of the present audience. Thus in plays such as this (other examples include Peter Brook's 1963 *Marat/Sade* and Alan Bennet's 2010 *The Habit of Art*) an inverted transportation of distance occurs in which the audience is spectrally inserted into the play, set in a theatre though not *the* theatre in which the play is actually being performed.

Character Consciousness of Journey (Journeys to Consciousness)

As a point of literary reference, Cervantes' titular character *Don Quixote* is perhaps the best, if not strictly theatrical, example of this model. In this, a written character travels through an assortment of literary adventures, ultimately having revealed when on the verge of this literary life that it has been lived as a character in a novel. So as to similarly make these claims in a theatrical light, I would note Dale Wasserman's 1969 stage adaptation of the novel entitled *I, Don Quixote*. In his 1999 reflection upon the adaptation, Wasserman writes:

Most of all, however, Cervantes deals with the matter which is fundamental to *all* theatre —the collision of reality and illusion. Nowhere is it more eloquently explored than in *Don Quixote*. By no means, though, is it confined to that work. Search all of Cervantes, and you will find it, sometimes expressed overtly, sometimes in the subtext. And, by the way, those familiar with the *Exemplary Novels* will recognize that I drew upon them as heavily as I did upon *Don Quixote*. They will note that I populated the prison in Seville with raffish characters similar to those in *Rinconete and Cortadillo*. All of them are adrift on their own particular sea of illusion. (1999: 128)

In plays of this sort, characters either possess a misunderstanding of their status as characters of play or are all together oblivious to its being the case however the circumstances of dialogue and plot steer them nearer and nearer to this awareness until arriving at this revelation by the play's conclusion. Often in the case of these characters there is an uncertainty or misperception of identity, and upon arriving at the actuality of their existence as characters of play are not given comfort but disquiet from this knowledge. It seems too, particularly in those examples provided, that the realisation does not merely coincide with the conclusion of the play but also with the characters' 'lives', which prompts reflection on the philosophical implications.

The most notable example of modernist characters whose journey finds them confronted with the reality of their existence is Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. This play particularly bears examination in its presentation of the convention of self-awareness and also in its synthesis of awareness, whereby the

characters exist exclusively within the framework of the play, conscious neither before nor after, their context is restricted to the performance of the play in which they appear. Likewise, if not before, in their fleeting moments before execution, the two characters seem in an epiphany to realize the totality of their existence as character Rosencrantz and/or Guildenstern (their names interchangeable as they themselves have no certainty of their identity save by how they are referred, which, courtesy of Shakespeare's original text offered, remains uncertain at best) remarks 'there must have been a moment in the beginning when we could have said – no. But somehow we missed it...well we'll know better next time' when asked what the meaning of it all by his counter-part (Stoppard 1974: 47).

In this line there seems a recognition of the fact that from their first conscious awakening (discussed at length in the play) at the actual play's beginning to their unfortunate and entirely innocent executions they are trapped in a predetermined plot over which they have had no control from the start. In this their remaining hope is that circumstances might be somehow altered when next they are brought to the stage. Of course, the tragic irony of this seems that unless re-written by Stoppard, the eventuality will never come to be. Unless the execution scene were to be cut from a performance, it is this proceeding, to this end, that constitutes the existence of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

There seems also the shared attribute of temporal discrepancy in Stoppard's conjuring of the peripheral characters of Shakespeare's play to Hamlet's soliloquy on 'what a piece of work is man' (this line spoken by the character postulating on himself): an introspective character removed from time. The temporal distortion that is particularly highlighted in this play is a convention that has persisted in these plays of self-aware characters. The reality of the characters exists within the framework of the performance of *Hamlet*, but does not account, as do the characters of *Hamlet* with whom they interact, for the lapse of time in the events of *Hamlet*. This now secondary, though interwoven plot recedes from the focus as though for these characters no such lapses occur.

'One of the most attractive elements of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*', for Enoch Brater, 'occurs in the dynamics of performance, when the production efficiently subverts the traditional relationship between background and

foreground...Hamlet is to be staged, as it were, in the distance, ...Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, this text's not so "indifferent children of the earth" who stand and wait and collaborate, are, by contrast, the observers unwittingly observed' (2003: 204). In this there seems also a slight acknowledgement of the character's awareness of their environment for most of the play. Of the vitality of his characters, similar to Pirandello's perception of his characters being entities separate perhaps from his own consciousness, Stoppard has remarked that 'they're organic, they're not mineral. They change their composition in relation to the time they exist, or are seen to exist, and in relation to oneself' (Levenson 2002: 162).

Historical Consciousness (Self-Aware Characters of Historical Speculation)

Resurrection, as I will identify in my annotated analysis of *This Go 'Round*, is a common convention of self-aware characters of modernist drama. In reviving a character, such as Stoppard has done in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, there is a pre-existing context for the character's identity which it is otherwise denied. My inclination, however, is to differentiate this from characters crafted after recorded historical figures and events whose consciousness is revived for the stage, though aware of this and therefore not intended to be a biographical representation. Rather, these characters are a means by which to answer speculative questions of 'what if' which, by virtue of the actual figures being dead, are investigated by characters of theatrical fiction.

The historical implications in the framing of such plays, and the potential they hold in speculating on the particulars of otherwise unknown events, such as those of Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*, has served as a further development in the application the self-aware character model. This play demonstrates the a speculative history into which these characters might afford insight. In this the characters, while not recognizing themselves as characters as such, appear to be aware that there are historical figures that have died. In an exchange between Margrethe and Niels Bohr:

Margrethe: But why?
Bohr: You're still thinking about it.
Margrethe: Why did he come to Copenhagen.
Bohr: Does it matter, my love, now with all three of us dead and gone.

Margrethe: Some questions remain long after their owners have died. Lingered like ghosts. Looking for the answers they never found in life.
Bohr: Some questions have no answers. (1998; 3)

And, later the character of Victor Heisenberg:

Heisenberg: Now we're all dead and gone, yes, and there are only two things the world remembers about me. One is the uncertainty and the other is my mysterious visit to Niels Bohr in Copenhagen in 1941. Everyone understands uncertainty. Or thinks he does. No one understands my trip to Copenhagen. (4)

The play speculates on an exchange between Victor Heisenberg and Niels Bohr in a visit Heisenberg had made to see Bohr amidst the rising tensions regarding nuclear development in the Second World War. In this respect historical knowledge of the events before and subsequent to the piece are known. Within the piece the three characters enact variations of the possible nature of the exchanges that might have led to the conclusion that is known and has been recorded. In this sense the characters of the play are not so much a resurrection of the historical figures, who would have been quite aware of the precise details of the event, but are characters conjured whose existence is only to serve as demonstration of what variations might have been plausible.

The play does not decide on one version of events firmly, given that the dialogue explores the nature of multi-dimensionality, the play reflects the possibility that all may have actually in some reality occurred. In the case of and for the characters of the play, all in truth did. Also, with the three characters there is an incorporation of quantum physics in the dialogue that highlights both uncertainty (on which Heisenberg's principals are based) and the influence of developments in science and notions of thought that have shaped the form of metadrama.

Character written as historical character are not an uncommon convention of theatre, but far more unusual are those aware of their being a sort of resurrection of these actual figures of history. These characters may fully recognise their distinct existence from their historical counterparts and be further aware of the total history of these personages (a luxury the actual persons on whom the characters are modeled did not obviously possess). Through this there is given opportunity to examine circumstances about which one might merely speculate in a complete context.

Suggested Self-Consciousness

It is this category from which much of my influence was derived in the writing of *This Go 'Round*. In such plays, the characters do not make direct reference to their awareness of existence as character, but engage in behaviour that seems to suggest as much. Here there emerges an interesting dynamic between audience and character in which neither are entirely certain if one is aware of the other.

In a play where 'time stands still, the words before and after have no meaning. All that counts is the present' (Robbe-Grillet 177). Thus, in the suspended time of the theatrical happening, the present in which the characters exist is likewise the present in which their observers exist. Commenting on this mutual experience, Alec Reid summarily pronounces, 'Waiting for Godot is not about Godot or even about waiting. It is waiting and ignorance and impotence and boredom, all made visible on the stage before us' (52).

There is a literality of which many scholars have noted and is brilliantly espoused by Brady who asserts:

Instead of there being...an artful hinting at everything assumed to lie *behind* the character's words and action, there is instead a literal authority: *all* that there is to hear and see is openly displayed before the audience. Beckett's plays encourage us not to look beyond the words and actions for hidden meanings, but to experience the presentation itself as its only meaning. (31)

In this, the pretence of the play is known from the play's opening, both characters acknowledging that they have no clear sense of an existence divorced from the theatrical event. Though references are made dubiously to other days, there is nothing that substantially distinguishes those days from those of the play and it might be suggested to be one in the same, as Vivian Mercer suggests in her review of the play's 1953 debut:

Is Godot God, as most readers and members of the audience have thought? I believes so, though the play still makes sense if...we avoid making any one-to-one correlation whatever; we get a Viconian cycle, in which history repeats itself every night. (1955: 624)

Thus, if replaying these two days - to the experience of the characters each act being a day - in a theatrical infinite return, it is solely the play that is (and therefore the characters that are) constant. They are denied all knowledge of self, including identity and general purpose, sharing in the audience's ignorance who likewise know no more of the two than they of themselves as the nature of their character is gradually revealed throughout the play's action.

This perpetual cycle of existence within a self-contained context of the play's events is similarly observed by scholar Mark Taylor-Batty in his analysis of response to character, writing:

As throughout the whole play, any impetus to move, to change the situation is deadened, overwhelmed by the hope that Godot will, one day, arrive. And so the events of waiting and passing the time are ordained to begin all over again. In this way, we are invited to think that perhaps these two days are of a sequence of never ending, ever-repeating days. (2008: 28)

It is this interpretation that allows for the basis of a relationship between audience and character that is grounded in a shared reality for the time of the play's performance. The two represented days are experienced in a similar fashion by the audience in their observation as by Vladimir and Estragon in their active participation.

Further, with reference to the 'others' by whom they are 'surrounded' (69) and an inability to escape the performance space without encountering the others it is strongly suggested that the duo are aware of the audience, if not knowing them to be an audience or their being in a piece of theatre. In this case, from the beginning of the play - as opposed to their being a suspension of the character's knowledge of actual self revealed later in the play - the characters of Vladimir and Estragon indicate an awareness of their actual surroundings, even if they are not attuned to this surroundings being part of a theatricalised reality:

Vladimir: We're surrounded! [*Estragon makes a rush towards the back.*]
Imbecile! There's no way out there. [*He takes Estragon by the arm and drags him towards the front*]. There! Not a soul in sight! Off you go.
Quick! [*He pushes Estragon towards auditorium. Estragon recoils in horror.*] You won't? [*He contemplates the auditorium.*] Well, I can

understand that. (Beckett 2006: 69)

These characters, therefore, may be said to be characters aware of their actual self but not of their theatricalised selves. The actuality of their self-awareness happens not to include their being characters of play, but does account for all the literal aspects of this play.

Their journey, as is shared by their audience consequently is one in which no resolution is achieved; without the revelation of the audience presence or the literal circumstances of their being figures of dramatic fiction, these characters remain in a sustained limbo with the audience for the play's duration.

Regular references engage directly with 'the others', which may be perceived to be those in the wings of the stage upon Estragon's exits and the audience from whom he recoils. Referring to a variety of these observations of the characters having a sense of being observed, Taylor-Batty expands on Vladimir's second act statement, 'At me too someone is looking at me too someone is saying, he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on'. Taylor-Batty writes:

Is he referring to God here as a distant observer who leaves him to continue in his ignorance, or to the audience, who might themselves have come to this judgment of his and Estragon's character by the end of the play? In this way, the metatheatricality of the play serves a thematic purpose in itself, and is articulate of what the play has to communicate. (2008: 39)

With many other such 'winks to the stalls' (39), it seems a sound argument that the two protagonists are tacitly aware of their audience's company, if not certain of why they too have joined them in their cyclical waiting; perhaps, indulging in the notion of the characters' consciousness, 'the others' are there to join in likewise waiting for Godot.

Sartre's characters in *No Exit* assume themselves to be in a room separate from the audience, and the audience (if unaware of the circumstances of the play) could be thought to make similar assumptions. For most of the play, there is a distancing of character and audience that would be common to more conventional plays of modernism or Stanislavskian realism. It is not, however, until moments before the play's conclusion, in which the character of Garcin places hands on the Barbadian figure that anchors the set that a revelation is made that the three have all the while been in this room within a theatre:

Garcin: Yes, now's the moment; I'm looking at this thing on the mantelpiece, and I understand I'm in hell. I tell you, everything's been *thought out before*. They knew I'd stand at the fireplace stroking this thing of bronze, with *all those eyes on me*. Devouring me. (Sartre 1989: 45)

We might consider this a reflexive revelation of character consciousness, one in which both character and audience do not appreciate their shared experience until the penultimate moment of the play where both are brought into awareness of their having shared a common space and time from the play's onset. Upon this revelation, the fusion of reality and fiction may result a more palpable impact than were this known from the play's beginning. It is in this moment that the merger of both the audience's and characters' temporality become explicitly acknowledged as one. Thus the accelerated time, the infinity to which the characters of *Huis Clos* are destined, and the space in which they exist has been in tandem with the audience throughout the play, yet it has not had the same meaning until this complicity is realised at that instant.

Referred Consciousness (Characters of External Consciousness)

Though a classification that may be rather removed from those characters I seek to construct, it cannot be denied plays in which actors step in and out of character, referring to the character whom they are enacting, is related to the evolution of the self-aware character. In these plays, the artifice of characters being removed from the actual performance space is eliminated by the actors themselves who are externally aware and make known their awareness of these characters. It would be in this variety of play that one might classify much of Brecht's work.

Brechtian on-stage estrangement can likewise be incrementalized across a continuum ranging from short to long distance. The stage utterances of Shen Te in Brecht's *Good Person of Szechuan*, for example, range from conversational-like prose dialogue, to singing, to poetic recitation, to audience interaction, to direct address. Brecht sees a need to protest her role and hand it over for criticism, thus conveying Brecht's—and the actor's—own political commentary and perspective (Cohen 2004: 121).

Though now a foregone definition of the *Verfremdungseffekt* (McCullough 2002: 31), these plays do, indeed, alienate actor and audience from character, as the prior may be regarded as conspirators against the latter. In these plays, awareness is denied to the character of their circumstance – they exist in an extreme mimetic form so far as to lack dimension beyond being agents of the story being told – but is acutely granted to both the audience and performers. The question raised by this, however, is whether the performer in question (whose commentary on his or her character is not their own but dictated by written text) is representing themselves or still another layer of characterization and thus character consciousness?

Direct Consciousness

It is in this subcategory that we would find *This Go 'Round*; in these plays characters behave and make declaration of their knowledge of being characters in the very play in which they are appearing. It is from the emergence of plays such as this transitional phase that it might be said the postmodernist character is born (such as that identified in Handke's work). This awareness of self, however, does not diminish there being a **story** told. This contrasts to those works of postmodernist drama that are significantly or entire lacking in a sequential narrative. In plays containing direct consciousness, there is to some extent a combination of 'Historical Consciousness' or a consciousness of those characters that have preceded and share in the circumstances of those characters being represented, and a 'Journey to Consciousness' which emphasized characters as aware of being bound by the circumstances of the play.

However, in employing these conventions in order to depict a character fully-cognizant (or given the appearance of full cognizance) of its literal circumstances, environment, and status, conventions begin to emerge that have been largely co-opted by characters of postmodernist drama. The point of distinction seems to lie primarily in the characters' acceptance of their being characters. As the opening gambit of Handke's character declares in *Offending the Audience*:

You are welcome.

This piece is a prologue.

You will hear nothing you have not heard here before.

You will see nothing you have not seen here before.

You will see nothing of what you have always seen here.

You will hear nothing of what you have always heard here.

You will hear what you usually see.

You will hear what you usually don't see.

You will see no spectacle.

Your curiosity will not be satisfied.

You will see no play.

There will be no playing here tonight. (1997: 6)

A Reflection and Contextualising of *This Go 'Round* and Its Place within The Modernist Form

In his 2005 acceptance speech for The Nobel Prize, modernist playwright Harold Pinter expressed the following:

It's a strange moment, the moment of creating characters who up to that moment have had no existence. What follows is fitful, uncertain, even hallucinatory, although sometimes it can be an unstoppable avalanche. The author's position is an odd one. In a sense he is not welcomed by the characters. The characters resist him, they are not easy to live with, they are impossible to define. You certainly can't dictate to them. To a certain extent you play a never-ending game with them, cat and mouse, blind man's buff, hide and seek. (Pinter 2005)

It was with this intent that I approached the writing of *This Go 'Round*; the notion of heretofore uncreated characters being conjured not by any mystical or paranormal means, but in the immediate act of writing. In producing the piece I attempted to allow, as best I could, the method to be automatic in its initial draft. In a sense it was my hope that the characters would direct me in their authorship rather than my directing them.

In writing *This Go 'Round*, my aims were not exclusively to produce a piece of theatre that adhered strictly to ethos of modernist drama. However, as it was, the form seemed more to choose me than I choose it, and the prevalence of its techniques, devices, and conventions are unmistakable. I had not, despite my extensive reading in the area, yet encountered a play that served as a defence for the life of characters represented as having an awareness of their own theatricality, and it was this dimension of certain plays of modernist drama (many previously discussed) that inspired my invention of Look and Listen - named so for the primary functions by which a play is performed and received.

Direct Address as an Appeal to the Audience

Many of the conventions employed were not used consciously as a means of specifically honouring the modernism, but as necessary to fulfil the objective of illustrating the characters' awareness of self as character. The most used and most obvious of these conventions is that of direct address to the audience, which had fallen by the wayside in favour of more conventional techniques of *veritas* naturalism.

As scholar Robert Bendetti notes:

The stagecraft of the naturalistic theatre was aimed at overcoming our native resistance to the life onstage, aimed at helping us to forget that we were in a theatre. I suggest that many modern playwrights, having learned the lessons of the rapidly dying naturalistic theatre, are creating a "metanaturalistic" theatre in which the attempt is to manipulate, rather than overcome, these and other resistances. When these resistances are manipulated, they become the tools of an editorial or philosophic point of view, a function previously served by various narrative devices, such as the chorus. Indeed, the return of direct address from stage to audience is one of the most obvious ways in which modern playwrights have begun to manipulate resistance. (1964: 28)

Certainly, this convention had been hitherto readily employed by plays since Greek Tragedy, however, it was not until the emergence of the modernist form and its subsequent iterations that the convention was employed as a means by which to directly transfer the role of the audience observer to the audience observed as a philosophical meditation on the nature of observing, rather than being merely a method by which the story was communicated or a celebration of theatricality.

Sustained engagement with the audience appears more prevalent among plays of the post-dramatic form, although the convention tends to be that characters deny their own theatricality or do not acknowledge it. In writing *This Go 'Round*, it was my intent to bring the element of direct, self-knowing address to the audience developed in modernist texts to its precipice, taking caution to test the extreme of this audience engagement while not abandoning a self-referentiality and metatheatricality that tends to define a modernist model.

In *This Go 'Round*, the characters operated on the premise of performers not representing the action of the play but literally taking part in it; very much in tune Artaud's concepts described in *Theatre of Cruelty*. The intent of this direct address is not dissimilar to that of Jack Gelber's *The Connection*, developed by Living Theatre, which adopted the premise and characters of *Waiting for Godot* if, as in *This Go 'Round*, imposing alternate circumstances: the two characters are made into heroin addicts and the performers appear to distribute and inject heroin on stage. Of this collision between the representative and real, Sartre pronounced in a 1961 lecture, 'Epic Theater and Dramatic Theater':

Is it image, is it object? I mean this: if they are really addicts, then it is

object...If so, you can regard them as human objects and you are a human object to them. Or else they are not drug addicts, but actors; if so, it's something else again. [...] If they are images, if they are playing the role of drug addicts, then that takes on a universal aspect.
(Rodenbeck 2003: 66)

The play itself relied heavily on the theatrical device of direct address in order to achieve this mutual objectification. In the case of *This Go 'Round*, it was hoped that the duality of 'them as human objects and you are a human object to them', might bring into question the very nature of existence as 'human object', for if the audience is to defend its own notion of autonomous being in this context the same concession must be made to the character.

Transparent Homage v. Pastiche

Examples of suggested consciousness in modernist self-aware character found in *No Exit*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and *Waiting for Godot* are implicitly acknowledged as external source material. In the case of *This Go 'Round*, the function of the placard at the play's opening is to provide a still more transparent acknowledgment, as a facetious device used to produce the effect of self-reference found in modernist works themselves. In initial notions of staging, the idea was to project the text set to music in order to force the audience to read in some detail the context for the play they are soon to witness.

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* the adoptions of extant Shakespearean characters altogether recontextualised and offered as characters whose circumstance are far nearer to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, would not be considered as pastiche. Rather I would argue that Stoppard is writing a reflection of another common attribute of modernist self-aware characters; namely, that in having an awareness of their own theatricalised selves, they likewise have either an overt or tacit sense of their own modernist form.

A more subtle example of this device, given the initial resistance from critics confronted by modernist playwrights during its initial emergence, is the example of Vladimir and Estragon's exchange of insults'. More than just a means by which to occupy themselves during the stasis of their circumstances, the climactic insult delivered by Vladimir is in calling Estragon a 'critic': a clear example of this very specific meta-referentiality. Thus I made the decision to ground the characters in their

own theatrical form (modernism) and further to do so in such a manner as to allow them a sense of their own literary heritage. In this sense, *This Go 'Round* cannot be regarded as a piece of pastiche, but a conscious attempt to evolve the extant modernist characters. Look and Listen have been derived from the legacy of Didi and Gogo, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and other examples of the modernist theatrical duo and in their progression in the text these previous iterations are acknowledged. Therefore, much in the style of Stoppard's resurrection of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Look and Listen offer an additional layer of theatricality to their precedents, and commentary on this existence.

The notion of a suspended spatial and temporal context, without real-world reference, is so nearly akin to stasis as to be interchangeable with it and an attribute often central to these theatrical modernist narratives. Very much taking its cue from *Waiting for Godot*, and so transparently so as to be a device of the piece, my intention was once more to structurally test the limits of this convention of stasis. 'The tedious progression of the play's non-Aristotelian action ("We're getting on . . . this is not much fun . . . this is deadly . . . don't you think this has gone on long enough?")' thus becomes central to the discourse between Look and Listen, and the subject of debate: whether to submit to or resist this stasis with inconsequential contrivance demonstrated by such discourse as the following:

Listen

Do you?

Pause

Perhaps we should commit ourselves to some definitive course of action, no matter how arbitrary.

Look

Given our limited options, I would think any course of action to be the definition of arbitrary.

Look sits...

Regardless, I'd just as soon devote myself to significant thought, however ineffectual, as to arbitrary action, however distracting.

Pause

Listen

Some might argue that postponing a decision is tantamount to death.

Look

And others would argue that postponing a decision ensures that no more death be risked...and there's only we two and only we two arguing so let's have no more of this 'some might', 'some would' absurdity.

In the context offered by Robert Benedetti on modernist character the essence of this confrontation and discussion to act or not to act becomes tantamount to the decision of whether to be or not to be, as he writes:

This confrontation is possible because of the commonality of social experience. Beckett's (and Ionesco's and Pinter's) characters live only within the context which they themselves create. Questions of motivation, psychology, prior history...are irrelevant here. They are bound in a relational context. To leave it is always suicide ("Gone from me, you'd be dead . . . outside of here it's death"). Despite the fact that maintenance of social relationship is Man's only defense against the nothingness/death of the 'outside', we are nonetheless reminded that "It's time it ended. In the shelter too." The end for Beckett can only take one real form, that of stasis; Man cannot leave' and yet there will come the time when the story will be over, the game played out to the end. Stasis is the only alternative. (1964: 32)

However, I felt a certain responsibility to the characters of Look and Listen, their creation, their existence, and their ultimate fate. Subsequently, in the case of This Go Round the choice was made to make the ultimate concession to stasis, the acceptance of this notion of 'don't you think this has gone on long enough?' being both the conclusion and cyclically the return to the play's opening, *en infinitum*:

Listen:

From what? To where? How will we know and will we carry this knowledge into the next go 'round? Finite passage? Hasn't it all been? Finite and fina –

Lights again begin slowly to dim

Listen

Is this your finite passage?

Look

I suppose so. Let it come, I'll wait no more. Let it be now.

Listen

Now left without tree.

Look

Coin.

Listen

Meaning.

Look

Merely boundary...binding boundary, now and forevermore.

Listen

With no return until...

Look

Until the next.

Pause

Listen

Would it be a horrible confession of weakness were I to admit there scarcely being a second in which I wasn't utterly confused this go 'round.

Look

No...

Look regards the audience.

I rather suspect you're not alone.

Pause

Listen

Look, do you suppose we'll decipher the meaning of it all come the next go 'round.

Look considers the prospect for a moment...

Look

No...but I'll certainly make an effort to enjoy it more. Let come the next –

The phrase hangs in darkness, silent, all light having now faded to black. A moment passes after which a spiral of light replaces the once lit circle, rotating in an implosive revolution, both Look and Listen now absent...or better, elsewhere.

The spiral then fades to black...

And so concludes the play whilst providing segue into what may have previously been perceived to be its nonsensical opening:

Look

-- go 'round...I don't want to be here.

Look stands, surveys the edge of the lit pool and the audience nearest that area. Listen stands, turning in place, observing the presence of the audience.

Listen

They're back.

Look

Aren't they always?

It would seem that to a substantial degree a hinging and shared component of these plays is their offering a portrait of characters without an expressed meaning beyond this presentation: they are depictions of life, if a theatricalised life, in undirected stasis without a literary or dramatic social imperative. In this I am given to disagree with any scholarly attempts to derive a correlation between the characters of these plays and the so-termed human condition, whether examined through the lens of a religious, social, or political context. There is a critical trend of imposing a mimetic significance upon these characters that elevates them to stand as metaphors for referents beyond the rigid confines of the stage picture in which they are presented. The one commentary frequently suggested is that these characters are allegories for 'the human condition', one lived in stasis without meaning or a clear sense of identity.

An extreme focus of character rather than on plot characterizes many of the plays of the modernist form, and so was my intent for *This Go 'Round*. Indeed, as locating environment or recognisably generically identifiable plot are so sparse in these plays the characters often may be seen to be suspended in both time and space. Even in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* it is less by virtue of that play's storyline that a plot emerges as the text being set against the events of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Thus, pursuing this idea of stasis to an extreme, Look and Listen are denied any connection to or sense of location or period, merely a light in order for them to see and be seen.

An audience is, then, confronted with the experience of actively witnessing the development of theatrical characters who at the onset of the play appear undeveloped,

without markers of realist reference. Thus the lives of the characters share the finiteness of the play itself: their lives, as it were, beginning with its beginning and are exhausted with its close. Thus, 'the result is that the drama's effectiveness lies not in any contextual or symbolic reference which it may make to the world outside the theatre, but in its primary, direct demonstration of the dynamic gestalt of that world' (Benedetti 1964: 32).

As an example of modernist theatre's favouring of character over plot in Sartre's *No Exit* each character gives an extensive account of the events that precipitated their arrival in the room, though this context is not, in fact, central to the circumstances of the play and serves merely as meaningless content, much as the rhetoric of both *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and *Waiting for Godot* serve to occupy the idleness of the play. Though the aim of confession is one of salvation, no such satisfaction is ultimately achieved or accomplished and the condition in which Inez, Estelle, and Garcin have found themselves remains unaltered. Admittedly, in the summoning of 'confession' there exists a set of conventions that are predicated upon character as equivalent to human – as having anterior, posterior and interior life beyond the life of the theatrical moment, however in the process of journey this is revealed to be a deception to both the characters and audience. As Rosencrantz and Guildenstern struggle to ascertain a sense of the before and after of their existence and Didi and Gogo assume a vague – if constantly shifting and unreliable – sense of a continuum, the relationship between the characters of *No Exit* and their audience are presented as concrete, but deteriorate until left with the actuality of the theatrical moment

Thus another component of the journey of the self-conscious character is revealed. One in which, no matter what the technique employed to distract from this notion of 'nothing to be done' might be, no satisfactory purpose can be identified. The characters are therefore left to invent for themselves a sort of purpose or denial of purpose with no more means than what is afforded them in the text. Taking this further in the writing of *This Go 'Round*, I removed all physical objects that might serve as diversion save the characters themselves, as an experiment in how distractions might manifest themselves otherwise.

Equally important was a removal of myself specifically from the events of the play. While there is a creator referenced and both Look and Listen aware of this creator figure, it was my intent to obscure that creator's origin or assign not to assign

it any specific identity (my own in particular). In effect, I wanted for *The Creator* to potentially be all those that had created or laid the foundation for the event of *This Go 'Round* (Shakespeare, Beckett, Sartre, Pinter, Stoppard), while not giving them specific recognition as authorial figures, but rather summoning an intertextuality through the work they had produced.

Though not drawing explicitly from Barthes essay, 'The Death of the Author', it was those principles that informed many of the decisions made in the writing of *This Go 'Round*, specifically those pertaining to the literary authority of the playwright and the relation between playwright and play (or more directly to playwright and characters of play). As Barthes discusses in an analysis of the apparent prescience of authorship in the work of Honoré de Balzac and a reader's inability to share this prescience:

It will always be impossible to know [Balzac's intended meaning], for the good reason that all writing is itself this special voice, consisting of several indiscernible voices, and that literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes (2).

As example the use of 'Creator' (to which characters Look and Listen regularly refer) was a deliberate means of supplanting my authorship over the two characters in performance, giving them a suggestion of independence from my having created them and thus a representation of autonomous consciousness. Rather than designating the playwright responsible for Look and Listen's creation by name (Adam Brummitt) or the less self-centric use of 'Author' or 'Playwright', 'Creator' was used as a means of acknowledging the characters' origins while endeavouring to divorce my overt presence in their grappling with who (or what) their creator is (and by implication they are). In this there seems a certain 'death' of author, though merely as the absolute authority of the characters created.

This negotiation between the relationship of playwright and play, an absence of author in performance was precisely my intent when conferring an awareness upon these characters by being somehow responsible for their existence. In paradox, however, irrespective of my intent, it is ultimately though a negotiation between written material and its audience (whether director, actor, or audience) that this *intent* is achieved or not. Merely in an analysis of this work, there seems a defiance of

Barthes' contention that 'the explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it was always finally the voice of one and the same person, the author, which delivered his "confidence"' (1967: 18). It may be for this reason that author-playwrights such as Beckett deny any inherent meaning in their work, realizing that – though responsible for its creation – they were not in a position to ultimately dictate its meaning but rather offer it for interpretation and assignation of *meaning* to those audiences for whom it was intended. It is in this sense that, as Barthes' asserts, 'language knows a "subject," not a "person," and this subject, void outside of the very utterance which defines it, suffices to make language "work," that is, to exhaust it.' So too, perhaps arguably more so than a piece of pure literature, is drama written with the explicit intent to be exhausted by the performance of its text' (5).

This is apparent in most of the provided examples of modernist drama involving characters seen to have a level of self-awareness, given their confines there subsequently arises a necessity for verbal interaction without any significant aim beyond its serving as diversion. Beckett, in particular, was often one to stress the imperative of speech for its own sake. He characterized this predicament as 'the inability to speak, the inability to be silent, and solitude... I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any ... in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on' (Beckett 1993: 414).

This is especially evident in *Look and Listen*'s attempt to arrive at the definition of the concept of 'shoot':

Look:

And, knowing I will live to regret asking, what is... 'shoot'?

Listen

Shoot? Haven't the foggiest.

The two consider the definition of the concept...

Look

Listen, here...

Listen

Listen here?

Look

No, no, no, no...Listen-

Look positions Listen directly in front of Look...

-here.

Pause

Look

Shoot.

Listen

Shoot.

Look

Room.

Look

Roomada...

Listen

Maroom...

Look

Roomaramadashoot.

Pause

Look kisses Listen

Pause

Look

I don't believe that's it.

On the subject of the kiss, there seems some imperative to acknowledge the source that informed this decision which, while not strictly falling with the pantheon of modernist drama, nonetheless was a reflection of the modernist influence in the cinematic examples of modernism at the time in which these other works were being written and produced. It is no less from trends in modernist drama by which this choice was inspired than the many other examples demonstrated throughout this piece, and owes its inspiration to writer, director, and animator Chuck Jones; most notably the two short films for which Jones' was twice the recipient of the American Academy Award: *Duck Amuck* (1953) and *Duck! Rabbit, Duck!* (1953).

Many comparisons have been drawn between Jones' metafictional narratives and those of the 'classic existential duo' as one might consider Vladimir and Estragon and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In an article written in memorium to the writer/director, Richard Corliss writes:

These films were more than amusing, more than an excuse to escape reality. They WERE reality, transformed into art: brutally true, honorably honest, like Samuel Beckett with the fun up front. (Corliss 2002)

Homage, though, might well be considered a convention of these characters in a more firmly traditional sense: Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern owing to Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon. In an early 1955 review of *Waiting for Godot* by Vivian Mercier, the idea of comparison seems the one mode by which any criticism might be gleaned from the play. In this, among the first reviews written on the work of 'the latest Irishman to become the darling of Paris', Vivian Mercier equates Vladimir and Estragon to Laurel and Hardy, the three characters of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Huis Clos*, 'a Groucho (Marx) [Vladimir] who lacks Groucho's serenity to the speaking Harpo (Marx) of Estragon', Charlie Chaplin, and Jean-Louis Barrault (Mercier 1955: 265).

CHAPTER TWO

The Construction of the Postmodernist ‘Non’-Character

Introduction

With modernist drama’s escalation towards a subordination of character to plot, whereby the ‘action of the characters are an unavoidable consequence deriving by natural law from the characters who perform them’ (Brecht 1967: 47), there occurred in the mid-late twentieth century a shift that took both plot and character to such extremes as to empirically dissolve both. According to postmodern theorists and dramatic practitioners of the philosophy, these constructs no longer served as an essential component of theatrical communication. As scholar Elinor Fuchs observes, ‘modernist characters come to a stage of partial de-substantiation’ whereas in the postmodern theatre, ‘the burden of signification (the answer to the question, What are we following?) begins to shift from unfolding of character and plot to the more abstract interest of the play of ontological and ideological levels’ (1998: 35). As Fuchs argues in prelude regarding the function of modernist characters: ‘It is the theatricalist *Ur-text* in the modern period, demonstrating that character no longer offers the spectator ontological assurance, but embodies an unsolvable ontological problem’ (1998: 34).

Before modernism, characters might have served as a proxy through which plot, a playwright, actor, or director might have made a representative illustration of a specific ethos. Later, playwrights such as Peter Handke, Martin Crimp and more recently Tim Crouch, have adopted the postdramatic model as a means of bypassing the narrative conventions of character and plot, instead using *non-characters* as a conduit through which to more directly communicate their philosophies. However, it remains that in the case of these playwrights that their work is based in a textual foundation and related to an audience by means of a performer. The question, then, ultimately to be asked of representations of consciousness on the postmodern is what, if not a character, is this entity that speaks and behaves as a human character, but whose author insists upon that entity not being a character?

In order to fully gain perspective on the breadth of the modernist/postmodernist rift, it is important to review the more expansive conceptualization of the latter paradigm. The key shift in dramatic paradigms

distinguishing modernist from postmodernist seems to have occurred in a renegotiation of signification in the theatrical event and what legitimizes the event itself. Reconsideration given to notions of the origin of legitimation and the origin from which it derives opens Jean-Francois Lyotard's 1979 *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Though not explicitly in the context of drama, the application of the concepts discussed in Lyotard's work transcend the political and scientific connotation of rules used when writing:

Take any civil law as an example: it states that a given category of citizens must perform a specific kind of action. Legitimation is the process by which a legislator is authorised to promulgate such a law as a norm. Now take the example of a scientific statement: it is subject to the rule that a statement must fulfill a given set of conditions in order to be accepted as scientific. In this case, legitimation is the process by which a "legislator" dealing with scientific discourse is authorised to prescribe the stated conditions (in general, conditions of internal consistency and experimental verification) determining whether a statement is to be included in that discourse for consideration by the scientific community. (1979: 8)

Lyotard's attention to interpretive rule lies at the foundation of the postmodernist treatment of rules, acknowledging that their legitimation lies in the fold between the issuance of the rule and its reception. In this sense, post-modernist theatre similarly acknowledges the theatrical event emerging not solely from the issuance of the performed event, but also in its interpretive reception.

It is in the subsequent section of this essay, in which Lyotard adopts the Wittgensteinian notion of 'Language Games' and their dynamic with the context of negotiating significance in exchange, that the greatest theatrical application may be seen. Whereas in modernist drama, the assumption of the use of text was usually that the employment of dialogic signifiers held a certain finiteness that distanced it from the audience, containing the intent of meaning to the performance, postmodernism allowed for an ambiguity within the stage event that enabled a dialogue with its audience. In Lyotard's writing, the theatrical event would be represented by the regularly observed 'utterance', in which the 'sender' would translate to the expression in performance and the 'knower' the audience. On this he writes:

A denotative utterance such as “The university is sick,” made in the context of a conversation or an interview, positions its sender (the person who utters the statement), its addressee (the person who receives it), and its referent (what the statement deals with) in a specific way: the utterance places (and exposes) the sender in the position of “knower” (he knows what the situation is with the university), the addressee is put in the position of having to give or refuse his assent, and the referent itself is handled in a way unique to denotatives, as something that demands to be correctly identified and expressed by the statement that refers to it. (1979: 13)

Therefore, the theatrical event observed in postmodernism did not reside so exclusively within the performance of text but shared between audience and performance with signification left more broadly to audience interpretation. As Lyotard writes, ‘What saves them [most people] from it [barbarity] is their knowledge that legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practice and communicational interaction’ (p.41).

With regards to the text of post-modernist theatre so based, the event itself was distanced from the performance and came to reside between audience and performance and constantly reconfiguring itself depending upon the signifiers offered in text but not set by text. Language thus became more fluid than the concrete exchanges seen in modernist drama, and significance emerged in an array of permutations which relied upon derivations of the audience rather than imposed by a predetermined significance set by a rehearsed performance. However, especially true of trends against rules, Lyotard rightly observes that, ‘every utterance should be thought of as a “move” in a game’, however, ‘this does not necessarily mean that one plays in order to win’.

The general conceptualization of the mechanics of the post-modern paradigm, however, leave much to consider when application is made to theatrical narrative and in specific character. As Philip Auslander asserts in his 2006 essay ‘Postmodernism and Performance’, ‘In large part, the conceptual complications of the relationship between postmodernism and performance derive from the instability of both terms, neither of which has a single, universally agreed-upon meaning’ (2006: 97). With there being no uniform definition, Auslander likewise rightly remarks that, ‘some performances that are clearly postmodern in the historical sense (that is, later than and different from their modern counterparts) are not necessarily stylistically

postmodernist' (2006; 98). Yet it is not a discussion of postmodernist theatre as a whole with which this examination concerns itself as much as the implications it portends for examples of character consciousness represented on stage: the non-character of postmodern drama.

This trend of character as non-character was not without precedent and seen in many conventions of modernism. As Fuchs notes, 'Symbolist playwrights and their theorists...took up this same enthusiasm for de-individualization in favor of the ideal. The chief obstacle to achieving this ideal, they realized, was character as represented by the living actor' (1996: 29). For the sake of defining a concept on which much of this discourse shall focus, Fuchs' reference to de-individualization may also be read to mean a stripping of identity, as one (the individual) cannot exist without the other (identity). The distinction that may be drawn between these modernist efforts of dramatic de-individualization and those of postmodernist drama, is that the latter efforts are less a reaction to and rejection of theatricality and more a direct challenge to ontology itself. Under postmodernist theory, the existence of a stable individual is itself in question and there is therefore no need to de-individualize the postdramatic entity represented on stage.

As Donna Hoffmeister proposes in her 1987 essay 'Post-Modern Theater: A Contradiction in Terms?' regarding postmodern theatre's shedding of its most essential elements:

[Characters of Postmodernism] are not discrete, independent subjects as individuals in literature tend to be. The individual, on the other hand, is capable of identity crises and feels antagonism toward society. What these plays do is to evade this significant distinction. What they offer us is the simulacrum of individuality. In each case the audience is induced to anticipate a major central character with subjectivity and a specific social environment. And in each case the character's experiences gradually cease to cohere, all plot-lines wither and the audience is confronted with the 'expressionless statue'. (1987: 425)

In this confrontation, does there remain some remnant of a mimetic character and a representative consciousness? It would be fair to assume that Hoffmeister's statue remains an expression of individualism as even the most extreme attempts at expressionlessness, unless the object of expression is removed altogether, communicates a presence, if an expressionless presence. Does then mere presence if

lent attributes that would hint at an individuality, (for instance, an object resting alone on a bed covered in sheets as will be shown in my application of this query) translate to a form of character consciousness? Within the postmodern paradigm, conversely, need there be a literal presence to denote consciousness?

Thus it is seen that one of the most significant paradigmatic shifts to emerge with postmodern drama was the relationship being negotiated between audience and actor, and to an even further degree the extent to which a conscious character - or, indeed, a character at all - was being represented on stage. Rather than character serving as the source of narration, Hans-Thies Lehmann argues that, 'the theatre becomes the site of the narrative act. One often feels as though they are not witnessing a scenic representation but a narration of the play being presented' (2006: 109). Here, again, there appears a degree of confusion as to how the 'play itself' can provide its own narration without relying upon character. Providing some illumination to this quandary, Lehmann writes:

A narrator in the context of the postdramatic aesthetic cannot simply be understood as a traditional epic-literary figure. His narrating manifests the direct contact with the audience. In this postepic narration, one observes often enough that the action (already fragmented and riddled with other material anyway) appears only in the form of an account being given. (2006; 108)

However, if deprived of all its essential components, and for sake of this thesis specifically deprived of character, what of postmodern theatre can be said to be theatrical, where in it is the theatre? It is in this search for theatre that a certain liberation is found in offering concepts of character consciousness in a postmodernist context that rejects a delineation of author, character, audience, and idea. To no small degree the dictums decreed by practitioners such as Foreman and Wilson in their definition of the postmodernist ethos altered the perspective of the field. The hierarchical system that had previously divided these elements could be seen to have been leveled by certain similarly defined tenets of postmodernist belief. However, the individual experience of each observer is very much set apart from the death of character or play in theory, and it is with this consideration that much of the paradigmatic shift may be observed in postmodern theory in terms of its negotiation of the relationship between performance and audience. By this same token, if, as I am insisting for sake of my analysis, these non-characters are characters in some fashion,

so too become all the audience save for the single, individual observer. Therefore the theatrical event of postmodern theatre resides not exclusively within the staged play, but extends also to the audience and its reaction to itself. It is there, ultimately, that the experience of the represented postmodern character consciousness resides: in the full scope of all activity within the performance space.

Furthermore, the postmodern paradigm has altered perspectives on the nature of time, so that the imperatives driven by the temporal and spatial constraints of the theatrical performance on the characters of modernist drama are not nearly so effective for (impactful upon) the post-modern stage entity, as the constructs of fictive time and space hold no importance in this theatre. Concerning the theoretical postmodernist approach to temporal presence, Steven Connor writes:

Postmodernism, by contrast, is concerned almost exclusively with the nature of its own presentness. One definition of postmodernism might be: that condition in which for the first time, and as a result of technologies that allow large-scale storage, access, and reproduction of records of the past, the past appears to be included in the present, or at the present's disposal. (2006: 4)

Thus, in accordance with this model the represented non-character consciousness of postmodern drama would exist in a constant suspended coalescence of past and present.

The use of, and reference to, the postmodernist character, non-character, and stage entity shall be used interchangeably in the discussion and demonstration of the construction of said entity. This discussion will explore the persistence of a mimetic mode of theatricality – a character of a sort – and a consciousness represented through that character/non-character - that endures in theatre that has been considered postmodernist, although the varied function and application of this postmodern character depends upon the practitioner/author responsible for its creation. Therefore, this examination will be a revelation of the forms of postmodern non-character's consciousness as represented despite being deindividualised or denied its status as 'character'. As in all examples provided, language (written text) remains a component of the method by which the plays are presented, spoken by entities who recite this text (whether meant to seem spontaneous or transparent in its theatricality). The presence of a performer who speaks or who 'stands for' this postmodern character affirms an individual presence. Should an individual entity be present with the capacity of

expression – even if claimed to be expressionless – where, then, does the postmodern character’s consciousness reside and through what techniques is it derived or paradoxically demonstrated to be absent?

More to this point of conceptualizing the part of the writer and character in a postmodern context as counterpoised to its precedent modern writer, Lyotard offers very concise definition in his appendix to *The Postmodern Condition*, answering the question, ‘What is Post Modernism?’:

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, [...] Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*. (1985: 81)

Thus the rule of a postmodern playwright is established in the course of his or her writing and cannot be assessed before writing begins, but only once the work itself has been produced, with ‘the fact that work and text have the characters of an event’ that come ‘too late for their author’ (1985: 81). In order to derive some manner of nebulous rule by which to define my own work within the postmodern, I therefore turn to the rules (of a sort) that have emerged through observation of established work whose rules did not exist before written.

A Taxonomy of Representations Of Character and Non-Character Consciousness In Postmodernist Drama

There arises an immediate dilemma in attempting to categorically delineate unique examples of consciousness represented in what may be termed postmodern or postdramatic characters: namely, that the philosophical paradigm of postmodernism largely rejects, by both scholars and practitioners, the ascription of 'character' to what stage entities – be they live actor, media recording, or object imbued with an apparent awareness of its dramatic presence – enact the events of these narratives. Indeed, by many, the notion of narrative is quite rightly argued to have no place in a postdramatic context or in many instances the entire concept of play.

However, for purposes of this examination of representative form of consciousness, there must be an identifiable means of referencing these non-characters. Notwithstanding certain reservations towards this limitation, for purposes of this examination and sake of directness it will be as characters that these stage-entities are referred. Likewise, while the interrogative through-line of this taxonomy does not challenge postdramatic renouncement of narrative alongside character, it will nonetheless be employed as a description of the stage happening and justified thusly: When a piece of theatre is performed in the postdramatic, it is presented to an audience, and in those cases illustrated and to be illustrated there has been a text-based script on which the events of the play/non-play are based. Therefore, when speaking of 'narrative' it may be interpreted as the events that transpire in the course of these given examples of postmodern performance whether the intent of those responsible for their staging mean to achieve a fictive conventional narrative or no: the stage event itself serves as its own narrative or story for purposes of this discussion.

It is also worth acknowledging that the structure or lack of structure, the form adopted by these pieces are in many instances not attributes exclusive to what is termed postmodern theatre. As abstractions of events rather than focused events themselves, the postdramatic theatre finds many of its origins in the precedent modernist drama and specific movements thereto related such as Expressionist and Dadaist theatre. What must be recognized is to some extent the differing intent for which these styles are employed.

All this prefaced, what has not been confronted in my research and practice related to representation of consciousness among characters of postmodernism is a certain apprehension towards the concept of theatricalised consciousness itself when examined as part of the postmodern paradigm which would seem to reject it. Truly, while not expressly embraced, it would appear in most instances that an awareness or consciousness is – if not explicitly stated – highly insinuated. What is less openly acknowledged is who or what is the harbinger of this consciousness which is a matter that remains nebulous at best. Rarely is there one dominant mode by which consciousness is represented by the postmodern non-character, but an amalgam of several I hereafter delineate. Therefore, by contrast to my analysis of modernist representations of character consciousness, one play may serve as a conglomeration of several examples of convention whereas in the previous chapter one play might most present consciousness in a singular fashion.

The Conduit Character (Consciousness by Proxy; Stage Entity as Direct Representation of Authorial Expression)

Though perhaps meant with some connotational difference, Peter Handke's concept of Sprechstucke (Speech Plays) might well be an interchangeable quality with the attributes I ascribe to the Conduit Character of postdramatic theatre in that 'the theatre here doubles itself by citing its own speech' [Lehmann 2006, 57]. The notion of written oratory on itself, taking the writer/orator as its subject subsequently allows for a medium through which 'the detour of an internal erosion of theatrical signs, via a radically self-referential quality, [whereby] the message occurs, and a reference to the real take place' [57]. It is this negotiation of consciousness from author to writing to conduit/character/medium of communication to audience that offsets the nature of the speech in relation to the speaker/character and their common function and shared identity and how this is received by the spoken-to. It might be suggested that the 'Speech Play' is the form through which this relationship of represented character consciousness in the postmodern context as demonstrated in the works of Handke himself and more recently in the theatrical endeavours of such playwrights as Tim Crouch and Jason Lindner*.

* It should be noted that all reference to playwright Jason Lindner, though thoroughly documented, is the product of direct contact with the author, production, and adaptation of *The Gog/Magog Project*, written by Lindner while a student of Yale University (2000).

By attempting to dissolve the pretense of a contrived narrative, it is often the case in theatre identified as postdramatic that its agents of expression are functions of a proxy of the playwright. They are therefore conduits of the playwright's own personal narrative, as the character itself is not meant to represent a fictive entity. It seems in these instances, there remains a noticeable thread of modernist metadrama that runs through much of this variety of postmodernist theatre, as the commentary of the stage entities is unavoidably centred on an inquisition of the theatrical tradition itself. Though there is a present agent/character, it operates as more a direct proxy to its author, an amplifier of a sort. In this, it seems often the case that the Conduit Character and its consciousness-originating author are less concerned with the 'redefinition of theatre space than [the] exploitation of the critical community and intellectual institutions in postmodern fashion; [its] reception depends on audience expectations about the theatre as an institution, not about the work itself' (Arens 1991: 40).

When the speaker of Peter Handke's seminal piece of postmodernism, *Offending the Audience*, pronounces the following, it is – or can be interpreted as – Handke's own pronouncement: his voice, his consciousness, and one very much addressing the actuality of the stage event in both a specific and general sense:

This stage represents nothing. It represents no other emptiness. The stage is empty. You don't see any objects that pretend to be other objects. You don't see any light that pretends to be another light. You don't hear any noise that pretends to be another noise. You do not see a room that pretends to be another room. Here you are not experiencing a time that pretends to be another time. (Handke 1970: 9)

To a large degree confirming his use of *Sprechstucke* as a forum for his own use of theatre to attack the theatre at the time *Offending the Audience* was being written, Handke remarked that it was 'not a piece against the theatre, but against the theatre as it is' (1972, 203).

In grounding itself in a certain temporal and spatial immediacy, the aim of postmodernist theatre seems to suggest an attempt to dissolve the artifice which distinguishes the play from the reality in which it is performed. There is, therefore, no play, no character, but merely an extension of the general reality of the audience. By this rationale, we observe another sort of individualisation from the individual observer. In this context, for the lone spectator the theatrical event also includes all

members of the audience by whom the singular audience member is surrounded: the person watching three rows from this individual as much as the characters involved in prepared performance.

Here, in specific terms of the Conduit Character, there arises an interesting theoretical question posed by Katherine Arens in 1991, writing, ‘theorists of postmodernism identify skepticism about referentiality as the essence of a postmodern perspective since this skepticism undercuts the false consensus about reality through which a society regulates its members. But what enforces an audience's reception of such a gesture as postmodern’ (Arens 1991, 39)? It is a query that June Schlueter likewise similarly posed in her 1981 analysis of Handke’s play:

On the one hand the circumstances of its production may have lessened the impact of *Offending the Audience*, for the piece purports to depend completely upon an audience which does have conventional expectations. On the other hand, it is perhaps only the unconventional audience that can appreciate Handke’s step-by-step negation of theatrical tradition and the intellectual response he demands of his spectators. (1981: 17)

Using my own personal theatrical experience as both witness of and participant in a piece in the postdramatic that resonates with this notion of consciousness represented through Conduit Non-Character. Demanding a similar two-fold – or mutually opposing – expectation of the audience, Jason Lindner’s *The Gog/Magog Project* provides another method by which this direct merger of Conduit Character and audience has been attempted. The conceit of the play involves a performance artist, Alexander Gog, being caged for an indeterminate period of time with the impression given that each performance of the show is a continuation of this on-going experiment. When staged by The Chocolate Factory in 2002, the company organized protests both against and for the play at each of the preceding production of that season, making every attempt to bill the event as a legitimate piece of performance art rather than the subversive piece of postmodern theatre it was.

On the evening of the performance I had opportunity to attend, cars were literally stopped outside the performance venue. Depending on the demonstrator to whom they spoke, the message delivered varied: some encouraged attendance of the show on the basis of preserving artistic freedom, others to see evidence of the inhumane treatment of an artist in an experiment that had gone to cruel extremes. In

either case, what was being offered was not a scripted performance of a piece of theatre, but an event with a social-imperative that demanded the active participation of those attending, if merely in observation.

As for the content of the piece, elements of *Offending the Audience* are echoed inasmuch as it served as a direct assault on the nature of theatre and the function it once served. Following a participatory sing-along, the character of Alexander launches into an attack on the superfluity that theatre has become, blaming the audience.

There will be a revolution and theater will not survive. It is you who have destroyed it. You self-serving sons of bitches who can't abide to hear one thing that you don't already know you agree with.

Theater that once was an instigator of social change – so dangerous that when the revolution came the artists were the first to be tortured is now an ever-turning wheel of bullshit that serves itself feces by the shovelful and loves itself for it. It is a purulent pus-filled gas bucket and needs to be put out of its own misery. You have murdered the theater and I hope you rot in hell for it. NOW LET ME OUT OF IT! This is the end! THEATER IS DEAD!!!! THEATER IS DEAD!!! (Lindner 2000)

Lindner could obviously not have intended the attack to be at those specifically in the audience, but rather his observations of theatre audiences generally. Indeed, Gog subsequently apologizes for the condemnation.

While this may seem more a marriage of the modernist and postmodernist form, framing it against Richard Foreman's *Pandering to the Masses: A Misrepresentation*, provides insight into precedent pieces of postmodernism which likewise use the transparency of the Conduit Non-Character as a means by which its author's consciousness is represented through the work. In this piece (which will be later discussed for its use of other forms of represented consciousness), Foreman's presence is absolute. In it, 'Foreman seeks the triumph of the conscious over the unconscious' in a manner that 'strives to create a continuous present even as it treats events of the past, i.e., Foreman's thoughts while writing the piece' (Marranca 1996: 7).

Though disjointed use of experimentation of language that may be interpreted as a cacophonous rejection of narrative, there remains a constant and coherent represented consciousness undercutting the entire piece: namely, a regularly used

recording of Foreman's own reading of his written text. The 'Voice' serves a variety of functions in the course of the piece, in its prologue clarifying to the audience what is being presented:

VOICE: What you are watching at the present is the prologue to the play entitled *Pandering to the Masses: A Misrepresentation*, in which a certain intellectual context is made visible to the audience for that work. The play itself, *Pandering to the Masses: A Misrepresentation*, will begin in perhaps five minutes. (1996: 16)

It is not merely as a preshow announcement, however, that the Voice continues in its commentary. In certain instances, Foreman's voice offers recited dictation of the written stage direction which are likewise enacted by the character to whom the directions refer. In others, the Voice seems to take an introspective tone, as though considerations are being made by Foreman when writing the piece:

VOICE: Rhoda does not know, still, what is expected of her. Rivals? In knowledge? If she is alone against the stripped wall of her own living room, are her experiences and her anticipations any less full of imaginary fears? Body experiences? The stripes have something to do with her body. The letter she finds has something to do with her nervousness. (1996: 22)

In all these cases, though Foreman at no point introduces himself as the source of the Voice, it is a rather overt use of the author operating as the Conduit Non-Character. The effect of this, whether in Handke, Lindner, or Foreman's use of the device serves to theatricalize the consciousness of the creator of the piece; in a postmodern context, the author making a non-character of him or herself, and one whose consciousness the author knows intimately well.

**The Deindividualised Character
(Conscious Reflecting the Absence of an Identifiable 'Self' or Individual)
and
The Fragmentary Character
(Conscious Demonstrating the Stage Entity as a Product of Segment Incohesion)**

Before giving illustrations of what I am terming the *deindividualised character* and the *fragmentary character*, it would do well to examine a divide I have observed in these categorisations and their relation to the prior elucidated *conduit*

character. Indeed, so amorphous are the attributes of postmodern characters, many share in elements of all three categories or fall within a spectrum of those being outlined, though there exists a particular relationship between the *conduit character* and both these other designations that exhibits a sort of hybridity that warrants further examination.

Indeed, the notion of a character possessing so ubiquitous an identity as to cease to be an individual and representative of the whole of humanity is not an innovation of the postmodern drama. The *Everyman* of the medieval mystery play has been identified as a 'prototype' of its long-descendent postmodernist counterpart, what Fuchs regards as 'a preparation for the branch of postmodern theatre whose concern has been the making of patterns and even the creation of physical geometry' (1996: 48, 50). Therefore, it is not the deindividuation that serves as an attribute of postmodernity, but how this deindividuated figure is meant to be interpreted by a spectator. This has been observed as a 'move away from the self-centered signification (centered on selves), that is still today the conventional if somewhat weary focus of the stage' (91).

However, if the assertion that an audience itself is subject to this same deindividuation, could self-signification or self-identification through character be re-inserted into the postmodern paradigm? The audience – deindividuated, observing, recognising, and relating to these deindividuated characters of the audience member – would seem still to have a relationship with these stage entities that by all rights retain the traits of character. Given this conceit, the character (albeit de-individuated) remains an essential, present component of the theatrical happening.

If the author is deindividuated, as seems often to be suggested by postmodern speculation, the product of its writing is therefore a character expressing the deindividuated consciousness of its creator. Without reducing this examination into the mincing of semantic hairs, it is important that we can proceed with an investigation of forms of represented consciousness of postmodern characters with an understanding of characters being characters by any account as much as author can be author, performer as performer, or audience as audience within the postdramatic paradigm.

The deindividuated and fragmentary character are often discussed in tandem, or identified as something of an interchangeable attribute of specific postmodern

character. However, while not mutually exclusive, it is important to note their distinction and in particular their relationship to and extension from the conduit character. They are two sides of a common coin.

Again using Foreman's *Pandering to the Masses*, as an example of the Conduit Non-Character may reflect a deindividualisation of himself as an author thereby translating to Deindividualised Non-Characters. In the play, the recorded dialogue (and example of the Absent Non-Character, later discussed) recorded by the four principal performers were done so in fragments, 'each separate word being spoken by a different one of those four performers in sequence, no matter who was listed in the script as the speaker of any particular line' (Foreman 1996: 12). Thus, though lines were attributed in the text to specific character, the effect of the represented consciousness of each Fragmentary Non-Character would have been deindividualised through its being shared by each of the performers, with Foreman's recording of his own written stage directions being a constant Conduit Non-Character.

Each of the provided names (Max, Leo, Rhoda, and Ben), the narrative – insofar as there is a narrative – of the piece, in script belies the specific directions likewise spoken by Foreman's record voice. For example, as written, the non-character of Max remarks:

MAX: I don't need an answer. I don't need a yes, yes, yes, yes. (1996: 17)

Whereas in actuality, the text is written, directed, and presumably performed (though remaining Max' line) as:

Performer 1: I
Performer 2: Don't
Performer 3: Need
Performer 4: An
Performer 1: Answer
Performer 2: I
Performer 3: Don't
Performer 4: Need
Performer 1: A
Performer 2: Yes
Performer 3: Yes
Performer 4: Yes
Performer 1: Yes

This structure and fragmentation is used more overtly in Robert Wilson's *A Letter to Queen Victoria*, in which – with the exception of its opening later discussed in relation to the Absent Non-Character – the spoken text is 'full of random sequences, odd colloquialisms, grammatical errors, slipshod punctuation and play with syllables that change according to the changes of the letter in them ("HAP", "HATH", "HAT") and are repeated again and again' (Shevtsova 2007: 11).

Laurence Shyer notes the similarity between Wilson and Foreman's methods, writing:

His (Wilson's) method is not unlike that of Richard Foreman who has said, "I don't write, I compile...I take fragments, pages from my notebooks, I spread them out on the floor, arrange them in a certain fashion, go from here to there and have a play'. (1989: 92)

Shyer later cites a comment of scholar Heiner Müller, who is said to have said, 'it's the principal rather than the language of the plays that's interesting' (92). However, as insistent as many scholars – and the author himself – are in dismissing the use of language, on which representation of this fragmentary consciousness relies, when examining the text, though disjointed, there remains a coherence that within the moment-to-moment structure that postmodern theatre professes to embrace, indicates the presence of a Fragmentary Character with a narrative – however unconventional – of its own, rather than 'bold disregard of the concepts of characters' (Marranca 1996: 44).

As example, in a passage in which stage direction clearly state the arrival of a 'civil war soldier', who sings the following 'aria':

C.W.S. IT'S SEVEN O'CLOCK AND THE GENERAL'S NOT HERE
YET
HE MUST BE HAVING HIS SUPPER OR TARDY

HE SAID HE'D MEET ME
IN FRONT OF THE DRUGSTORE
I BELIEVED HIM
SO NOW I'M WAITING
IMPATIENTLY FOR HIM TO COME
I THOUGHT I HEARD
SOMEONE KNOCKING AT THE DOOR!
IT'S GETTING LATTER AND
LATER AND LATER

HE'D BETTER COME PRETTY SOON OR I'LL SCREAM

2 SCREAMS (1996: 84)

Though disconnected from all other events of the play, this interlude concludes with the arrival of The General, and therefore a full cycle of action. I similarly considered element of isolated narrative in the writing of *NARRATIVE*, despite the piece as a whole meant not to convey any one set of events specifically. It is thereby that the Fragmentary Character serves as a mode of conveying character consciousness, emphasized the more by the absence of an over-arching narrative. As Byrd Hoffman writes of *Queen Victoria*, 'Since there is no narrative structure, there is no real beginning or end to the piece. It exists, rather in a continuous present'. (1996: 39)

Non-Character/Performer as Object (Actor) and Non-Character as Object (Object)

Further adhering to principals of this notion of thought as theatre, or the distillation of consciousness as performance, in the most extreme of cases, postmodernism has removed from the stage the once necessary element of the live performer as the representation of this presence of thought. However, taking – as this examination does – the stage happening to be its own narrative, objects have replaced performers as the agents of this staged event. In these cases, it is the manner by which the objects are present that offer an immediate context for how the audience interprets the object to be more than its base appearance.

Even in those occasions in which a human performer represents a non-human entity, the impulse is registered by ascribing an anthropomorphic, thus human, narrative to the character. This can be seen in reverse in these plays – JM Barry's character of Nanna in *Peter Pan*, Julie Taymor's *The Lion King* – where a performer seen dressed in coattails and a bowler hat in the style of a Victorian butler likewise translates the performance through an elaborate puppet as the Red-Billed Hornbill attendant character, the presence of both representing in combination one character.

In her 2006 analysis of Disney animated film adaptations to stage, Rebecca-Anne Do Razarzio comments on the process when actors are meant to represent inanimate objects made animate characters as being a reversal of audience expectation in Robert Roth's design for the stage production of *Beauty and the Beast*, 'rather than

produce plasticness from the animation of inorganic matter, the theatrical production produces it from flesh and blood actors performing inorganic matter. The production makes this feasible by a modification in that transformation[in the quality of the metamorphosis]...they're being turned into objects, slowly subsumed ... by their costumes.' (Do Razario, 2003, 287)

Though one would not consider these productions to be a clear illustration of the postmodern Non-Character as object, it certainly illustrates the antecedents of its influence; worth noting is the fact that designer Robert Roth is likewise among the founding members of Big Art Group (later referenced with regards to their use of the Absent Non-Character), whose transgressive work plays upon the subversion of perceived character consciousness in its relationship to audience. These in turn found origins in such postmodern practices as the works of Richard Schechner and The Wooster Group.

A student of Schechner's, Theodora Skipitares' work throughout the 1970s and 80s (Lynch 1989: 140), demonstrated the notion of affected consciousness communicated through objects. Her first piece was *Mask Performance*, performed in the Artist's Gallery on Wooster Street. In this piece, which featured Skipitares set against a stage filled with molded casts of her face, the performance consisted of her selection of a mask which then informed the duration of the performance (141). In this instance, though the objects were in the rough design of human faces, it was a representation of its consciousness rather than the performer that was presented on stage. As Sue Heinemann remarked in her 1980 review of the piece, 'The solemnity, the not-quite-human quality of the unchanging mask. The disjunction of real sounds, the real gestures. And then Skipitares re-emerging, taking off the mask – just there, a quiet presence' (1980: 3). This unquiet 'presence', however, when behind the mask, illustrates a represented consciousness in the form of the postmodernist Non-Character as object.

The evolution of Skipitares method is deeply rooted in the use of Non-Character Objects as objects, as Joan Driscoll Lynch writes, 'She used found material: a textile factory in the East Village had burned and many bolts of damaged fabric were thrown onto the sidewalk in front; [she] hauled charred polyester back to the theatre...a way of working that has strongly influenced her own methods of juxtaposing materials from different sources' (70). Through this use of Non-Character as Object (Human) Skipitares has remarked in 1987 that, 'I employ [a] kind of license

when I go out and look for scraps of research material. I am in a sense a one-person improvisational team' (71). Thus, through use of objects, Skipitares demonstrates the versatility of representing multiple sources of consciousness through her individual work.

Conversely, postmodern theatre has likewise employed the convention of actors as objects. Returning to Foreman's *Queen Victoria*, the piece employs actors seemingly denied any function of identity through their use as a variety of non-human objects. As an example, as Foreman's pre-recorded Conduit Non-Character dictates the action of the character of Demon, stage directions indicate: 'RHODA sits on a naked woman, one of several who lie about, decorating the floor of MAX's writing chamber' (1996: 18). Though the body operates as scarce more than a chair, the notion of an attributed consciousness cannot be divorced from the situation. To have specified that the body naked and assigning it a specific gender, the Non-Character as Object (Object), Foreman has offered a context to which an audience would respond no matter how 'lifeless' the body may appear. An undefined narrative for the object surfaces, though infinitely variable in its interpretation.

Later in the same scene actors appear in a 'constructed' form, 'fitted...with objects and cloth, they appear like assemblage art' (Marranca 1996: 8). With dolls strapped to their shins, a chorus of the several naked women enacts a musical number for the writer character of Max. Even more than their use as furniture, though seeming to be intended more as vehicles for the dolls that adorn them, the chorus – arms linked – perhaps make the focal dolls redundant. It was when writing *NARRATIVE* that I attempted to employ a similar use of Non-Character as object who lies on a bed and denied context. In the text of the script, I indicated that the figure was inconsequential in its representation (a human actor, a mannequin, a teapot, and so forth). However, in ultimately choosing the use of an actor in performance, it similarly seemed to have defeated this intent and was I feel, in retrospect, similarly redundant.

The Absent Character (Present Consciousness of Character Conveyed Through Mediated Representation of a Physically Absent Stage Entity)

While perhaps seen to reject many semiotic elements previously identified with the theatre such as has been discussed with relation to character and narrative, postmodern drama has fully embraced technological advances and their application to

theatre. In many of these cases, it has shaped the very notion of what audiences might accept as a present consciousness, a present stage entity offered through digital medium. In so media-saturated as the cultures in which the plays discussed are performed, it might be argued that stage entities of postdramatic theatre represented through projected video and/or audio recordings or monitor displays are more readily accepted as a present consciousness than live performers.

More and more, the use of multimedia or mixed-media, such as video projections of performance-within-performance or audio recordings, has in contemporary theatre become rather common place. Indeed, critic Martin Harries remarks in his 2006 review of Richard Freeman's *Zomboid!*:

The contrast, in a theatre, of the more-or-less new medium of film with the more-or-less old one of theatre has become so common that it is now a surprise when an adventurous piece of theatre does not include video or film. To use film or video onstage as an acknowledgement of our mediatized condition – to use a shorthand made familiar in this context by Philip Auslander – is by now almost a reflex. To engage once more in a form of shorthand, recall that Foreman collaborated with the Wooster Group in the late 1980s. (2006: 673)

Without dismissing more recent works of postmodernist theatre, it is precisely this period and before when theatre audience might not have been so inured to effects of video representations of character – and as a matter of course to this discussion, video representations of character consciousness. Therefore, Foreman's 1987 production *Film is Evil: Radio is Good* offers a fundamental image – no pun intended – of character consciousness represented by a physically absent character punctuated by onstage actors beseeching their audience to consider the two contrasting realities and which should register as the truer.

With regards to the allure of this of mediatized representation of the Absent Character on stage, Hans-Thies Lehmann points to the attraction resting in its being purely representational writing:

Media images are – in the first and in the last place – nothing but representation. The images as representation gives us a lot, to be sure: especially the feeling of always being on track of something else. We are hunters in search of lost treasure. Always 'in the picture', we are on the scent of a secret – but in doing so at any moment 'content at the end' because we are satisfied by the image. The reason for this in that the

electronic image lures through emptiness. Emptiness offers no resistance. Nothing can block us. Nothing stagnates. (2006: 170)

It may thus be that the acceptance of the Absent Character and the effect of its theatricalized consciousness is in the security afforded by its absence. What this portends for the characters of Foreman's play, however, is precisely the inverse of that which Lehmann assumes its effect to be for its audience.

Within the context of a radio broadcast in *Film is Evil: Radio is Good*, the interviewed character of Estelle asks, 'do you know who's really in this film?' (Foreman 1992: 169) as a film entitled *Radio Rick in Heaven and Radio Richard in Hell* dominates the performance space. The 'Rick' and 'Richard' of this projected film is, in fact, the author of the piece itself, Richard Foreman, his represented consciousness serving as example of both The Conduit Non-Character through The Absent Non-Character.

As the film is shown, not within the radio studio but in parallel, the interviewer character of Girl comments on this notion of Absent Character, addressing the audience directly:

GIRL: You see, film is the hypnosis of the population in general, making us all believe the concrete physical world, which is that which can be filmed, is therefore the real world.

THREE BOYS: Yeah.

GIRL: No matter what adventures occur on-screen, no matter how imaginative, they are seen to occur against a background of reality, and that reality seems not changeable. There seems no escape from that filmed reality, which becomes the lie of reality itself. Believe that lie? Believe that lie? (170)

In the onstage performance, the interviewed character of Estelle is performed by actor Kate Manheim, whereas in the film – as the script offers through direction – the Absent Character is credited as herself, similarly interviewed though not 'in character' despite her dialogues being written. At one point, with Radio Rick staring into the camera and thus at the theatre audience, the Absent Character of Kate makes a clear statement of the nature of her consciousness within the film:

KATE: I am excluded from real consciousness of what you're telling me. Maybe I should get away from this motion picture camera that records my image, and that exiles me from my own consciousness. Did you know that

film – to film somebody – steals the soul? It does. It steals the soul. It steals the soul. People with their own inner life understand. They understand that. I am excluded from real consciousness of seeing myself, even when I think I'm looking at myself. (172-173)

With the onstage character of Estelle (performed by Kate Manheim) set against the recorded image of Kate Manheim seeming to represent herself gives instant illustration of this conflict of represented consciousness. Interestingly, the film in which *The Absent Character*, Foreman, appears is of a radio broadcaster in studio. Thus, in his absence, through physically present actors represented onstage, there are a variety of forms of effected character consciousness demonstrated as consequence of the use of *The Absent Character* through use of film: the awareness of the Girl in her defence of the onstage reality being a truer reality to the film being simultaneously viewed by the audience, the absent-presence of Radio Rick shown in surroundings more representative of a radio station than that in which the onstage actors appear, and the overt use of the author's consciousness represented through his depiction of himself (in a similar fashion to *Pandering to the Masses*) as the Absent Character who, as the author, is also responsible for all represented consciousness having himself written the play.

From precedence set by such plays as *Film is Evil: Radio is Good*, other iterations of represented consciousness through the postmodern convention of *The Absent Character* to not nearly so exhausted effect as Harreis suggest of Foreman's more recent enterprise. Performance groups such as Big Art Group have based their practice in testing the barriers between the performed-present character with the Absent Character in real time. In one such piece, *The House of No More*, Jennifer Parker-Starbucks, writing on the limitation of the human performer and the developments of the introduction of media as character, gives an account of how this was achieved:

In one clever scene, two actors are filmed at opposite sides of the long horizontal space while their images are mixed into a kiss on screen, not only forcing the spectators to choose between the live and screened images, but also cleverly exposing the mechanism of the magic to reclaim the ingenuity of the live stage. (2006: 658)

In this example, as the multiple image and the represented consciousness related

thereto present to the audience is technically originated from what may be a single source, be it performer, director, or author of the piece. However, through a simultaneous reconfiguration of one image into two through creation of another represented consciousness not actually extant in any realistic context, through the Absent Character, this consciousness likewise becomes fragmentary (demonstrating again the nature of hybridity and fracturing of theatricalised consciousness in the postmodern epoch).

Beyond character consciousness being represented by an absent non-character, a more subtle device of removing the consciousness presented by the actor who serves as an intermediary to written text through its being read. In what is otherwise a convolution of vocal symphonics, Robert Wilson's *A Letter for Queen Victoria* opens with three performers simultaneously reading an actual letter sent to Queen Victoria from Rufus Smith given to Wilson by Stefan Brecht. Though intended to be method of 'decontextualising the letter, instead giving it the place of a non-narrative overture' (Hoffman 1977: 42), in the recitation being before any contextualizing elements that follow – if, indeed, the context is context-less – the effect is giving voice to the absent author of the letter.

Writing of an installation piece by Ann Hamilton, Elinor Fuchs examines this notion in the context of a work in which a book is read aloud in 'an immense loft with horse hair' (1996: 90) filling the space and the smell of burning paper likewise abundantly present in the space. Though not a piece of theatre as such, Fuchs' review approaches the convention in comparison to similar conventions of the theatrical avant-garde. Writing of the book and its being read:

The 'victim burnt at the stake' is neither Saint nor actor, but text itself. But rather than lamenting the burning of text, the burning of writing, the artist may be ironically turning her audience to the experience of 'presence'. Unlike the 1960s avant-garde, however, which attempted to banish the absent oppressive text, Hamilton brings the text onstage 'literally'. The text has become an actor. (91)

It was by this notion of the 'text [becoming] an actor' – among others – that I was influenced strongly in my writing of *NARRATIVE*, which likewise uses the text as a source for the representation of an Absent Non-Character consciousness. In the whole of the video-projected performance likewise being overtly read, the aim of effecting

the consciousness of a twice-absent Absent Character was intended, and still further when the text itself ‘speaks’ for still another consciousness that was ‘one said to have said’.

Reflections on The Development of NARRATIVE in Process

The process by which I crafted *NARRATIVE* was especially unique being that in terms of my research it was meant to reflect observations of a form with which I was far less familiar than its modernist counterpart. Accordingly, it was from these observations that I directed the course of its writing far more than when penning *This Go 'Round* for which the process felt more intuitive, as I was already more familiar with the territory of modernist drama. It was not an altogether natural technique by which for me to work, though as consequence it proved to be very influenced by reflections on the research on postmodern and postdramatic characterization.

In writing the second piece, it was my endeavour to engage with these identified conventions of postmodern theatre and the techniques by which the effect of consciousness was represented in such a way as to allow for the stage happening to develop of its own accord. This seemed in tune with Hans-Thies Lehmann's study of the evolution of postmodern theatre in which he writes:

One of the salutary effects of this study is that demarcation of a new theatre continent with other criteria, values and processes has created the necessity to reveal a number of 'un-thought' implications of that which...shapes the common understanding of theatre. (2006: 23)

In taking these 'un-thought implications' to mean a lack of premeditative assumptions as to the function of this variety of theatre, while in some instances writing with some personal intent, it was without any forced agenda as to how this would ultimately shape the piece in its entirety that I approached *NARRATIVE*.

Text as Character

Mentioned in the prior taxonomical analysis of the Absent Non-Character and Conduit-Non Character – and discussed in still more detail in my later analysis of the application these varieties of conventions of character consciousness – there merits a focused reflection on the decision in my writing to explicitly state that the Reader non-character was to be seen *reading*. Though in production, it was not apparent that it was expressly the script of *NARRATIVE* being read, that was the device intended. The Reader non-character is therefore removed from the staged context that might be derived from the circumstances of *NARRATIVE*. In the sense, he or she serves quite

literally as a conduit for the reflected consciousness represented in writing.

To some degree, similarities between this and Foreman's *Pandering to the Masses: A Misrepresentation* can be observed. However, while perhaps misperceived as being an absent entity, it was my intent – as with Elinor Fuch's examination of Ann Hamilton's installation piece – that the text literally be a present character, perhaps the most present of any those that might be perceived in *NARRATIVE*. Therefore, the consciousness of the text may be better designated a representation of Non-Character as Object.

In order to achieve this, it may have been as well that the title and author ('*NARRATIVE, A Play by Adam Brummitt*') have been spoken aloud by the Reader, though my apprehension towards this was its redirection of focus onto the Reader rather than having the consciousness of the text represented through this figure. As with *Pandering to the Mass* in which Foreman used the performance as a means of effectively narrating the play in process, some consideration was given to stage direction likewise being spoken (read) by the Reader. By contrast to Foreman, though, it was the text's consciousness that I wanted to bring to the audience's attention, rather than the effect of my own person's consciousness. Though it is still not absolutely clear as to the level of its success, my intent was to displace myself from my own work as much as I was able, thus any reference to my being its author, or indeed my being the Reader, would deny the text its function as an independent theatricalized consciousness.

A Function of My Frustration (The Conduit Speaks on My Behalf)

In deliberately using the non-character reader of *NARRATIVE* as a conduit through which some personal expression of my own might be made, divorced from any narrative restraints, that the consequence was a subtle commentary upon my own process and its scrutiny under academic parameters. The constant reference to proof and the Reader's espousal of the un-provability of proof emerged from a certain despair felt at concepts I had attempted to advance being ill-received for their inability to be conclusively proven. It is therefore no coincidence that in the opening of the play, in darkness the Reader asserts:

READER

What is it? It is sound, it is speech, it is all. But all is not sound, not speech. Sound is not speech but its vessel. Speech is unproven...speech is you. You are unproven. It is now sound, proven, but not without you, unproven. Its proof requires your unproveable acceptance of its proof. It is all...it is speech, unproven, and therefore nothing. An equation: it is all, you are its lack of proof, you are nothing, all is nothing.

It wouldn't be inaccurate to suggest that 'it' might refer to consciousness itself, of which has at times been a confounding element in my research – the attempt to provide concise definition, and more so, the attempt to offer a demonstration of this elusive concept in a theatricalized context. Thus, it wasn't merely an arbitrary venting of this frustration that compelled my use of a theatricalized consciousness to abstract variously what that consciousness is. If, indeed, it is the text's consciousness as a Non-Character Object being represented, much of the subject of its expression is grappling with its own representative consciousness. Here one might observe echoes of *This Go 'Round's* Look and Listen's similar conundrum, paradoxically play through their own stage representation.

Un-Expectation of Response

Though remaining a piece of text-based theatre, it was very much with the intent of incorporating a certain level of participation from the audience that I wrote specific aspects of *NARRATIVE*. Acknowledging a desire to expel the artificial divide between audience and stage event, the Reader often addresses the audience directly not as a character delivering an aside but as a literal presence engaging in a sort of direct discourse with the observer. Through this, though absent from the space in any literal sense, the Reader was meant to breach any theatricalized delineation between it and the audience to which it spoke.

Perhaps the most flagrant example of this intent can be observed in the passage in which the Reader

Reader

Prove to it your being, prove to it you are! Proof through sense, unproven, proof through speech, unproven, through knowledge unproven, through anger unproven, through love unproven. Prove through proof, unproven. Prove it is a play. Prove it is the play. Prove your proof through sense, speech, knowledge, love, and anger unproven.

In writing the passage, the intent was meant to be a direct provocation of the audience, as to not less a degree all references to ‘you’ (the audience) were likewise meant to be. Similar to Handke’s non-character of *Offending the Audience*, the constant direct address of the audience was meant to have what I observed as a similar effect of conscious when its speaker announces:

You are sitting in rows. You form a pattern. You are sitting in a certain order. You are facing in a certain direction. You are equidistant from one another. You are an audience. You are auditors and spectators in an auditorium. Your thoughts are free. You can make up your own mind.
(Handke 2002, 6-7)

It was this impression of the audience being able to ‘make up [it’s] own mind’ on which the intent of the command to ‘prove that [they were]’ operated. In production I was rather curious as to whether one among the bolder members of an audience might actually rise to this and demonstrate his or her presence in the performance space. Being established that the text was meant most to serve as the represented consciousness of the piece, it seemed an intriguing prospect to have this non-character – removed physically from the space through projection and given voice by an Absent Non-Character – have some manner of direct interaction with its audience. Without anthropomorphising the text to such an extent as to have it seem to speak for itself, there was on my part the aim of having a Non-Character as Object engage in discourse with those by whom it was three-times removed.

It seems, however, that this was taken to be merely a convention of the piece as a whole and not as the conversation it was meant to be in performance. This became apparent when the non-character Reader delivered the direct command of ‘go...’, intended to signal the play’s conclusion and prompt the audience’s departure. As it happened – though performance and its consequences were not central to my practice – in the two stagings of the piece, the audience lingered well after the command was issued, presumably not perceiving it to be a direct command anymore than the previous attempts to directly engage the audience. This may actually have been the greatest indication of the material’s challenge to the theatrical conventions to which audiences are accustomed, and though not responding as they were ‘meant’, offered the greatest insight into how represented consciousness is received under such unconventional circumstances. In not responding as though having been addressed by

a literally present consciousness, the audience reflected the impractical expectation of the postmodern concept of total theatre and the means by which it conveys the effect of consciousness, irrespective of the extent to which the audience assumes their role in the happening.

Presently Absent

The choice to make the Reader appear through projection was again a result of my allowing my research to guide my process. In doing so, the Reader functions variably as a Conduit, Fragmentary/Deindividualised, and Absent Non-Character. The Absent Non-Character was perhaps the most forced in my composition of *NARRATIVE*, however the consequences of this choice proved to me among the most interesting. It may have been as well that, and I did consider the option of, the Reader's being physically present in the space. In deciding upon the Reader's representation being through recorded media, it may well have had the effect of its consciousness being more present. As Phillip Auslander observes, it has been through mediatization that the notion of presence exist at all, writing:

I propose that historically, the live is actually an effect of mediatization, not the other way around. It was the development of recording technologies that made it possible to perceive existing representations as 'live'. (Auslander 2008, 56)

It is interesting to consider the notion that, in terms of represented consciousness, the non-character least literally present is the representation of consciousness that is attributed the most presence. This was, of course, intentional, it was proffered the most prominent placement in the performance space and was given the most dialogue. The Non-Character/'Non-Character as Object' seen in bed was a convention meant more to confound than enhance what narrative might have been derived from the piece, as I specified that in performance it might be either object or actor:

Visually central to the performance is a white bed adorned with white sheets and a white pillow on which lies a figure. The gender or other such physically distinguishing attributes of the figure are inconsequential – it is not necessarily ideal provided the minimal action required of this figure, but for all intents and purposes the figure could be a mannequin or a non-human object – though it is preferable to have all audience-visible areas of the figure unclothed. The figure will remain on the bed for the duration

of the performance.

The actuality of the matter was that the recorded image of the Reader (taken outside its theatricalized context) represented the documenting of an event more than a week prior to the performance: it could be paused, it could be manipulated with size and filters, in a separate space to the performance space. Though some have argued that use of video has become hackneyed, our ability to refrain - or *consider* refraining - from attribution of significance remains low. In terms of literal presence of being, the video was no more significant than were I projecting images of Scooby Doo. Interestingly, however, the present/absence of the bedded figure may ultimately have accentuated the present/absence of the projected Reader and the text for which the Reader served as intermediary.

Auslander highlights this relationship between live and mediatized performance:

The notion that, working together, stage and screen can convey a fuller sense of what it is to be human than either can alone is premised on the assumption of their working together as complementary equals, an assumption that still underlies much performance work that incorporates both live and screened bodies. The possibility that audience perception may inevitably be drawn to a screen even when human beings are present, for instance, is not usually considered as part of the equation. (2008: 40)

In the case of *NARRATIVE*, however, with the screen dominating the performance space, it was precisely the inevitability of inequality that was considered as part of the equation. If anything, the use of an actor in production as the bedded figure may have ill-served the intent of its presence meant to represent the Non-Character as Object (Object). The vehicle by which *NARRATIVE* was intended to convey ‘what it is to be human’ – which with regards to my research would translate to ‘what it means to be conscious’ – was perhaps diminished by the living, physically present actor and the focal projected non-character. It is interesting to consider how a more direct representation of text as non-character might achieve the effect of consciousness without merely offering to an audience to be read. Were a bound copy of the script to have replaced the Reader non-character, large enough that it might be read by the audience, would this make more or less apparent the fact that it was the text’s narrative that constituted *NARRATIVE*’s performance, that the text itself was the

focus of the piece, or would this narrative again be divorced from its intended source and ascribed imaginatively to a more human representative by its reader audience?

CONCLUSION

Consideration to Character Consciousness

Included among the collected letters of Wallace Stevens, cited by Bart Eekhout in *The Limits of Reading and Writing*, there exists a passage reading:

There are things with respect to which we willingly suspend disbelief; if there is instinctive in us a will to believe, or if there is a will to believe, whether or not it is instinctive, it seems to me that we can suspend disbelief with reference to a fiction as easily as we can suspend it with reference to anything else. (2002: 150)

It is perhaps upon a premise such as this that my interest in a practical exploration of character consciousness first found inspiration. There seems to me an imperative for the writer to consider the ramifications of the ‘fictive’ as they operate in the ‘real’. It is so often that the fictive – and with regards to my research the fictional representation of character consciousness – that serve as a precursor to our thinking about its actuality. The imaginative construct allows for the image on which to build a new way of thinking, and thus the responsibility of the playwright and the characters he or she produces is no trivial matter. In another of Stevens’ letters the scholar writes:

There is, in fact, a world of poetry indistinguishable from the world in which we live, or, I ought to say, no doubt, from the world in which we shall come to live, since what makes the poet the potent figure that he is, or was, or ought to be, is that he creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing it and that he gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of it. (2002: 55)

I grant that both these extracts may be regarded as about literary artefacts, important elements of the power of the imaginative faculty and modern discourse.

Considerations given to consciousness within the controlled microcosm of a staged play may – particularly in the temporal unfolding and evolution of the performed text – provide the circumstance for gaining an understanding of our own consciousness that cannot be quite so achieved through any other artistic medium. With respect to continuing interrogation of stage phenomena, among the functions of this study has been to illustrate the continued importance of dramatic theory and

practice as it relates to the existence and effect of consciousness represented on stage.

By determining how this is demonstrated through playwriting techniques in modernist and postmodernist drama – the stated aim of my study, which I feel has been met with fair success – it is my hope that these observations will retain some measure of lasting contribution to existing scholarship, if in the meagre respect of encouraging those that follow to similarly consider theatrical text and production as examples of consciousness and the particular importance of character in this equation. Character, I would contend, is the most important component of the theatrical milieu and questions of consciousness the most important in gaining an understanding of our lives in and out of the theatre.

No Beginning and No End: The Coalescence of Character Consciousness in Modernist and Postmodernist Drama

Although I divided my analysis of techniques used by playwrights of the latter half of the 20th century along the lines of modernism and postmodernism, in retrospect this has demonstrated the fact that the two may very well be approached with a similar – if, perhaps, contextually modified – set of taxonomical categories. The Conduit Non-Character, for instance, while perhaps lacking the transparency of its postmodern examples, has a noticeable presence in earlier modernist texts.

It would be as accurate to suggest that to some extent all characters serve as platforms through which playwrights have long communicated their own unique voice, though this became especially the case under the influence of modernism and continued its evolution through postmodernity. Didi and Gogo's exchange of insults – each insult escalating in its severity – which concludes with the most biting insult being 'critic' has as much significance in conveying Beckett's position towards theatrical criticism as it does to the two characters for whom it serves as more a nonsensical, arbitrary crescendo to a game of ridicule meant to distract from their constant waiting. Certainly, many of the later works of Samuel Beckett might be approached as well, if not arguably better, through the taxonomy of character consciousness identified in the litany of postmodern non-characters.

In Beckett's 1963 *Play*, the trio confined respectively to their separate urns may be seen to reflect characteristics of the Fragmentary Non-Character, in their overlapping, often unintelligible dialogue, as well as the Conduit Non-Character, with autoreferentiality being a key theme of the entire piece and a means by which Beckett

depicted a love triangle in which he himself was involved. In his 1972 piece *Not, I*, the disembodied mouth that serves as the sole focus of the twenty minute monologue would constitute an example of character consciousness under both the Fragmentary Non-Character as the Absent Non-Character categories. Though using theatre technology not available to those in decade's prior to its production Foreman's *Film is Evil: Radio is Good*, shares traits with notions of a Journey to Consciousness as the live Estelle character is confronted with the video image of her likeness though not characterised self, accentuating her role as character of play while defending her position as the more 'real'.

I will not offer all examples in which two categories merge as that would ultimately amount to a discourse demanding the level of specificity exhibited in the whole of this study. However, it is germane to note that with so much exchange between the two it begs the question whether there are distinctive enough characteristics to warrant their being separately classified at all.

The Counter-Intuitive 'Non-Character'

As reflected in my introduction, it was not without certain reservations towards notions of postmodernism that I approached postmodernist texts I had long held with the position shared by Linda Hutcheon, that 'postmodern' was a misnomer that falsely suggested a terminal point to artistic development. Though regarded in my analysis with respect to the philosophical rejection of character in postmodern theatre, in referring the stage entities discussed as non-characters, it seems to me - perhaps more than when beginning this study - that this is a distinction in title alone. However, it was at no point my intent to debunk the existence of the concept based on my own personal misgivings. My analysis gave concession to the assumptions of those playwrights and scholars whose beliefs may have been contrary to my own. As Elinor Fuchs outlines in the opening to *The Death of Character*:

My thinking on theatre after modernism originated in the practical context of seeing new work in the theatre and writing accounts of it for weekly newspapers in New York. It clarified as I began to teach students of theatre, and deepened as I read 'theory'. But its abiding approach has been that of a theatre critic in search of language in which to describe new forms, forms that have appeared in actual theaters and in the theatricalized surrounds of our contemporary public life and discourse...I had fallen into

the mental swoon of postmodernism.

For this vertiginous new perspective, at once artistic and broadly cultural, I lacked at the time a name, much less an adequate vocabulary and grammar. The older categories of fantastic, theatricalist, and the ‘absurd’, whose effects realism through contrast, had little explanatory power. (1996: 1)

My critical argument may amount more to the proposed abandonment of character in this search for a new vocabulary. It is one regularly contradicted – by Fuchs among others – by consistent reference to situations which postmodern playwrights place his or her, not impulses, not origins, not action or writing or theatre, but characters, often even describing them as such .

It seems in recent decades with the emergence of postmodernist perspectives in the theatre under the wider umbrella of postmodernity (such as Fluxist performance or Theatre of Cruelty) have suggested that the notion of Character as coherent ontology referencing a non-illusionist world beyond the theatre has become an obsolete concept, and one from which a postmodern practitioner who subscribes to these theories seeks to emancipate theatre. Yet the endurance of ‘non-characters’ suggests that postmodernist writers have not necessarily succeeded in exorcising of the presence of a character in performance. To suggest the death of Character would be in effect to deny agents that make possible most of what we take for granted in mainstream theatre, cinema, media, television, and indeed the broad scope of fictional literature. Yet as Fuchs argues, much avant-garde theatre of both modernist and postmodernist writers did begin an interrogation of character self awareness that causes audiences to reflect afresh on these processes of representation:

The process of cultural fission and fusion that has brought about the ‘death of character’, and the replacement of objective reality by the autoperformative stage, is arguably a reflection of the scientific and political processes that may indeed annihilate all life on earth. But the ‘end of humanism’ can also mean the end of post-renaissance Western arrogance – and beyond that, the end of the anthropocentrism that devastates forests, forces animals to suffer, and is making a junkyard of the moon. (1996: 175)

In the course of my research, however, a through-line between the modernist and postmodernist characters I had come to regard a more significant than first

perceived began to emerge. It was David Kennedy's discussion of the rules – or lack of rules – that might be seen to govern the postmodern which largely guided this realization. To some extent the difference may be seen as the order, which is to say the *sequence*, of consideration to form and its distinction in the creation of modernist and postmodernists characters comparatively. Form in the modernist perspective may be viewed as the source from which the character is produced: consideration to form precedes the creation of character. Character is not disregarded in postmodern drama, but is a consequence of form which is the product of the impulse to create: form emerges as a secondary to the active process of creation, and with it character.

Limitation to Postmodern Playwriting Analysis

In accepting as a matter of course certain tenets of postmodernist ideology as part of my research, however, in combination with its being practice-led through writing based on the established texts of identified postmodernist playwrights, I was confronted with an admitted limitation. As central as the proposed 'death of character' is to postmodern theory, there is likewise a proposed death of authorship. Many of the most recognized works of postmodern theatre – such as those produced by The Byrd Group, The Wooster Group, Schechner's Performance Group, and so forth – are the product of devised collaboration and improvisation rather than a staging of one playwright's work. This does not eliminate the shared authorship that emerges from the collaboration or that which is negotiated between performers and audience, though it does make difficult analysis of this work from a purely textual approach to character such as I chose to make.

It was for this reason that Peter Handke, Robert Wilson, and Richard Foreman became so focal to my research as their work, while still widely accepted as examples of postmodern theatre, were at their root text-based. It is an admission of these playwrights that it is *their* singular vision that is represented through their work and the represented conscious of the characters they have written and one seemingly admired by the actors with whom they have worked. As example, in the forward to Foreman's *Unbalancing Act*, actor Peter Sellars writes:

Foreman's shows create, like old-time theatre, a world unto themselves. Complete satisfaction is an encounter with the world on *your* terms – now that is paradise. We all dream of that everyday. In the

‘written/designed/directed by’ world of Richard Foreman, he immediately establishes *his* terms up front, which is why he clearly loves watching and participating in his own productions from a presumed position of absolute control. Who wouldn’t? How many of us have ultimate control over the small productions that we offer as our lives. (1992: viii)

Beyond eliminating through this process any aspects of postmodern collaboration, it likewise does not account for performativity of self. While my analysis of the postmodern conduit Non-Character accounts for certain implications of this notion, it is with the impact on character consciousness that my analysis concerns itself, rather than the impact on a playwright or performer’s self that is rather the inversion of this process. Joel Anderson points to this conflict of self and character in his essay ‘Dead or Alive: Protecting Actors in the Age of Virtual Reanimation’ with regards to the work of monologist Spalding Gray (whose body of work included collaboration with postmodern companies The Wooster Group – as a founding member – and The Performance Group):

As a character in, and author of a book...the ‘Spalding’ persona, which began as a fictional conceit of his performances, has become ‘real’ by virtue of its continual reappearance in the cultural arena. (2005: 77-78)

This process of playwright becoming performer, performer becoming character, character becoming performer, and the consequent disorientation of the process for both audience and actor has links to concepts of represented character consciousness, but not in the sense that it can be observed through extraction of authorial technique. This contrasts the considerations given in my analysis of Peter Handke’s work, which is likewise regarded as monologistic, but does not operate within the same parameters of scripted character assumed to be an out-of-character persona in the same fashion.

In limiting my analysis of representations of postmodern character consciousness to text-based performance, there remains a great deal to be explored outside the realm of scripted work. A synthesis of consciousness, for example, might be considered with regards to the characters that emerge from collaborative production through rehearsal, or the questions of identity of self and character produced through improvised works, or the negotiations of delineating self from character when drawing from a source that is not text based, are all valid considerations of concepts related to represented character consciousness for which

my analysis rooted in the act of writing cannot account. There is, however, common ground between those phenomena and the varieties of character consciousness on which my study does focus.

With writing – and in specific playwriting – being a relatively unexplored focus within the field of practice-led research, it is having approached and defined the components of this process in regards to character consciousness that my research finds its greatest value in the widening academic discourse of practice-led research. This may serve as a point of departure to more comprehensive studies of character consciousness as it proceeds from written work to the process of production in rehearsal to observation on production in performance. What this may portend for future research on directorial practice and acting methods may have greater and greater importance as playwriting as practice gains footing within the field.

The Consciousness Within

It was from those playwrights who most ignited my own personal aspirations as a playwright that this study derived its inspiration, and the love of those characters that in their theatricalised reality examined their own existential quandaries. In not having the benefit of knowing the playwrights responsible for the creation of these characters, and in the characters seeming to have autonomy from their authors, it was their outward glances to the audience in which I found comfort in my own questions as to the nature of consciousness. Although they were written – as an effect of theatrical conventions – it was and continues to be through a connection with these self-conscious characters that I have often found myself truly enlightened.

In my own writing, the characters, with whom, I might contend, I have shared a period of consciousness, have allowed me to simultaneously creatively produce a variety of theatrical characters, while also deriving comfort in the ambiguities of existence that they appear to afford me. Is it myself or the detached fictive character to whom I owe this credit, this sense of distance between the writer and the written being a frequent trope used by writers in talking? It is certainly attributable to the power of imagination, which I am grateful to have retained even as society seems to value it less and less, concerned more and more with concrete practicalities that seem rather to strip from life its own worth.

There is certainly precedent for an experience such as mine in the writing of French playwright Jean Cocteau. During the difficult composition of *L'ange Heurtebise*, Cocteau speaks of the writing as an entity separate to himself, referring to it as an 'angel':

The angel had taken up residence within me without my knowing it...[it] couldn't have cared less about my rebellion. I was only its vehicle and it treated me like one.

Imagine a parthenogenesis, a couple formed of one body that gives birth. At last, after a night in which I had contemplated suicide, the birth took place...it lasted seven days, during which the character's gall exceeded all bounds, compelling me to write against my will.

It is my contention that there is potential through the imaginative faculty such as that described by Cocteau this ability to conjure the abstract image, dimension and all perceived attributes of a character - to create a complex reality not so far removed from our own. In examining representations of character consciousness, it may be that the consciousness of character is ultimately brought to light whether the source or product.

APPENDICES

(Note: All rights whatsoever to the performance of the following plays are strictly reserved and application for performance etc. should be made to the author or a designated representative of stated author. No performance(s) may be given unless a licence has been obtained.)

This Go 'Round
A Play by Adam Brummitt

THE PLAY

A pool of light appears on stage and at its centre sit two figures. Back-to-back, these are the characters of LOOK and LISTEN. Though not expressly dictated by this, the script, it is suggested that LOOK be dressed in a top hat, a cravat, waist coat, dress shirt and trousers that fall to the length of two-thirds LOOK's legs, the remain third covered with a pair of black and white vertically bold striped socks or leggings. LISTEN, by contrast, is adorned in a bowler hat, a bowtie, a black and white bold striped dress shirt, black tinted goggles, finger-less gloves, two-thirds lengths trousers, white socks, shin-high boots and a black overcoat. Again, this is not strictly essential to the characters, but would achieve the desired appearance of the two being in equal parts regal and tattered. Proud vagabonds exemplified in their manor, comportment, and world weariness.

The characters should be considered, though inured to the fact, to operate with a constant sense of internal distortion, unfiltered, a barrage of sporadic images, a flood, a wash of their current incarnation as well as those previous. An erratic deluge of themselves as they are, as they were, as they will be.

The reality of the audience and that of Look and Listens cannot co-exist in one physical space and should one intrude upon the other it is for existence that they fight. The audience cannot step into the pool of light and the characters cannot step from it as in both cases it would deviate from what is written, upon which the characters depend to be.

Look

-- go 'round...I don't want to be here.

Look stands, surveys the edge of the lit pool and the audience nearest that area. Listen stands, turning in place, observing the presence of the audience.

Listen

They're back.

Look

Aren't they always?

Listen

Are they?

The both from their separate positions intensely scrutinize the audience, looking for confirmation of their (the audience) existence beyond the obvious evidence of their presence.

Look

(With noticeable irritation) They are.

Pause

Listen
Always?

Look
Do you recall a time when they weren't?

Listen
Do I recall...?

Look
They are, as sure as we are. A foregone conclusion, Listen, yes, perhaps, but sound enough.

Listen
Here again we find ourselves.

Look
So it seems.

Listen
And seeming seems less seeming and more or less so.

Look
Awfully poetic.

Listen
I do often have a propensity for cryptic eloquence.

Pause

Look
Or have I?

Listen
All a matter of perspective, I suppose.

Look
A credit to the creator.

Listen
Though never to have been spoken if not for we two.

Look
Yes, you're not without a point.

Listen stands examining both the pool of light in which Listen and Look reside, the audience, the space above, what area of the theatre Listen can discern from the limited confines of the light...

Listen

We're always given such stark ambiguous surroundings.

Look

Bleak.

Listen

Dismal.

Look

Desolate.

Listen

Dreary.

Look

Grave.

Listen

Redundant.

Look

Of course...

Pause

Listen

During the previous go 'round –

Look

Which go 'round in specific?

Listen

The events surrounding the tree...

Look

So to speak...

Listen

How other than to speak? For what do you suppose we were waiting then?

Look

Can't say as I've the faintest beginning of speculation.

Listen

Humour me with conjecture.

Look

Don't I always?

Listen

Do you? Seems a bit disingenuous, if merely humoring me.

Look

I've nothing to offer but conjecture, it would be duplicitous, dishonest were I to veil it otherwise.

Listen

Point well made. Stab in the dark, conjecture. In as near to reason as you can assume, for whom or what were we waiting?

Look

I – god –

Listen

Oh...something as monumental as that certainly warrants our waiting.

Look

As if to suggest we had any recourse.

Listen

We had the tree.

Look

Again, offered purely as conjecture.

Listen

Do you suppose we're meant to do the same this go 'round?

Look

What's that?

Listen

Wait for...god?

Look

Oh...I suppose, among other diversion, left to our own devices as we are.

Listen

All we've been left...what alternative have we, what with our being sans arbor?

Look

There certainly seems no apparent end to our tireless conversation.

Listen

Apparent end, no...and this god, apart from being monumental...what...is...it?

Look

I...haven't the first fragment of an inkling. What gives you the impression it's monumental?

Listen

It seemed to stand to...reason?

Listen considers what was spoken and its definition...

Reason?

Look

For want of a better excuse.

Listen

It seemed to stand to reason...for want of a better excuse, if we'd spent our entire time waiting for it.

Look

I see...

Listen

Do you?

Pause

Perhaps we should commit ourselves to some definitive course of action, no matter how arbitrary.

Look

Given our limited options, I would think any course of action to be the definition of arbitrary.

Look sits...

Regardless, I'd just as soon devote myself to significant thought, however ineffectual, as to arbitrary action, however distracting.

Pause

Listen

Some might argue that postponing a decision is tantamount to death.

Look

And others would argue that postponing a decision ensures that no more death be risked...and there's only we two and only we two arguing so let's have no more of this 'some might', 'some would' absurdity.

Listen

What of...

Listen gestures, suggesting the presence of the audience...

Look
I'm not prepared to acknowledge that element at the moment.

Listen
Postponing decision...

Look
And perhaps prolonging our time here, but I'll expect no thanks from you.

Listen
And I'll extend none. Who's to say it might not be to our benefit?

Look
You are and I am, and as we both have been, if by implication...and...well, our being here. Let the argument rest.

Listen
For the moment.

Look
For the moment. No, Listen, if it's our fate to wait we shall wait with dignity.

Listen approaches Look, removes Look's hat, examines it and returns it with a brush against its top...

Listen
With dignity shall we?

Look
Listen, I realise we don't look the part...

Listen
But Look, the part, you are, and Listen, the part, am I.

Look
Precisely. The two again, bound together as before...

Pause

Listen
Bound together as before...

Pause

Wasn't there an occasion in which you attempted to shoot me?

Look
Did I?

Listen
Did you?

Look
Or did you shoot me?

Listen
Did I?

Look
Was it in this or another go 'round? The one with the tree, perhaps?

Listen
Not the one with the tree...there was a...a...an...

Look
An...?

Listen
There was a...room? A room...with a...waiter...or an amadama.

Look
An amadama?

Listen
To the effect...amadama...a...mada...

Look
And, knowing I will live to regret asking, what is... 'shoot'?

Listen
Shoot? Haven't the foggiest.

The two consider the definition of the concept...

Look
Listen, here...

Listen
Listen here?

Look
No, no, no, no...Listen-

Look positions Listen directly in front of Look...

-here.

Pause

Look
Shoot.

Listen
Shoot.

Look
Room.

Look
Roomada...

Listen
Maroom...

Look
Roomaramadashoot.

Pause

Look kisses Listen

Pause

Look
I don't believe that's it.

Listen
How did I know of this 'shoot', how did I know to ask after this... 'shoot', whatever it happens to be?

Look
The creator, I imagine.

Listen
The creator you imagine?

Look
No! The Creator... (*mockingly strokes his chin*) I imagine.

Listen
Do you imagine?

Look
Do I?

Listen
Do I? Do we?

Look
Did we imagine them?

Listen
Did the creator create shoot, or did the creator know the creator of shoot/come by this
shoot from another creator?

Look
Why are you asking me?

Listen
Who else would I ask?

Look
What is certain is the creator didn't create us with any knowledge of 'shoot'.

Listen
Not in this go 'round.

Pause

Look
Nothing to be done.

Listen
As before...

Look
On your advice...a plan of action. Shall we flip a...

Listen
Flip a what, exactly?

Look
(*In despair*) A coin.

Listen
Which is?

Look
I haven't a clue.

Listen
Why mention it...?

Look
An image, a word planted by...

Look points upwards

Listen

The creator, yes...why point upwards to signify the creator?

Look

I don't know what's there. They're...there, for better or worse, and I know full well what is downward and that it is not the creator.

Listen

Do you know what's downward?

Look

The floor...our floor, our space, the firmament on which we walk, all we have.

Listen

You're so sure.

Look

Listen, we've enough doubt on our plate without our questioning the floor.

Pause

Listen

Plate?

Look

Aaarcgh...plate...coin...it's, coin...I can see it...

Listen

Where.

Look

In mine minds eye...coin, turn...spin, hands, on the other foot, toes...not our toes, but our toes for a time...with a coin...theory...law of odds...it's there, it's there with the tree...or they're both there, both here, both with me, but not together...it's...it's not enough. It's not enough. There are fragment going 'round, fractured go 'rounds. Us, we two, yet not us...they don't know us, but we know them. Why? We were them. They knew...they were given enough, yet I...yet you keep on about this damned tree with no clearer sense of what it or coin or plate or shoot actually is.

Listen

Look, the tree gave us comfort, it anchored us.

Look

Did it? So you say, but did it? Better still, what was it? You don't know, I don't know, they might, but they're...what you will, and the creator certainly must have else we wouldn't be having this conversation.

Listen

If the creator knew and we once shared a consciousness with the creator...why wouldn't we know all this? Why wouldn't we know what it knows?

Look

We'd be the better for it if we knew.

Listen

Would we?

Look

Oh, probably not...our circumstances would be no different. I might feel better for knowing.

Listen

I might feel worse...but I'd want to know, were it an option. We do, though, appear to have imbued with a relatively high degree of intelligence.

Look

I might ask to what degree exactly, but, yes, I'd be hard pressed to say we aren't of a particularly enlightened stock – much good has it done us. Bit of a double edged sword though, isn't it.

Listen

Drawing blood from both ends.

Look

Intelligence breeds skepticism, skepticism yields doubt, doubt enables one – or two in this case – to question so much as their very existence.

Listen

At your advise, a plan of action without coin. Exploration.

Look

What...do tell...is there...to explore?

Listen

The boundaries...the boundaries of our space, such as you have called it. You to that side, I to the other.

The two position themselves on either side of the circle respectively, not venturing from but testing the extent to which they are able to feel beyond the circle's cusp...

Listen

Are you there?

Look

Well, I'm principally here.

Listen
Principally where?

Look
At the circles edge.

Listen
So am I, but you're in the circle?

Look
Listen, you could look.

Listen
I'd rather not, tending to my own bit of void.

Look
You're there?

Listen
Where?

Look
In the void.

Listen
No, but I can certainly see it.

Look
I can't hear anything.

Listen
From me or the...void.

Look
At the moment, from neither but I can hear myself with crystal clarity. I sound
spectacular...

Listen
In the void?

Look
No.

Listen
Have we not been speaking?

Look
You've been speaking, then I've been speaking, then you've been speaking, and so
forth.

Listen
But we have been speaking to one another?

Look
Is there an alternative? Oh, this is positively futile...

Look stands...

Even were there some discovery to be made from extending ourselves as far into the void as we were able, what good would come of it?

Listen
When was 'good' ever our goal?

Look
Again I'll wait.

Listen
For the moment.

Look
Yes, Listen, for the moment.

Pause

Listen sits and begins to loosen the laces to his boots...

Look
No!

Listen
What?

Look
You were planning to remove your boots, were you not?

Listen
I was.

Look
Do not remove your boots.

Listen
My feet are sore.

Look
They're not.

Listen
I assure you they are.

Look

Perhaps they are, but haven't we gone through this before.

Pause

Listen

No, we've been through this before, but not this go 'round.

Look

But if you remove your boots we will have been through it this go 'round.

Listen

What does it matter?

Look

You can **not** remove your boots, it's within your power.

Listen

It's also within my power to not **not** remove my boots.

Look

But we've established you didn't **not** remove your boots before, which got us nowhere. This go 'round you can not remove your boots.

Listen

And we'll be the better for it, you suppose?

Look

Consider it an experiment.

Listen

Fair enough, the boots shall remain as they are. A game of questions, then?

Look

To what purpose?

Listen

Hasn't it proven to bide the time?

Look

Is that as much as we can hope?

Listen

When has hope ever been a factor?

Look

Do you actually believe I'm participating?

Listen

Doesn't your behavior reflect as much?

Look

Haven't we done this before as well?

Listen

Does that make a difference?

Look

Listen, why are you insisting on this inanity?

Listen

Would you rather I stopped?

Look

Yes!

Listen

Statement...I won!

Look

Did you? Seems awfully self-aggrandizing to name yourself the victor in a game for which you were the only willing participant. Further, a single point does not a victor make. You've made but one point.

Listen

And you've made none...?

Look

I have, as yet, made no point.

Listen

I have a point?

Look

Indeed, so you do, well done.

Listen

And you're pointless?

Look

I am for the moment without a point. You needn't gloat on the matter, we've more questions to ask. Proceed...

Listen

You're now playing?

Look

Haven't I made as much clear?

Listen
You've no reservations?

Look
What would be the point in reservations?

Listen
Is it merely a matter of making a point?

Look
Can points be made?

Listen
Do points exist?

Look
Is it possible to conceive of the singularity -a *point*- of existence so far as to arrive at a fixed point for which there is no counterpoint variance and yet sustain some manner of perceptual constant within said singularity?

Listen
Was that rhetoric?

Look
Does it demand any less response than if it weren't?

Listen
Was **that** rhetoric?

Look
No, but **that** was repetition. We're now equally matched in points.

Listen
We're both pointed?

Look
In a manner of speaking.

Listen
There must then be a third.

Look
How can there be a third if just we two?

Listen
Isn't it a frustrating dilemma?

Look
You're back at it aren't you?

Listen
Isn't it essential to resolution of the game?

Look
Will the game ever have a resolution?

Listen
Isn't this exhausting?

Look
Isn't it all?

Listen
Was that rhetoric?

Look
Enough.

Listen
State-

Look
ENOUGH.

Listen
Then haven't I wo –

Look
No, there is no victor if it is an unwinnable game. It's happened before and before and before, the questions, the boots...we shall wait abidingly. The less that happens the less likely any harm shall befall us as it has again and again and again as before.

Listen
Has it before?

Look
Do you not get that sense.

Pause

Listen
I do...but, Look, there's much happening. You're being created constantly, even now, as am I, as are they...I suppose. As equation, if I may?

Look
You may.

Listen
There is you.

Look
No, here is me.

Listen
Precisely...Look, you plus...

Listen moves Look a circular step to Look's right –or left- pivoting him with every addition...

You plus...

Another step...

You plus...

Another step...

You. The result?

Look
I'm back precisely where I'd been before.

Listen
Yes, all these separate yous now equal you **and** them.

Look
I'm now myself plus myself?

Listen
Yourself plus all the selves that passed in the interim. Though you are where you began, you're more than when you started.

Look
I see...and how does this get us any further than we'd been before.

Listen
It doesn't.

Look
I see...

Listen
But it's likewise the case for me and them...I suppose. Irrespective of the creator we are created and recreated by the passage of time.

Look
The point of which is what?

Listen

To pass the time.

Look

By adding ourselves to ourselves to ourselves?

Listen

It diverts time from the alternative, does it not?

Look

Which is?

Listen

Nothing.

Look

That...it does...but, Listen, there must have been a point of conception...of inception. It's begun, we start again and again and again and again.

Listen

Or end again and again and again.

Look

Or both, but by our mere conception we came into being, if in the abstract.

Listen

I preferred it then, many more possibilities when one exists in the abstract.

Look

Yes, but for us to now be here, hopeless and miserable though we are, proves that moment of conception, that moment beginning. It can then be assumed that there was a moment when the creator created, otherwise we'd not be here, but in order for the creator to exist, the creator has to have created, which obviously is did, visa-vi us. Therefore the creator is as dependent on us for its existence as we are on it. Without the creation there is no creator, and at the moment of creation, when consciousness was conferred upon us by the creator, when our consciousness was created it was shared by the creator, thus in the moment we were both creator and created. All this purely abstract, but as we are, we can't not be, and in being and being created, the creator relies on us for being as well. In effect, we created the creator, and now...NOW, the creator is the abstract and we the actual, creating the creator in order to be created.

Pause

Listen

Comforted?

Look

Not in the least.

Listen

I still prefer the one that gave us the tree. It afforded one a sense of being anchored.
As it is I feel adrift.

Look

Not much worry being adrift in so small a sea.

Listen

It's not so small in the abstract.

Look

Leave that sea to the creator...and the tree for that matter.

Listen

That's well and good...and redundant, though how do they factor into this matter of our being the creator of the creator? Where do they fall in that perfectly unconvoluted tract? Did the creator create them? Did we?

Look

I...have no explanation for them. They seem to pose no threat. It's likely best not to question the creator.

Listen

Why is that?

Look

And here...I've just been contradicted by demonstration.

Listen

How do you mean?

Look

And again...to question me is to question it, to challenge it –

Look gestures to the audience, Listen, self, 'the heavens'...

– to challenge the creator. Have we not thoroughly exhausted this topic?

Listen

Not in this go 'round.

Look

No, I suppose not. It's not so much a matter of our inability to question the creator, as demonstration as shown, as the pointlessness of our so doing.

Listen

Is it any more pointless than all the other means by which we occupy ourselves?

Look
You're not without a point, it does while away the idle hours.

Pause

Listen
Hours?

Look
Minutes?

Listen
Seconds?

Look
All relative, it seems.

Listen
Performance?

Look
Drama?

Listen
Comedy?

Look
Tragedy?

Pause

Listen
What, though, if...we were being created even now?

Look
We are being created now...one, plus, one, plus, one...I don't want to credit you for a legitimate point, but I thought you demonstrated it quite well.

Listen
No, wait...in order to have created, in order for that moment of shared consciousness, as you say, there would have to have been that moment. What if this is that moment, what if the creator is creating us now. Each word spoken ours, yours, mine and the creator, being created now.

Pause

Look
Impossible.

Listen
Why is that...?

Look
Where is the creator if creating us now?

Listen
Where are we?

Look
Are we a product of the creator's imagination, or the creator the product of our imagination? I don't want to be here.

Listen
Perhaps your not, perhaps we are even now words on a...

Interrupting Listen, a book descends upon the lit circle, instantly drawing both Look and Listen's undivided attention. A black book on which a spiral has been sketched in what may seem chalk. The two circle is, assessing whether or not to disturb its place of rest...

Look
What is it?

Listen
It's a book.

Look
Well, yes, obviously it's a book. What do you suppose its contents?

Listen
It's at our disposal, is it not? Hardly requires any lofty supposition.

Listen peruses the contents of the manuscript. Listen reads from the book, though seeming to Look to be replying...

Listen
It appears to be a transcription of everything that has passed between we two this go 'round, up to and including the last statement just spoken.

Look
What statement was that?

Listen
That also...

Look
What also?

Listen

Your enquiry as to what statement was made.

Listen reads from the book...

Listen

‘What statement was that’...? It appears to be the last entry.

Look

That statement or the statement made prior to that?

Listen

Your last statement, which I should phrase more properly as the question made prior to your most recent – again, more a query than a statement – concerning my statement, which was in effect less a statement and more a prescribed line of dialogue but became, as a result of its being recited, a statement.

Look

It all strikes me as a bit convoluted.

Listen

Odd that you should think that anything but expected, but if in doubt I might suggest examining it yourself to gain some insight and clarity.

Look

Can I expect either?

Listen

I very much doubt it.

Look peruses the pages of the book, bewildered yet entranced...

Look

I...huh, actually it’s not convoluted at all if given a chance to be read. I wasn’t entirely certain about the claim of our being created creators of our own creator, but in reviewing it seems to make perfect sense.

Listen

Is that reassuring?

Look

Meagerly. This is incredible...

Listen

Is it?

Look

You truly are dense, you realise that? I was obviously written to have been the more intellectually savvy of this unfortunate duo.

Listen

Inasmuch as anything was written to mean anything.

Look

Inasmuch as anything was written to mean anything, I was obviously meant to be the more intelligent.

Listen

The more intelligent, perhaps, but the less sympathetic.

Look

Only to those disposed to suffering fools gladly. All a matter of perspective.

Listen

And the perspective of your superior intelligence?

Look

Brilliant of you to ask, I retract all...not all, some. Listen, this is the means of our escape.

Listen

Escape to where...

Look

Does it matter? From the very play itself, from the games of questions, from trees and plates and coins and shoot...or to trees and plates and coins and shoot, perhaps to some certainty or uncertainty, does it matter? An escape from the inevitable end...it's not written. Listen, it's not yet written.

Listen

What then do we do?

Look

We keep writing.

Listen

With what, exactly, do we keep writing?

The two look about the space at a loss. Listen eventually looks to Look's hat, circles him, removes his hat and the plume in its band. Look seizes the plume in excitement and scrawls across the first available page. Upon doing a corridor of light appears before Look extending from the circle into the unseen beyond. Unbeknownst to Look, an identical corridor likewise appears simultaneously opposite the first, leading from the unseen beyond into the circle.

Look

Hah!

Look begins to write feverishly, muttering whilst making towards the corridor, face buried in the book...

Look

It shall be a theatrical representation of Phi, triangular, reticulating implosion-

As Look exits there instantly appears from the opposite corridor a second figure, identical to Look in dress, also muttering as though continuing the statement being made by the original Look upon exiting. This second Look, face also buried in a second identical book paces towards the centre of the circle where Listen stands...

Look

-concentric, reticulating collapse leading to...

This second Look raises its head from the pages of the second identical book to be met with a bewildered Listen. This second Look, regards the entire space, obviously unnerved.

Second Look

FUCK!

This second Look hurriedly exist from the corridor of light from which it entered, at which time the first Look (hereafter again 'Look') instantly appears from the corridor of its exit. Once having re-entered the space both corridors fade, leaving the circle as it had been.

Listen

Odd, you've not said anything of that sort before.

Look

Said anything of what sort?

Look/Listen

You were there...

Look gestures to the now faded point of exit...

Look/Listen

Was I?

Listen

I don't recall having moved. You though were there...

Listen indicates opposite entrance...

Look

Was I?

Listen

I do admit your appearance was noticeably different.

Second Look

And the hat?

Listen

Both I and the hat remained perfectly stationary, insofar as I'm aware, throughout the entire interval. Only you appeared to cross any distance. All relative, I suppose...it may have actually been that the hat and I moved and it was you that was stationary, but that's certainly not how it seemed.

Second Look

How then did I...

Listen

Another Look...

Look

Another Listen...

The two look to one another, and from one another to the once-lit corridors.

Listen

How many more...and when? That Look and Listen is now as we are now or as we were then...and now, perhaps, though that now may have been then for another Look and Listen, another us now.

Look

Our now is the now...isn't it?

Listen

It's a now.

Look

And they're now might be our then?

Listen

Precisely...and then for others, other Look and Listens, yet to come. Different in appearance, but all the same, all as we are.

Look

And they're now is our then?

Listen

Precisely.

Look

And others thens, our now?

Listen
Yes.

Look
Whose now is now?

Listen
Ours.

Look
And we are...?

Listen
Them.

Look
I see.

Listen
Look and Listen before the book, now. Look and Listen before the questions, now.
Look and Listen before the play...

Look
Look and Listen before the lights, now... Look and Listen after. Look and Listen, so many. Infinite... how terribly pitiable. I'd feel worse for them than I do for us if they weren't also us.

Again taking the pen and amending the revisions to the text, Look closes the book and surrenders the manuscript to Listen...

Look
I'm quite through with this book.

Listen
So you say. It though seems far from through with you or me for that matter.

Look
How do you mean? There's no more to be read...

Listen collects the book gently from an increasingly distraught Look and examines later pages...

Listen
No, no... here it is. All that bit that transpired before. It appears complete, shall I continue to its conclusion?

Look
Have I nothing to add?

Look consults the pages...

Listen
Well, yes, you just did and you've more dialogue.

Look
Dialogue? Why then would pages be left empty? Why would the suggestion be made that we had some control over the circumstances?

Listen
To our torment I suppose. Well, your torment...I'm finding it rather enlightening.

Look seizes the book, hurling it into the abyss beyond the pool of light...

Listen
It mentioned you'd being doing that...

Look sits clasping hands about either side of Look's head, eyes pursed...

Look
If it's to be oblivion for which we are destined, I'd as soon be oblivious.

Listen
It wasn't necessarily oblivion.

Look
Did you see the last page?

Listen
No.

Look
But there was a last page, which obviously we weren't meant or able to read. Were we, we would have, but rather we were scripted...I was scripted to toss it beyond our reach or means of retrieval, which was part of the script, though you didn't bother to mention that until after my doing it.

Listen
Could I have?

Look
Could you have? Would I have, if not for...would we, were we...could we...had we? Here we are with nothing but questions, and from the sky falls, what? Ah, some lovely encoded epistle with we are expected to drive ourselves towards hysterics.

Listen

Why do you assume hysterics were expected?

Look

Because I crossed that threshold long ago and am gaining by degrees with each passing moment!

Listen

What of them?

Look

Them?! Listen let's not be so passive...not 'them'. You...

Look addresses the audience directly...

You with your passive prying eyes, does this amuse you? We two made aware of other realities, of tedium and tree, made aware of you. Knowing you're there with no respect afforded us but what understanding you may or may not have of us...we who have no understanding of you beyond what's been written. We are so disposable to you...this soul, this consciousness, this being screaming at you now, however you choose to define it, occupying this form, possessing this body, however fleeting, however transient, constitutes my existence. And you, you observe from a distance, regarding this torturous spectacle with some lingering amusement, the most sensitive among you, perhaps, channeling the wrenching circumstances under which we writhe, mustering some abstract cathartic sympathy, but never compelled to act or intervene, and were I but able to suppress the paralyzing fear of what would become of me were I to step beyond the threshold of this light, I would visit bloody ruin on all your heads. What good is your sympathy to me?

I am as real...prove to me I am not. I stand before you now, I speak, I accuse you. In this moment, I am all you have...all that came before me, all that might come after is not now so real as I. And if performed well...as to you I am a performance, **your** performance, I will exist in whatever time I am allotted, the length of which is unknown and thus uncircumstantial to me...but, I will exist. I do exist. Exist! Not as a portrayal, not an actor manufacturing some affectation to give the illusion of existence. I will, I do exist. It is they that do not...these actors, these husks, these great and glorious puppets that have surrendered to my being. But by contrast, they can retain some confidence of a world to which they shall return once lights have faded. Where do I go? Where do we go?!?

The misery of our lives, its purpose is surely not that we function as metaphor for yours, not that we serve as a representation of your fears, your anguish. We are quite capable of representing our own, but only in whatever time you allow us. See me, hear me, know me...but still you remain convinced that a world at this moment you do not see, you do not hear is somehow the real and I the fantasy. I am the character of play, a fiction...you don't deserve to be our audience.

Listen

Look, they wouldn't be able to aid us even were they to have the gumption. We exist on a plane altogether separate to theirs...if we leave the light, if they enter it, this go

'round is no more. These bodies, these forms, ours for a time, would return to being as they were: two performers in dress without care for this go 'round.

Look
Surely they'd care.

Listen
Best to leave it be. Get on with it, as they say...

Look
They? What they? Listen, there is no they, you've merely been scripted to say so.

Listen
No more than you!

Look
And even were there a they, they have never said any such thing to me. Get on with it? I am it! It is that from which I have telescopically expanded. In the beginning there was it, and from it came us. It and I are inexorably intertwined.

Look strikes Listen, first hitting Listen in stomach and following this with a blow to Listen's face. Listen inexplicably appears unaffected much to Look's surprise, who pauses for a moment before reeling backwards as though having been punched in the stomach and lurching to the side as though hit in the face. The combination leaves Look prone on the ground.

Pause

Look
Now why do you suppose that happened, exactly?

Listen
Perhaps, following your hypothesis of creator being the created and vice-versa, the creator, then, the created, and we two being the creative creations and therefore interchangeable...you were in effect hitting yourself.

Look begins to recover, looking to Listen with fury...

Look
Now's no time to be injecting logic into this nonsensical farce of a travesty!

Pause

Look
I can't help but be completely perplexed as to the point of our being here, as to what function we serve.

Listen

And here I'd begun to reconcile myself to the fact that our being at all may be the point.

Look

For what are we the point, for whom if certainly not ourselves? Them? Are they following a moment of this? I'm having considerable difficulty myself and I apparently the subject of the damned play. For whom are we the point?

Listen

For the creator?

Look

Why did I even make the effort to ask?

Listen

You were ...you are bound by the contents of the script. I'd recite the exact exchange, but not to mention our now having it, you saw fit to discharge the manuscript to the void in which we seem the only point. Little matter that you did as that was likewise done in accordance with the script...we it's point.

Look

So it's to be absolute sway by a now vanquished script of which we are the unwitting victims, from which all our actions are predetermined? And by whom? An unseen creator whose actions are just as likely dictated by some arbitrary order over which it has as little control as we have over it. Which again raises the question, are we the point of origin or finality?

Listen

The creation of the point of the creator's being, thereby making us in a sense the creator's creator?

Listen

Or are we three a kind of conjoined symbiosis?

Look

Or the product of a highly self-referential, reflexive, nearly incoherent piece of theatrical drivel?

Listen

Or are we –

Look

Conducting a game of endless questions? For as little as we've accomplished, I've the nagging suspicion that's all we're granted, questions are all the creator was granted for that matter which based on this most recent exchange may be one in the same. It's all a game of questions...perhaps that is as near to truth as we're capable.

Listen
What?

Look
Precisely.

Pause

Look
Is it night or day...as though I've a clear concept of either?

Listen
Daytime, nighttime...all time.

Look
You've suddenly become a might cryptic.

Listen
So it seems. I'm certain it's night somewhere and elsewhere day.

Look
How are you certain?

Listen
I've been made to be.

Look
What is it here?

Listen
Does it matter?

Look
No.

Pause; Look regards the audience...

Look
They'd likely know if able and willing to be of any good use.

Listen
Their situation is significantly different to ours. They'll have both...night and day.
We'll have neither, naught but to question which it is for us, when for us it matters
least.

Pause

*Listen considers the situation at hand beginning to seem to take a subtle change of
tone.*

Listen

Oh, but they're no less characters than we. They have night and day, day and night, they know what it is, they move through it, but they're here now and if day and night are meaningless to us, it has no greater meaning to them. Anything beyond us, beyond them anything they might conjure, that is fantasy. They began when we began, how can it be proved, how can it be claimed otherwise?

Listen affects a voice in demonstration of how it could be otherwise claimed.

Listen

They **be-gan** when **we beg-an**.

Look

Not my meaning.

Listen

What is you're meaning?

Look

We are real, if for what time we have. Enacted, characters of play, speaking the words of that accursed book...that is the reality of now, whether they are able or willing to accept it. We speak, they do not, we live as much as they. All that is beyond this space cannot be proven so conclusively as we can. The equation of which you spoke...it's us plus one, them plus one, anything beyond is speculation.

Listen

Is that a comfort?

Look

As much as reality can be. This go 'round...

Listen

Has been and will be again, with scarce difference one from the other. They with different faces, we with different bodies. Different faces, night after night...

Look

Or day after day...

Listen

Time after time, but for us, one night, one day, one time. There will be other faces, though no difference known to us as we again discover this truth, such as it is, or come to accept it. Truth and discovery, again and again and again to no end and no satisfaction, with no knowledge ultimately gained.

Look

Truly, this is a rather abrupt turn for the solemn.

Listen

Nothing lost, nothing gained. A zero sum game, but a game all the same. Lights will fade, the circle will close, and we will be cast from whence we came before this go 'round.

Look

I thought I was the fatalist. There is the next.

Listen

The next?

Look

The next go 'rou-

The pool of light begins slowly to fade...

Look

Listen?

Listen

Look?

Look collapses, scrambling to Listen to whose legs Look clings in the dimming light...

Look

No, not now! Light! We've not...deciphered...Light! Listen, we need more time. We haven't made sense of it.

Listen

It likely wouldn't make a difference if we had an eternity...which we might.

Look

But...Light!...the same beginning, the same end, not knowing...Light!...not knowing how many time its been done, how many times gone through, if its going on elsewhere with other Looks and other Listens. They...it can't, not now. Light! Light! Light!

Abruptly lights return, revealing a curled Look and Listens, huddled together eyes closed. Gradually, Look opens an eye and releases Listen...

Pause

Look

Why do you suppose that happened?

Listen

You called for light, didn't you?

Look

I did, but...

Pause

What do you suppose distinguishes this creator from its predecessors? What had this creator to offer that warranted our being conjured anew?

Six corridors of light appear extending from the circles edge and branching into the unseen beyond, each equidistant from the other.

Listen
Mercy...?

The two, Look and Listen join in the center, regard each of the potential exits and tacitly agree upon the exit taken previous by Look alone. Upon exiting the second Look, seen before, now enters with a second Listen. These two regard the circle, regard each other, turn and exit through the point from which they entered at which time both the first Look and Listens reappear.

Third Look
Merciful, is it? Still to your illumination or are you yet as tormented as I?

Third Listen
Not yet tormented, no. Perhaps despairing. Though what were we to...

Listen gestures in indication of their attempting an exit not yet taken.

Third Look
Listen, let us see.

Impatiently, Look takes Listen by the wrist leading the way through the suggested corridor. As before, an identical Look and Listen appear opposite this exit, this second Look tossing this second Listen towards the circles centre.

Third Look
Satisfied? Ourselves plus ourselves plus ourselves, and we are...?

Third Listen
Precisely where we were before.

Third Look
An experiment, if I may?

Third Listen
You –

Third Look
Rhetorical, Listen...rhetoric as it has always been and will always be.

Look takes Listen by the coat shoulders, forcefully sending Listen again through the corridor from which they most recently entered.

Third Look
Cyclical, rhetorical, self-referential, redundancy leading to...

The first of the Listens reappears opposite the third Look.

Listen
Fuck...

Third Look
Fuck, indeed.

This third Look exits through the corridor through which the third listen was tossed, at which point the first Look appears from behind the re-entered Listen.

Look
I'll not bother with its definition, but it sounds to be a apt description of our situation.

Listen
What more?

Look assumes a seated position in the circles centre as first introduced at the play's opening.

Look
We wait as before.

Listen
Without conclusion?

Look
No until we are offered a definite passage, a point...

Listen
We're once more pointless

Look
When were we not?

Listen joins Look, the two again seated back-to-back.

Pause

Listen
Wait until what?

Look
Until one finite passage it presented to us.

Listen

From what? To where? How will we know and will we carry this knowledge into the next go 'round? Finite passage? Hasn't it all been? Finite and fina –

Lights again begin slowly to dim

Listen

Is this your finite passage?

Look

I suppose so. Let it come, I'll wait no more. Let it be now.

Listen

Now left without tree.

Look

Coin.

Listen

Meaning.

Look

Merely boundary...binding boundary, now and forevermore.

Listen

With no return until...

Look

Until the next.

Pause

Listen

Would it be a horrible confession of weakness were I to admit there scarcely being a second in which I wasn't utterly confused this go 'round.

Look

No...

Look regards the audience.

I rather suspect you're not alone.

Pause

Listen

Look, do you suppose we'll decipher the meaning of it all come the next go 'round.

Look considers the prospect for a moment...

Look

No...but I'll certainly make an effort to enjoy it more. Let come the next –

The phrase hangs in darkness, silent, all light having now faded to black. A moment passes after which a spiral of light replaces the once lit circle, rotating in an implosive revolution, both Look and Listen now absent...or better, elsewhere.

The spiral then fades to black...

Narrative
A Play by Adam Brummitt

The Play

Visually central to the performance is a white bed adorned with white sheets and a white pillow on which lies a figure. The gender or other such physically distinguishing attributes of the figure are inconsequential – it is not necessarily ideal provided the minimal action required of this figure, but for all intents and purposes the figure could be a mannequin or a non-human object – though it is preferable to have all audience-visible areas of the figure unclothed. The figure will remain on the bed for the duration of the performance.

Behind the white-lit figure is a projection of a reader sat at a table. The table includes a lamp for sake of the reader's vision as well as to make visible his or her reading. Again, the attributes of the actor/reader – save for its ability to read – are inconsequential. There may or may not be a microphone into which the reader speaks. If able to not make too flagrant the fact, it should be made known that the script from which the reader is reading is the script to the play 'NARRATIVE'.

*During the period of 'space', lights should be taken to absolute darkness. No matter Health and Safety regulations, this **will** be disrupted by illuminated exit signs or whatever else might prevent as near to absolute darkness as can be achieved. The play opens in this darknes...*

READER

What is it? It is sound, it is speech, it is all. But all is not sound, not speech. Sound is not speech but it's vessel. Speech is unproven...speech is you. You are unproven. It is now sound, proven, but not without you, unproven. Its proof requires your unproveable acceptance of its proof. It is all...it is speech, unproven, and therefore nothing. An equation: it is all, you are its lack of proof, you are nothing, all is nothing.

Space

The projection of the reader now becomes visible though the bed and its occupant remain in as near to darkness as is possible. The reader may take its time in sorting paper, sipping from a drink should it have one, adjusting the chair in which it sits. This is the case for the behaviour of the reader throughout the play excepting those moments specifically written otherwise.

READER (cont'd)

What is it? It is darkness. Does darkness take away the pain of day?

It was a song.

It was sung.

That the song was sung cannot be proven. It knows it was sung... its knowing is unproven. It is spoken. Its speech is unproven, its speech is you, you are unproven, You are nothing.

Lights now reveal the white bed and its occupant. As with the reader, unless having chosen an inanimate object, the figure may effectively do as it will so long as remaining in the bed, apart from speaking. Exception to this may further be masturbating, excessively scratching itself, or acts that do not emerge organically from the figure or distract from the reader.

READER

Darkness is all. Darkness is not speech, unproven. Darkness is your representation of nothingness. The void is not nothingness. The void is not dark. The void is unproven. It knows the void. Its knowledge is unproven. Its proof is spoken. Speech, unproven. Prove to it you speak. Prove to it your proof. Your proof is unspoken, your proof is unproven.

Space

In the passages written in the dialogue of As Yet Untitled, the reader may choose to speak the character's name prior to its dialogue or affect some manner of voice differentiating the two.

Teacher: And how have you been occupying yourself, Creature?

Creature: Actually, I've been reading analysis of your work...

Teacher: Or worse. Have you discovered anything of interest, Creature?

Creature: I...do wish you'd not call me creature, Sir.

Teacher: I've no doubt, Son...and if wishes were horses all beggars would ride. Mind, I've often wondered why they wouldn't eat the horse, being beggars, but I suppose metaphors aren't very nourishing.

Space

Is it a play? **Is** it? Is, am, to be. Is it? It is everywhere. It is all. Is it all a play? It is now. What it is not is unproven. Is it proven? Is it proven? Is it a play? Is a play proven? It is.

Space

It did not enter through the door. The door is unproven.

Space

It is not your mother.
It is not your father.

It is not your genitals.
Is it a play?

Space

Prove to it your being, prove to it you are! Proof through sense, unproven, proof through speech, unproven, through knowledge unproven, through anger unproven, through love unproven. Prove through proof, unproven. Prove it is a play. Prove it is the play. Prove your proof through sense, speech, knowledge, love, and anger unproven.

Space

Teacher: But what have you made of scholarly take of my...works, Creature?

Creature: It seems they all attempt to make sense of your work.

Teacher: Indeed...do they succeed?

Creature: It's impossible to assess, really. It's quite clear that your works were never meant to make sense, though each argument is...plausible.

Space

It is. It is proven in its unproven speech, its lack of proof. Its lack it. It is. It is proven. It is all. Its being is all that offers proof. What is it? It is proven. Is this it? All is unproven. It is all. It is proven. It is both proven and unproven. What is it? It does not ask to be proven. It does not ask. It is...isn't it?

Space

What is it? It is a representation. What does it represent? It represents itself. What is it? It is all. All is a representation?

Space

It was said once to have been said,

Since first attending events at the theatre I was acutely aware of the power unconsciously devoted to the audience. To this day, no matter how immersed I may be, with the few odd exceptions, there occurs to me a moments when - not merely by interpretation, but in actuality - I own the whole of the performance. A West End production with a budget more than my yearly earnings could be instantly interrupted if I so chose. I've mentioned this impulse to some and their eyes widen as though that would be the greatest insult to gods of theatre, cruel in some sense...and it is. As an audience member of the theatre, I am a god. I am Prometheus with the knowledge of a fire that could destroy the entire reality of a collaborative attempt at perfection. Were I to stand and do most anything - call to the actors, spontaneously erupt with emotion, perform an odd improvised dance, sing a contemporary rock ballad acapella, urinate on the floor, drop trawl and appear to shit, actually shit, and, though uncreative and an

obvious choice, masturbate - all these and far, far less and an entire amphitheatre, a small black box, a class, a park of many observers would become mine. Waltz on stage, and you are immortal... all eyes riveted on you, actor, audience, and as many members of the production team as you would hope to be there. On some level I can't help but feel it would be an act of courage, and to this day I'm not entirely certain - beyond some deeply engrained sense of bullshit politeness - why I never have.

In this interval of darkness, both the projection of the reader and the figure – which may require a certain creative convention – will be seen to light, as simultaneously as can be achieved, a cigarette. The figure will have a white ashtray set beside its white bed. The reader will have an ashtray of what colour it please.

Space

What is it. It is smoke. It is illegal. A violation of law, unproven. Is it a play? Is a play a violation of law, unproven. It is smoke, unproven, permitted. A play is not a violation of the law. A play is the bastion of smoke.

Space

What is it? It is smoke. It is proven in sense, unproven. It whispers ephemeral, lingers, and passes without asking to be proven. It is transient, impermanent. Its transient impermanence is unproven. It is a sand painting, it is a joke, it is a kiss, it is rape, it is war, it is birth, it is a cliché, it is hackneyed. It is object, action, inertia, evidence, deduction, fear. It is all. It is smoke. It is unproven.

Space

Teacher: Each interpreter with its own universe creating its own sense.

Creature: Why are they so insistent? Why determinate? Why deny uncertainty?

Teacher: Science.

Creature: Science?

Space

What is it? It is absurdity. It is not being able to smoke in a Parisian Café, in a grotto pub. It is a need to smell nice no matter how incongruous it is with the surroundings. It is not smoking in a Parisian Café.

Space

It was once said to have been said...

I recall well the performance of my death. It was unintended, a misdirected turn of an unsteadied wrist despite months of rehearsal. I'd no sense of my collapse, but once

sprawled on the raked floor, blood pulsing in waves from my open wound it was obvious my life was escaping as quickly as the crimson pool in which I lay.

An actor stood above me, paralysed for the instant. Others came to lift me to safety, but I resisted, once more falling in a heap to the floor. At their feet, one made to what I was certain to be a plea for assistance, but with a slickened hand I latched to the leg of a cuffed pair of trousers.

I smiled...let me die on this stage. Let me have this, this one of my two greatest desires, and in the blur of consciousness I drifted to the other that had been realized long ago. A night in which I felt a strength not doubled until being brought to my conclusion on this occasion.

Younger, older...immortal. We had crept unnoticed into the theatre, a bare stage before us save for a spotlight at its centre which we entered with the grace of two dancers and an internal ferocity that stirred me into transcendence. I neither took my partner nor my partner me, the stage took us both.

My partners legs spread over mine, we both facing the hollow auditorium, we melded into one another and the space echoing our presence. The light positioned as it was, my vision was scalded beyond my ability to see the unoccupied rows of seats. The theatre and its absent audience meant nothing, though, the notion of the audience meant nothing - there might well have been a house of millions, silent and unseen, but it was no care of mine, no care more than the stage, the writhing body atop me, and the blinding pool of light in which we bathed. The acoustics of the intricate unseen walls amplified each and every of our most subtly made movements; at times moistened, slick whispers of the friction of flesh against flesh, at others unbridled and unbidden whines, sigh, moans...glory. If this sounds to have the tenor of a page ripped from a piece of overwrought erotica, it certainly could have been. If that strikes you as unimaginative or trite...you've obviously never fucked on a stage.

I was given what most I wanted in my life, to have fucked and died under lights on stage with no concern for anyone but myself. I my own audience, consumed by and enthralled in a performance to which no one had or would ever be treated. Yet as senses began to ebb and the forms of this world passed from my eyes, my limbs limp, what applause, what applause, what applause...

Space

Teacher: Seance...

Creature: You did, though, say science.

Teacher: Science, seance, aren't both an attempt to give meaningly to the essentially meaningless?

Creature: Is making sense their meaning?

Teacher: Aspiring to make sense is their meaning.

Space

What is it? It is smoke: sense, unproveable, ephemeral, unproven. It is impossible. It is impossible to conclusively, proven, determine, proven, correlation, proven, to translate to causation, proven. Conclusive, determine, correlation, causation, proven through speech, unproven.

Space

Teacher: But let us then give time to your paradigm.

Creature: I'd rather not.

Teacher: Appreciable, but really you've no choice in the matters. Beggars not able to be choosers and such...

Creature: Is there a beggar motif emerging?

Treacher: If I can manage more impoverished hyperbole, I won't hesitate to use it. Now, your paradigm.

Space

It was once said to have been said...

I once was preparing for a show, applying makeup, exercising my instrument, my apparatus, my voice. My holy voice through which I would communicate the transient yet magnanimous sermon of theatrical missives that would spur our audience to revolutionary action. It was to be the first stage in a mobilising effort that would herald an age of enlightenment and I was to be its harbinger, a singularly privileged role. It was one this topic that I was conversing with a fellow cast member, both we two knowing how essential our part was to be in the dawning of a new era. Obviously this would strike some a narcissistic, but we agreed we'd not want for our names to be associated with this awakening. It had been raining for most the day and thunder clapped in regular interval setting the perfect tone for a storm to wash from the world all the injustice, the ignorance and filth by which it had been plagued for so long. I dabbed my small sponge into the cake of concealer, and in that moment lights were lost in the dressing room. I was unconcerned; electricity would be restored or the performance would go on by candlelight undeterred. We say in the darkness, silent for the moment when a voice whisper in my ear. I can't be certain whether it was my fellow cast member or not, and I've not discussed it with anyone, but no matter by whom it was said what was said was clear:

'More and more it has occurred to me how very much I hate actors. It's been an intensely growing hatred that stems partly from my hatred of humanity, but of actors especially'...

As it continued, certain words the voice whispered appeared to flash against the walls of the dressing room which I could see in reflection from the mirror before me. It spoke again:

'This hatred threatens to cripple me, stifles my breath...'

Against the wall read 'hate', 'cripple', 'stifle'.

'What's worse is knowing that everyone is an actor, everyone! Including me...posturing wretches who have no self. There is no self, merely marionettes imbued with ego all of whom I hate, and I am not by nature a hateful voice, I am not by nature a hateful actor'.

'Everyone', 'wretches', 'posturing', 'nature'.

'Yet I reserve a particular hatred for those that proudly wave the banner of actor. Those puppets who disguise themselves as puppets to impress upon other puppets their being puppets'.

'Proud', 'puppets', 'disguise', 'impress'. The flash of words now were met by an accompanying clap of thunder that shook my chair. I'd no sense of time or place, as in a dream, though knowing I had not moved from my dressing room. The whispering was becoming increasingly violent in tone and seemed now to come from no one place, but surrounded me.

'I...I...I have put to myself the question of why I feel the wrath, the destructive loathing, why these people in particular are the object of my crushing rage'.

Against the walls: 'Wrath', 'Loathing', 'Rage'.

'It comes to this: actors persist in what they do despite knowing, knowing, the sheer futility of what they do. Others may be forgiven, might be forgiven for their stupidity, but actors, actors know it is futile. They know'.

Thunder seemed to topple the walls of the darkened room, all the words glowed with a burning luminance:

'Hate', 'Cripple', 'Stifle', 'Everyone', 'Wretches', 'Posturing', 'Nature', 'Proud', 'Puppets', 'Disguise', 'Impress', 'Wrath', 'Loathing', 'Rage', 'FUTILE'.

The flash, the thunder, and the whisper subsided until again all was silent darkness, and shortly thereafter lights were restored. Staring at myself, I added the remaining touches to my makeup and took the stage

Space

What is it? It is trust, unproven. It is not believed, not belief, unproven. It is not sense, unproven. It trusts it is. It is not believed it is. It is not sensed it is. It is, proven. It is.

Space

What is it? It is unproven, proven, all. It is proven. It is not darkness now. It is darkness now. Nothing is not darkness. What is it? It is representation. It is trusted

representation, unproven. What is it? It is trusted representation.

Space

Teacher: And now select your utensils.

Creature: A tooth brush, a dental scrapper, and a nail file.

Teacher: All very useful with a Paradigm.

This is a play. As Yet Untitled it the title of the play. This is the title of the play. This play is not now. This play is for another time.

Space

What is it? It is sound, it is speech, it is all. But all is not sound, not speech. Sound is not speech but it's vessel. Speech is unproven...speech is you. You are unproven. It is now sound, proven, but not without you, unproven. Its proof requires your unproveable acceptance of its proof. It is all...it is speech, unproven, and therefore nothing. An equation: it is all, you are its lack of proof, you are nothing, all is nothing. It has been a story.

Breaking the relative darkness, the doors to the performance space should be opened allowing light to flood lightly into the theatre. No house light should be raised and time should be allowed in the recording of the reader to remain projected following this closing command.

Go...

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