

*No Knowing Not Said:*  
How It Is *and* What Where

After *L'Innommable* Beckett found himself at an impasse. In a letter to Aidan Higgins in February 1952, Beckett indicates that the novel marks an endpoint in his writing, 'there being nobody left to utter and, . . . nothing left to utter about' (LII 318).<sup>1</sup> *L'Innommable* 'seems about the end of the jaunt as far as I am concerned', he asserts.<sup>2</sup> Just over a week later, writing to Bram and Geer van Velde's sister, Jacoba van Velde, Beckett elaborates on his predicament: 'I haven't been able to do anything since *L'Innommable*. It's the bottom of the barrel. Perhaps you'll understand why when you read it. I twist and turn, but to no purpose' (LII 321).<sup>3</sup> These twistings and turnings would become Beckett's thirteen *Textes pour rien*, short prose pieces 'torn off the placenta of *L'Innommable*',<sup>4</sup> begun, in fact, over a year before those letters were written.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Beckett undertook freelance work, translating Octavio Paz's *Anthology of Mexican Poetry* for UNESCO, and Georges Duthuit's study *Les Fauves*. He was also reading and translating Maurice Blanchot's work, an interest which began in 1948 when Duthuit sent him one of Blanchot's articles.<sup>6</sup> By 1950 Beckett had read Blanchot's *Lautréamont et Sade* (1949), commenting that there are 'some very good things in it. A few tremendous quotations that I did not know, in the style of the one I knocked up for you from the *120 Days*. Hard to single out one passage to translate, but I managed to and started on it' (LII 211).<sup>7</sup> Beckett began to translate Blanchot's book, announcing to Duthuit on 3 January 1951: 'I have finished the Blanchot. It makes 12 pages of

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Beckett to Aidan Higgins, 8 February 1952 (LII 319).

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Beckett to Aidan Higgins, 8 February 1952 (LII 319).

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Beckett to Jacoba van Velde, 19 February 1952 (LII 321).

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Beckett to Jen Wahl, 8 July 1951 (LII 263).

<sup>5</sup> Beckett began writing the *Textes pour rien* on Christmas Eve, 1950, and completed them in December of the subsequent year (Cohn 2001, p. 194).

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Beckett to Georges Duthuit, 28 October 1948: 'Thank you for your kind letter with the Blanchot article' (LII 107).

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Beckett to Georges Duthuit, Friday December 1950.

text. Some excellent ideas, or rather starting points for ideas' (LII 219). Beckett had also read Blanchot's collection of essays *Faux Pas*, discussing with Duthuit whether it would be wise to include a translation of Blanchot's introduction, 'From Anguish to Language', in the journal: 'I think it would be right to leave the foreword to *Faux Pas*, which could really only go out as separate aphorisms, in another issue' (LII 219)

Beckett's interest in the Marquis de Sade goes back to the early 1930s. Laura Salisbury reminds us that Beckett may have first encountered Sade in 1931 when he was reading Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony*, and Shane Weller notes Beckett's reference to 'Sadism' in his 1930–31 lectures on Racine (Salisbury 2012, p. 71; Weller 2008, p. 108). In a rich and oblique letter to Thomas McGreevy dense with reference and allusion (in which Beckett analyses the importance of Cézanne's painting) he quotes Sade from *La Nouvelle Justine ou, Les Malheurs de la vertu* (1797), asking if there could be 'any irritation more mièvre than that of Sade at the impossibilité d'outrager la nature' (LI 223).<sup>8</sup> Four years later Beckett was on the point of accepting a commission from Jack Kahane, founder of Obelisk Press in Paris, to translate Sade's *Les 120 Journées de Sodome, ou l'école du libertinage* (1785). Beckett was ambivalent about the commission. Though the money was good – 150 francs per 1,000 words – and he had a long-standing interest in the author, he was concerned about how being known as the translator of Sade would reflect on his reputation as a writer. On the 11 February 1938 Beckett outlined his dilemma to McGreevy: 'Though I am interested in Sade & have been for a long time, and want the money badly, I would really rather not' (LI 605). He expresses the same dilemma in a letter to George Reavey of 20 February 1938: 'I should like very much to do it, & the terms are moderately satisfactory, but don't know what effect it wd. Have on my lit. situation in England or how it might prejudice future publications of my own there' (LI 604). Nonetheless, he acknowledges Sade's book as 'one of the capital works of the 18th century' (LI 604). The next day, on 21 February, in a letter to McGreevy, he describes *Les 120 Journées de Sodome* in terms of a counterpoint between descriptive excess and structural rigour, a tension which is evident in much of Beckett's own writing, particularly *Watt* and *How It Is*: 'The obscenity of surface is indescribable. Nothing could be less pornographical. It fills me with a kind of metaphysical ecstasy. The composition is extraordinary, as

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Beckett to Thomas McGreevy, 8 September 1934 (LI 226). Beckett is quoting Sade: 'L'impossibilité d'outrager la nature est, selon moi, le plus grand supplice de l'homme' (LI 223)

rigorous as Dante's' (LI 607).<sup>9</sup> Beckett returns to Sade in the early 1950s. On Monday, sometime around 8 January 1950, Beckett writes to tell Duthuit that he has translated four letters by Sade, taken from an edition by Gilbert Lely (LII 222). On the recommendation of Duthuit, Beckett reads, and translates parts of, Pierre Klossowski's *Sade mon prochain* and Maurice Heine's collection of essays *Le Marquis de Sade* edited by Gilbert Lely (LII 225):<sup>10</sup> 'I have finished the Heine and started translating the foreword to the *Dialogue entre un prêtre et un moribund*, a text by Sade', though Beckett finds Klossowski's writing 'incomparably woolly rubbish' and concludes that, of these writers mentioned, 'Blanchot is by far the most intelligent' (LII 225).

Blanchot's readings of Sade illuminate, in striking ways, Beckett's poetics. In 'Insurrection, the madness of writing', *L'Entretien infini* (1969), Blanchot searches out the impulse behind Sade's work. Stripping away the narratological moment and the moral context out of which the acts described in Sade's writing emerge – 'the blasphemy to be uttered, the evil to be exhaled, the criminal passions to be sustained' – Blanchot identifies fundamental exigencies in the eighteenth-century writer's work: the obligation to say everything, to speak the unspeakable and to write with a compulsion and repetitive force that cannot be stopped. In terms that bring to mind the urgencies of both *The Unnamable* and *Not I*, Blanchot describes the 'irrepressible necessity of [Sade's] writing', describing it as 'a terrifying force of speech that would never be calmed. Everything must be said' (Blanchot 1993, p. 220). While subject to an imperative to say everything, Sade also 'says all that is not to be said and recommends the unspeakable' (Blanchot 1993, p. 221). Blanchot describes Sade's writing in terms of a 'frenzy', a 'violence that cannot be either exhausted or appeased', the 'excesses of a superb and ferocious imagination', yet this imagination is not in control of language (Blanchot 1993, p. 221).<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, it is 'always inferior to the transports of a language that will not tolerate stopping' (Blanchot 1993, p. 221). There is

<sup>9</sup> For an astute and comprehensive analysis of Beckett and Dante, see Caselli 2005.

<sup>10</sup> *Le Marquis de Sade*, ed. Gilbert Lely (Paris: Gallimard, 1950); Pierre Klossowski, *Sade mon prochain: Le philosophe scélérat* (Paris: Seuil, 1947).

<sup>11</sup> Here Blanchot recapitulates key points from his earlier work *Lautreamont et Sade* (1949), which Beckett read, in which he explicates the relation between the said and the unsaid in Sade's writing: 'everything said is clear, but seems at the mercy of something unsaid, which a bit later is revealed and is again incorporated by the logic, but, in its turn, it obeys the movement of a still hidden force. In the end, everything is brought to light, everything comes to be said, but this everything is also again buried within the obscurity of unreflective thought and unformulatable moments' (Blanchot 2004, p. 9).

no law that can arrest the impulse of Sade's writing; the 'repetitive force' of his narration 'encounters no interdict' (Blanchot 1993, p. 221). The Beckettian poetic is, however, quite different to that of Sade in this regard. Beckett's writing is subject to an interdiction that obliges, controls and passes judgement on those who speak in his work. In her article 'Samuel Beckett, Lecteur de Sade: *Comment c'est est Les Cent vingt journées de sodomie*' Elsa Baroghel articulates the complex differences between Beckett and Sade, arguing that in Beckett's world 'the philosophical stability and the implacable logic that Sade claims is precarious, continually threatens to draw into its fall the illusion of the unity of the subject' ('la stabilité philosophique et la logique implacable dont Sade se réclame sont branlante, risquant en permanence d'entraîner dans leur chute l'illusion de l'unité du sujet') (Baroghel 2016, p. 133).

Blanchot describes the Sadean narrative in terms that recall Beckett's work: the 'repetitive force of a narration' and the 'monotony of its terrifying murmur' (we remember here the murmur with which *Not I* begins and ends) (Blanchot 1993, p. 221). What distinguishes Beckett from the Blanchotian Sade is the role of authority – the rule of law – in writing. Sade's narration 'encounters no interdict . . . because there is no other time than that of the interval of speaking [*l'entre-dire*] the pure arrest that can be reached only by never stopping speaking' (Blanchot 1993, p. 221). Sade's narrative seeks an excess of saying in order to reach the unspeakable. In contrast, Beckett's narrative is subject to an unknown authority, confined within the parameters of a pensus defined by obligation and impossibility: the agonistics of speaking in order to be silent.

Throughout Beckett's writing the speaking body acts often as a substitute for the body that suffers the obligation to speak. Weller underlines the Sadean intertext of *How It Is* noting the direct reference to Sade in part two of the novel – 'sadism pure and simple no since I may not cry' (GII 455) – and that 'the word "orgy" is used in reference to the impossibility of any community that would overcome that radical isolation of the individual which will be affirmed at the end of the novel: "orgy of false being life in common"' (Weller 2008, p. 110; GII 459). *How It Is* articulates a logic through which the act of speaking dislocates the speaker from himself, compelling the other to speak for the self. In the novel the body of the other is a necessary site of translation through which the voice without may become the voice within. Both tormentor and victim, the one who hears and the one who speaks, recognise the necessity of this substitution. Each acknowledges the inevitable circularity of their circumstance whereby the tormentor will become victim and victim, tormentor, in an endless chain

of substitution through which the murmur of language is translated. The speaking of oneself which is required by the pensum to which the unnamable is subject involves the passage beyond and through the boundaries formed by the tympanum and the skin, which divide the world from the word. It is by passing these boundaries that the speaker of *How It Is* seeks to speak of himself and to hear himself speak.

The complex aporia of which Beckett writes centres on the silence, the speaker and the self. In order to reach the silence the speaker must speak of the self. But in speaking, the self is always other to itself. The words with which one speaks are always the words of the other. When one speaks it is always the other that speaks. One can never speak of oneself, for even if one tries to speak of oneself, that which one says comes from the other. If one could get the other to speak, to speak of oneself, then self and other would be reunited. There would be no distinction between 'I' and 's/he'. There would no longer be an obligation to speak for there would no longer be the voice of the other forcing one to speak. There would only be silence.

In *The Unnamable* Beckett describes this paradox through the voice of a speaker who vacillates between self and other, who is both and neither. This voice traces a line between inside and outside, and forms the tympanum through which the voice of the other comes to the self. The tympanum is the membrane which both receives and gives birth to the voice. It circumscribes the limit and boundary of the body through which the voice must pass in order that it may be spoken. It engenders the speech which, in Beckett's work, is always a citation. In *How It Is* Beckett enacts this paradox through the voice of the speaker, who attempts to speak of itself through the other, but cannot since the words which it forces the other to speak are already the words of an other. The speaker of *The Unnamable* describes the pensum under which he labours as a 'Strange task, which consists in speaking of oneself' (U 27; GII 305). At the close of the novel the speaker specifies the complexities of this obligation and the relationship it demands between self and other:

there I am far again, there I am the absentee again, it's his turn again now, . . . he's the one to be sought, the one to be, the one to be spoken of, the one to speak, but he can't speak, then I could stop, I'd be he. (U 131; GII 405)

The 'I' who becomes the absentee in speech must get the 'he' to speak. If the third person can speak for the first, then the pensum given to the unnamable will be discharged and the frantic speaker of *The Unnamable* can be silent. By speaking of the other, or speaking the other, the distance

between self and other is resolved. However, the unnamable's solution to the problem posed by his pensum, as we see in *How It Is*, and later in *What Where*, is not a simple procedure, producing works that are 'endowed with . . . uncompromising violence' (Hill 2010, p. 10).

The ear of *The Unnamable* becomes the entire body of *How It Is*. The tympanum that translates the murmur of the voice into words in *The Unnamable* becomes the skin through which the voice must pass in *How It Is*. The body of *How It Is* is not a vehicle for the transmission of the word. Rather, it is the space in which the unintelligible, indistinguishable murmur of language is embodied and translated and produced. Within this space language makes sense: through the body language is spoken. The text of *How It Is* pierces the membrane that distinguishes between self and other, between the voice without and the voice within. This membrane is the skin of the other that the narrator parts in his attempts to force the other to speak, and in so doing eliminates the distinction between self and other. The elimination of the distinction between the body of the narrator and the body of the other gives voice to the other. But what kind of voice is this? Does it fulfil the obligation with which the unnamable was burdened? Perhaps not, for the words which the narrator forces the other to speak are not his own words. They come to him as the words of an other. *How It Is* is an enactment of the desire to speak of oneself with one's own words and to abolish the distinction between the 'I' and the other which the utterance of those very words introduces.

The distinction between the 'I' and the other is written into the texture of the novel itself in terms of interruption or rupture. The gaps in the text introduce a discontinuity in the narrator's speech, suggesting that something has been said, beneath the white space of the interval, which the eye of the reader will never grasp. This interruption is the mark of the disjunction between the speaker and the other from whom the words come. In *The Infinite Conversation* (1969) Maurice Blanchot makes a distinction between three kinds of interruption in language; the 'ordinary pause' or 'discontinuity' which 'ensures the continuity of understanding'; the 'wait that measures the distance between two interlocutors'; and the interruption which measures 'the foreignness between us' (Blanchot 1993, pp. 76–77). It is of the latter two interruptions that Beckett writes in *How It Is*. Though there is only one voice speaking in the novel, two bodies are involved, and it is through the interruption that is integral to the text of the novel that Beckett plays out the desire of the speaker to achieve what Blanchot describes as 'an immediate relation wherein the same and

the other seek to lose themselves in one another' (Blanchot 1993, p. 77). This immediate relation is to be achieved by forcing the other to speak for the self and thereby 'making of it its own thing' (Blanchot 1993, p. 77). Yet in *How It Is* the identity between self and other through speech is impossible since the Blanchotian interruption interposes an irreducible distance between speaker and spoken which, rather than eliminating the distance between both, further emphasises the 'separation, fissure, or interval that leaves him [the other] infinitely outside me, but also requires that I found my relation with him upon this very interruption' (Blanchot 1993, p. 77). *How It Is* is written from the interval of this interruption. Its words trace a circular and unending movement towards conjunction between the 'I' and the other. It concludes with a demonstration of the futility of such a movement and the infinite distance between both as long as the 'I' is spoken.

Like *The Unnamable*, *How It Is* is a spoken text. The unnamable's resolve to 'transmit the words as received, by the ear, or roared through a trumpet into the arsehole, in all their purity, and in the same order, as far as possible' (U 66; GII 343) is reaffirmed by the voice of *How It Is*: 'how it was I quote before Pim with Pim after Pim how it is three parts I say it as I hear it' (H 7; GII 411). The speaker is not the origin of his voice, he cites the words of another: 'I say them as I hear them murmur them in the mud' (H 7; GII 412). The voice that prompts the narrator to speak comes from a distance in time and space. It is a 'voice once without' which traverses the speaker with tales of 'past moments old dreams . . . and memories' (H 7; GII 411). It originates beyond the narrator, but takes place within the narrator; it is 'in me that were without when the panting stops scraps of an ancient voice in me not mine' (H 7; GII 411). In *How It Is* the speech of the narrator does not originate in and is not under the control of the narrator. His body is a conduit for this ancient voice which speaks of 'my life my moments' (H 7; GII 411). But the telling of this life, the 'natural order more or less', is flawed in the transmission (H 7; GII 411). It is 'ill-said ill-heard ill-recaptured ill-murmured' (H 7; GII 411). It is a flawed text that must still be transmitted and recorded by 'someone listening another noting or the same' (H 7; GII 411). This reference to the reception and notation of the text refers to Krim and Kram, who act as witnesses to the voice:

of an ancient voice ill-spoken ill-heard murmur ill some ancient scraps for  
Kram who listens Krim who notes or Kram alone one is enough Kram alone  
witness and scribe his lamps their light upon me (H 145; GII 510)

The interplay between reader and writer characteristic of Krim and Kram is paralleled in the interplay between speaker and listener of Beckett's novel which is to be read, and heard, between intakes of breath which form intervals common to reader and narrator.

In his study *Beckett's Fiction* Leslie Hill analyses the position of the reader of *How It Is* as one who is 'not so much addressed by the novel as absorbed into it and is given the task of embodying Beckett's text as a process of linguistic production rather than interpreting it as a set of meanings' (Hill 1990, p. 135). Hill's analysis implicates the reader, and concomitantly the author, in the circularity of transmission, recording and production of the voice about which the narrator of the text speaks. The way in which the reader is directly implicated in the subject of the novel parallels the implication of the audience in a piece of theatre. Hill goes on to explore how the text of *How It Is* is 'more performative than descriptive or representational. It enacts, in the theatrical sense of the term, more than it recounts' (Hill 1990, p. 137). The theatrical aspect of *How It Is* is no doubt informed by Beckett's work in the theatre, and in radio, in the years between the completion of *The Unnamable* and *How It Is*.<sup>12</sup> Laura Salisbury underlines the connection, noting that the 'tireless linguistic permutations' characteristic of early to mid-prose such as *Murphy*, *Watt*, *Molloy* and *Malone Dies* are 'strongly reminiscent of the circus or vaudeville gags, such as the famous hat swapping routine that appears in *Godot*' (Salisbury 2012, p. 87). Beckett's experience of writing for the stage and for radio is evident in the performative style of *How It Is* which incorporates the rhythm of the spoken voice in the prosody of the written word. John Fletcher tells us that Beckett 'originally intended to issue his text as a block of words quite unbroken by typographical punctuation marks of any kind, subject only to the breath-pauses of the reader reading it aloud' (Fletcher 1964, p. 218). The typographical and syntactic innovations of *How It Is* cause the reader to echo the speech rhythms of the narrator including those pauses for breath that are indicated by the gaps in the text. Thus reading the novel becomes more 'a question of performance than interpretation' (Hill 1990, p. 138).<sup>13</sup>

On 6 April 1960 Beckett writes to Donald McWhinnie with a few thoughts on a text called 'From an Unabandoned Work' (which would

<sup>12</sup> In the intervening years Beckett wrote *Acte sans paroles I (Act Without Words I)*, *Fin de partie (Endgame)*, *All That Fall*, *Rough for Theatre I*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Fragment de théâtre II (Rough for Theatre II)*, *Embers* and *Acte sans paroles II (Act Without Words II)* (Cohn 2001, pp. 218–49).

<sup>13</sup> Garin Dowd underscores the proximity of Beckett's and Blanchot's thought in Dowd 2007, p. 33.



become *How It Is*) that the actor Patrick Magee was preparing to read at the Royal Festival Hall. Beckett is not optimistic about its potential as a piece for performance, advising that the best course of action is to 'gasp it out very short breath, into a microphone if possible, and hope for the best' (LIII 327). The letter gives an excellent *précis* of the novel:

A 'man' is lying panting in the mud and dark murmuring his 'life' as he hears it obscurely uttered by a voice inside him. This utterance is described throughout the work as the fragmentary recollection of an extraneous voice once heard 'quaqua on all sides'. In the last pages he is obliged to take the onus of it himself and of the lamentable tale of things it tells. The noise of his panting fills his ears and it is only when this abates that he can catch and murmur forth a fragment of what is being stated within. (LIII 327)

The narrator of the novel is on his 'face in the mud and the dark' (H 10; GII 413). He is a single figure, traversing the mud on his elbows with only a 'coal-sack to the feel small or medium five stone six stone wet jute' (H 8; GII 412) filled with tins of fish – 'on my elbow I quote I see me prop me up thrust in my arm in the sack we're talking of the sack thrust it in count the tins impossible with one hand keep trying one day it will be possible' (H 8; GII 412) – and a tin-opener which will, as the narration progresses, be put to alternative use. He claws his way through the mud with a measured physicality which resembles Watt's exaggerated walk: 'throw the right hand forward bend the right knee these joints are working the fingers sink the toes sink in the slime these are my holds too strong slime is too strong holds is too strong' (H 21; GII 421). His movements occur at specific intervals, 'right leg right arm push pull ten yards fifteen yards halt' (H 12; GII 421), which modulate the intervals of his speech creating the distinctive textual pattern of *How It Is*. While recognising a former life 'above in the light said to have been mine on and off no going back up there' (H 8; GII 412), his world is now circumscribed by 'the mud the dark I recapitulate the sack the tins the mud the dark the silence the solitude nothing else for the moment' (H 9; GII 412).<sup>14</sup> Binary distinctions trace the parameters of the novel. Distinctions between light and dark, above and below, fact and nostalgia, speech and silence, movement and stasis, self and other, text and absence of text, create layers of contrasts

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault also makes the distinction between the qualities of spaces above and spaces below when he writes of 'the space of our primary perception'. Foucault characterises this space in terms of intrinsic qualities: 'there is a light, ethereal, transparent space, or again a dark, rough, encumbered space; a space from above, of summits, or on the contrary a space from below, of mud' (Foucault 1986, p. 23).

which find their focus in the lines which separate them. These lines form a barrier and mark a passage from which the novel is written. These lines form also a thickness from which the voice speaks. The materiality of his environment has a distinct intertextual resonance with Dante's *Divine Comedy* – the mud of *How It Is* a parallel to that in the fifth circle where the Wrathful endure – as Daniela Caselli observes in her incisive study *Beckett's Dantes: 'Inferno VII is reconstructed in How It Is/Comment c'est'* 's painfully detailed exploration of the materiality of speech and its investigation of how repetition and reproduction confer the status of reality upon invisibility' (Caselli 2005, p. 156).

Beckett's writing explores and exploits the relationship between the shape and signification of language. He creates a literary structure which generates a tension or pressure within language, forcing it to signify through shape and sound as well as through structural interrelationships. Beckett's word is 'at the same time a sign which produces meaning through difference and opposition, and a sign producing intensity through force and singularity' (Lyotard 1993, p. 54). Beckett's writing works through opposition and intensity. In *How It Is* this opposition and intensity focus on the body: the body of text which is now visible, now invisible, the body of mud through which the body of the narrator progresses, and the body of the other which the narrator violates. The voice informs all of these bodies. It creates the distinctive textual pattern of the novel in which the recitation of the narrator is broken by pauses for breath:

she stops her eyes burn down on me again I cast up mine in haste and repeat awry

the air thrills with the hum of insects

that's all it goes out like a lamp blown out

the space of a moment the passing moment that's all my past little rat at my heels the rest false (H 17; GII 418)

Voice is a force which propels the narrator along his journey. This journey consists of the recitation of the tale 'before Pim with Pim after Pim' (H 7; GII 426). The voice causes the 'brief movements of the lower face' (H 7; GII 426) which produce his narration, but the same voice is also dependent on the corporeal gesture which produces sound: 'brief movements of the lower face no sound it's my words cause them it's they cause my words it's one or the other' (H 50; GII 442). The voice impels the body to speak even as the body enables the production of this speech.

The word is inseparable from its corporeal manifestation. It births itself through the mouth, 'say say part one no sound the syllables move my lips and all around all the lower that helps me understand' (H 19; GII 420), but this linguistic emission is also a corporeal excretion, 'I strain with open mouth so as not to lose a second a fart fraught with meaning issuing through the mouth no sound in the mud' (H 29; GII 427). The word only makes sense as it is produced by the body. Signification becomes corporeal. The incorporeal word without is made flesh within and becomes a product of the body: 'I fart and piss in the same breath' (H 42; GII 436). In *How It Is* the production of language is intimately linked with the body. While the speaker insists that he acts only as the conduit for a voice which precedes and supersedes him, the manifestation of that voice through the speaker is enacted in an intensely visceral manner. Like a fart, words are an excretion of the body and both have equal signification. Words are of the order of the body. The body which speaks does not so much cause the production of speech as suffer it. The alterity of language, the voice which comes from without, creates a rift between the speaker and his speech but cannot separate the two since without the body there would be no production of speech, no words murmured in the mud.

It is the other which obliges the self to speak, and in this obligation the self is erased. The 'I' of the speaker of *How It Is* is not his own 'I'. The one who voices the words 'I quote I see me' (H 8; GII 412) speaks not of himself but of a speaker anterior to him. The 'I' is always displaced. The speaker cannot even recognise himself in his own words for they are the words of another. There is no self-presence in this speech which is the recitation of another whose origin and location are unknown. Here in the world below the light, the world of mud, there is no self-recognition: 'and no again I'm sorry again no one here knows himself it's the place without knowledge whence no doubt its peerlessness' (H 134; GII 502). Knowledge necessitates recognition of the self for without such recognition one cannot take responsibility for one's own words. Without such responsibility one cannot properly speak of oneself. The urgency with which the unnamable pursues the identity of the 'I' and the attribution of the speaking voice is absent in *How It Is*. Issues of the identity of the speaker, 'who is speaking that's not said any more it must have ceased to be of interest' (H 23; GII 422), and of the coincidence of the speaker with the subject, 'how I got here if it's me no question too weak no interest' (H 23; GII 423), are still unresolved in *How It Is*.

In part two of *How It Is* the narrator encounters another body travelling in the mud:

smartly as from a block of ice or white-hot my hand recoils hangs a moment  
it's vague in mid air then slowly sinks again and settles firm and even with a  
touch of ownership already on the miraculous flesh (H 57; GII 446)

The touch of ownership that the speaker feels on the body of the other is the touch which, through pain and power, brings forth speech from that body. It is this touch which binds these two bodies in a relationship of power that is both visceral and linguistic. The body of this other is perceived by the narrator as inert matter, 'dumb limp lump flat for ever in the mud' (H 58; GII 446), which can be brought to life by the actions of the narrator: 'I'll quicken him you wait and see' (H 58; GII 446). This quickening is a linguistic quickening. It is the power of language inscribed on the body. This other body closely resembles the body of the narrator: 'he's a little old man we're two little old men' (H 60; GII 448). Body is laid against body, 'my head against his my side glued to his my right arm round his shoulders' (H 60; GII 448), until they are of one breath:

how long thus without motion or sound of any kind were it but of breath  
vast a vast stretch of time under my arm now and then a deeper breath  
heaves him slowly up leaves him at last and sets him slowly down others  
would say a sigh (H 61; GII 448)

The long peace is shattered by the sound of singing. This other emits 'a little tune' (H 61; GII 449) the words of which are incomprehensible. This body's ability to speak is proved by a physical investigation which confirms that the sound emanates from the mouth: 'the hand . . . encounters the mouth . . . the anatomy all astir lips hairs buccinators it's as I thought he's singing that clinches it' (H 62; GII 449). There is no intentionality to this speech. The body produces sound but is not aware of its own production. The body which speaks is always other to itself in that it does not recognise its speech as its own. It does not hear itself. The one who cannot speak can hear and the one who cannot hear can speak:

he can speak then that's the main thing he has the use without having really  
thought about it I must have thought he hadn't not having it personally and  
a little more generally no doubt that only one way of being where I was  
namely my way song quite out of the question I should have thought  
(H 62; GII 449)

In this passage Beckett raises an important distinction between speech and quotation as it relates to subjectivity. He who says 'I' does not speak, he

quotes the words of another. He who speaks does not say 'I'. What are we to make, then, of this utterance of the 'I'? Saying 'I' in *How It Is* does not constitute subjectivity; on the contrary, pronunciation of the first-person pronoun serves to emphasise the distance between the body who speaks and the subject from which the words originate, a subject which, for Beckett, is always under question. To the 'one way of being' (H 62; GII 449), the way of hearing, is joined another way of being, that of speaking.

The narrator cleaves to the body of this other traveller who, while similar in appearance and demeanour, is 'two or three inches shorter than me', and possibly younger: 'I put it down to seniority' (H 64; GII 451). Narrator and other are both unnamed; 'no more than I by his own account or my imagination he had no name any more than I' (H 66; GII 452). The distinction between self and other is confirmed by appellation: 'so I gave him one the name Pim for more commodity more convenience' (H 66; GII 452), but unlike *Watt*, in which the dog is named in order to distinguish it from all the other dogs, naming the other Pim engenders a self-identity which is then reappropriated by the narrator. The other is allowed to accustom himself to the name Pim; 'he was calling him by it himself in the end', before that name is reinscribed on the narrator: 'when this has sunk in I let him know that I too Pim my name Pim there he has more difficulty a moment of confusion irritation' (H 66; GII 452).

Rather than distinguishing the one from the other, the name Pim serves as a point of confusion between narrator and other. If both are named Pim, what is the difference between them? In *How It Is* the name is no longer a rigid designator which endures from one instance of utterance to the other. The name does not identify a particular figure.<sup>15</sup> In his study of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Rudolphe Gasché asks a question pertinent to *How It Is*: 'What, then, is the function of the name, if it has no necessary link to what it designates?' Gasché identifies the name as the primary announcement of the articulation of language:

Its role is merely to call a first articulation into the volume constituted by the ripped up surface, to inscribe it in this volume as a rumour, and more specifically, to reinscribe the verbal sound of name into the scene of writing.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Rubin Rabinovitz emphasises how Beckett's writing erodes 'the sense of fixed identity that accompanies the naming of characters' (Rabinovitz 1992, p. 201). He notes how an addendum in *Watt* urges one to 'change all the names' (W 254), an exhortation which is acted upon in the trilogy. He examines how alliteration and euphony are used to undermine the fixity of the name (Rabinovitz 1992, pp. 200–202).

<sup>16</sup> Gasché 1977, p. 164.

In *How It Is* the name identifies a power relation between two figures. The name is specific to the situation rather than to the person. He who was Pim before he met the other, names that other Pim, and in turn is named Bom by another. Beckett's choice of single syllable non-referential names in *How It Is* marks a break from those novels written before *The Unnamable* in which the names of the characters resound with cultural and linguistic references. Hill underlines how 'the body [of Beckett's work], having neither the fullness of presence nor the unity of narrative coherence, cannot be signed with any name that is already available' (Hill 1990, p. 133). The distinctly Irish connotations of Molloy and Malone and the linguistic punning of Watt and Knott give way to the austere simplicity of the single sound of Pim and Bom, Krim and Kram: 'm at the end and one syllable the rest indifferent' (H 67; GII 452), a sound which becomes what Duchamp calls a 'Prime Word'.<sup>17</sup> These names do not give any information about their bearers, neither do they identify the same bearer throughout a discourse. They are asignifying sounds which isolate a position within the discourse which can be occupied by any number of figures within a given length of time: 'nothing changing but the names and hardly they two are enough nameless each awaits his Bom nameless goes towards his Pim' (H 124; GII 495).

As the figures change positions, so do the names. The narrator names the encountered other, he who will become the victim, with his own name, and is in turn named by another. As becomes clear in part three of *How It Is*, this name change signals a change in position. The narrator, once called Pim, gives his name to the new victim, and in turn is given the name of the tormentor, Bom, by some other, in a cyclical movement in which tormentor becomes victim and victim, tormentor:

and at last when I hear among other extravagances that he is coming ten yards fifteen yards who for me for whom I what I for Pim Pim for me (H 67; GII 453)

Having named the other as victim, the tormentor proceeds to force the other to speak. This linguistic coercion is enacted in a specific and detailed corporeal manner. The rudimentary cries, 'the slit whence contact with the right cheek less pads than nails second cry of fright', and screams, 'I longed claw dig deep furrows drink the screams', elicited by physical intervention are fashioned into speech by a process of pain and violation (H 58–59;

<sup>17</sup> For Marcel Duchamp, Prime Words are those 'divisible only by themselves and by unity' (Duchamp 1973, p. 31).

GII 446–47). The narrator forces Pim to speak through a series of lessons. The first lesson involves digging his nails into Pim's armpit and then thumping him on the skull. The second lesson repeats the first, reinforcing control over the production and limitation of the voice. With practice the cry elicited by piercing the skin of the armpit is developed into a song. Within the first series of lessons the tormentor has gained control over the commencement and termination of the voice, and over the form of that voice. The second series of lessons moves the site of pain from the armpit to the arse and changes the instrument of torture from the nails of the right hand to the tin-opener. Using the same principles and procedures as the first series of lessons, this second series distinguishes between the pain in the armpit which elicits song, the pain in the arse which elicits murmurs, and the pain in the kidney which elicits speech. After much repetition and not a little exasperation on the part of the narrator Pim finally understands what is required of him and 'instead of crying he articulates hey you me what don't hey you me what don't that's enough I've got it thump on skull done it at last' (H 76; GII 459). Pim's random articulation signals the beginning of speech. This speech is a visceral response to specific physical stimuli which are refined into a table of action and response enumerated by the narrator:

table of basic stimuli one sing nails in armpit two speak blade in arse three  
stop thump on skull four louder pestle on kidney

five softer index in anus six bravo clap athwart arse seven lousy same as eight  
encore same as one or two as may be (H 76; GII 459–60)

Pim's speech is a quotation elicited by pain. Like the narrator who repeats the words which enter through the ear, passing through the boundary of the tympanum, Pim repeats the words which pass through the boundary of the skin. The violation of the skin engenders language. The 'open sore' (H 70; GII 455) of the armpit and the 'open wound' (H 75; GII 459) of the arse provide a point of passage through which the body of Pim is opened onto language. The body is no longer an object exterior to language, for 'disrupting the plane surface is nothing less than the inscription of a mark into its hitherto virgin space, the opening of a gap in a surface' (Gasché 1977, p. 160).

The second stage of this linguistic lesson which Pim is obliged to learn involves progressing from random linguistic utterances – 'stab him simply in the arse that is to say speak and he will say anything' (H 79; GII 461) – to a specific utterance. This utterance is the 'strange task' (U 27; GII 305) which is required of the unnamable. It is the pensum which has to be both

learned and discharged. This pensus involves 'speaking of oneself' (U 27; GII 305). It requires that one speak one's own name. The narrator begins by carving 'Roman capitals' (H 77; GII 460) on Pim's back. With the nail of his right index he traces the letters 'YOU PIM' (H 78; GII 461) through the skin to produce a text which is identical to the one we are reading: 'unbroken no paragraphs no commas not a second for reflection' (H 78; GII 461). This text is produced by the violent mark of body upon body, as the nail of the index finger is forced through the skin 'until it falls and the worn back bleeding passim it was near the end' (H 78; GII 461). The name of the one is inscribed on the body of the other, and, unlike the officer in Kafka's *The Penal Colony* who is neither enlightened nor redeemed by corporeal inscription, Beckett's victim understands the words which are traced through his skin:

inevitable one fine day should it mean his trying all the consonants in the Roman alphabet that he will answer in the end it's inevitable me Pim which he does in the end it was inevitable me Pim (H 79; GII 461)

The other, who is named Pim by the narrator, recognises this name as his own. This name which once belonged to the narrator is given to the other. The gift of the name from the one to the other, and the recognition of the name of the one by the other, as the name of the other, and as one's own name, erases the distinction between one and other.

Under the appellation of Pim tormentor and victim become one. The victim speaks the words of the tormentor, words which are inscribed onto his body, words which enter through the ruptures of his skin. At this moment the distinction between victim and tormentor, speaker and listener, self and other, is annulled. The speaker, at last, speaks of himself with his own voice. The voice which is one's own banishes all the other voices, and all the other names:

can't go on we're talking of me not Pim Pim is finished he has finished me now part three not Pim my voice not his saying this these words can't go on and Pim that Pim never was and Bom whose coming I await to finish be finished have finished me too that Bom will never be Pim no Bom and this voice quaqu of us never was only one voice my voice never any other (H 95; GII 473)

At this moment of self-coincidence in which the speaker speaks of himself in his own voice the circularity of repetition whereby tormentor becomes victim and victim tormentor ceases. Self-recognition lasts only a moment, just long enough for the tormentor to drink deep 'of the seconds delicious moments' (H 65; GII 451) in which the vast stretches of time are arrested



by the body which gives voice. It is at the corporeal instantiation of the voice that time properly takes place. Without this instantiation time is at once both interminable and singular. It is only through the body, through the ticking of the wristwatch on the arm of the victim which is heard by the tormentor, that time passes. It is this body which gives time the differentiation which allows the conceptualisation of the sequence 'before Pim with Pim after Pim' (H 7; GII 411). By structuring this novel into three parts which are characterised by the above divisions, Beckett confounds the continuum and the instance of time. The time before Pim is always also the time after Pim. The time with Pim happens at a specific interval, but also happens simultaneously with numerous other identical meetings. The moment of self-recognition at the meeting of the gaze is also the moment at which the tormentor elicits speech from the body of the victim. It is at this fleeting, but ever recurring, moment that the 'I' and the 'he' who is always other converge: 'only me yes alone yes with my voice yes my murmur yes' (H 159; GII 520).

The voice which passes from one to the other through the boundaries of the body, always distanced from itself, comes to rest in the 'I' who speaks of itself. There is no more Pim and no more Bom. The points of passage of the voice, from body to body, which these names announce become redundant. The violation of the boundaries of the body which produces this voice interlace the body of the narrator with that of the other:

like two old jades harnessed together no but mine my head its face in the mud and his its right cheek in the mud his mouth against my ear our hairs tangled together impression that to separate us one would have to sever them (H 100; GII 477)

But can there ever really be this self-coincidence of the voice? Can there be 'only one voice my voice never any other' (H 95; GII 473), the voice which, in speaking of itself, can become silent? The words which the narrator forces the victim to speak are already the words of another. Just as the written text of the novel does not differentiate between speech and quotation, so the spoken text of the narration does not distinguish between the origination or repetition of words:

the text employs no punctuation marks whatsoever, and . . . has already situated itself explicitly within a mode of infinitely regressive citation. The text is always already a quotation; there is no discursive hierarchy to establish identifiable, separable, originated voices for the various personages in the fiction. (Watson 1991, pp. 97–98)

The victim does not speak with the voice of the tormentor for the tormentor himself is speaking under the obligation of another. The narrator of *How It Is* speaks the story of another and in this story enacts the process by which the other is obliged to speak of the self. But speaking of the self is impossible for each instance in which speech is brought forth is the result of a repetition or a reenactment of speech. Each voice is the quotation of another voice. Tormentor becomes victim and victim tormentor in a cycle of conjunction and disjunction through which the one voice is never 'my' voice.

Yet, in *How It Is* such a voice is impossible for the voice which speaks of itself is always the voice of another. The phrase 'me Pim' (H 79; GII 491) establishes an identification between the victim and the tormentor. This identification takes place through the act of writing. It is in writing his name on the body of the other that the tormentor names himself. This naming takes place when the victim speaks the words of the tormentor, 'me Pim'. But these words are not the proper words of the tormentor for he does not speak, he only quotes the words of another. This identification of the self as Pim does not close the gap between tormentor and victim, between listener and speaker. For in saying the words 'me Pim' the speaker posits himself as other to himself. The me who speaks becomes the other who was named Pim. Naming oneself does not lead to self-identity; instead, it perpetuates the cycle whereby the one, the victim, takes on the name of the other, the tormentor, and in his turn becomes that tormentor who passes on the name to another victim.

Pim names an intersection between voice and body.<sup>18</sup> This intersection requires the interpenetration of one body with another. It requires the wounding of the body, the destruction of the integrity of the body. From this wound comes speech. The speech through which the name is assumed, 'me Pim', is a speech which erupts from the ruptures in the skin which divide the one from the other, tormentor from victim. Through the violation and transgression of the skin, that border which divides one body from another, tormentor and victim become one in language. The speaker and the listener conjoin:

a mouth an ear sly old pair glued together take away the rest put them in a jar there to end if it has an end the monologue (H 87; GII 467)

<sup>18</sup> In her paper 'The Politics of Ontological Difference' Rosi Braidotti also identifies the body as 'the point of intersection'. For Braidotti the body acts 'as the interface between the biological and the social, that is to say, between the socio-political field of the micro-physics of power and the subjective dimension' (Braidotti 1989, p. 97).

The monologue of *How It Is* echoes back to that of *The Unnamable* in which the speaker is marooned in a jar, and in a reciprocal movement the speaker of *The Unnamable* who rejects the first-person pronoun prefigures the speaker of *How It Is* who only says 'I' through the mouth of another. Like *The Unnamable*, *How It Is* is a spoken text. There is no origin of speech. There is only transmission. The speaker is not the author of his own words. He is a conduit for language. Unlike the unnamable, who traces the difference between subject and other, balanced between speech and quotation – 'I say what I hear, I hear what I say' (U 130; GII 405) – the speaker of *How It Is* never aspires to authorship of language. He is other to his own speech: 'I quote the natural order more or less my life last state last version what remains bits and scraps I hear it my life natural order more or less I learn it I quote' (H 7; GII 411).

The 'bits and scraps' of voice that are forced out of Pim in intermittent bursts, 'YOUR LIFE ABOVE' . . . 'YOUR LIFE CUNT ABOVE CUNT HERE CUNT' . . . 'DO YOU LOVE ME' (H 83; GII 464), are like the 'scraps' that are forced from the narrator by the 'ancient voice in me not mine' (H 7; GII 411) with a coprolaliac urgency. The voice which was 'once without . . . on all sides then in' the narrator is the same voice which is inscribed by the narrator, now tormentor, upon the body of the victim who, in his turn, gives voice (H 7; GII 411). These sporadic outpourings of speech mirror the interrupted passages of text which we read as the voice of the narrator of *How It Is*. This reflection develops towards a congruence as the narrator anticipates the day when speaker and spoken are one, the day 'Bom comes YOU BOM me Bom ME BOM you Bom we Bom' (H 83; GII 464). This is the day when the alterity inherent in the voice will disappear. The 'I' of *The Unnamable* who is always 'not I' (U 128; GII 285) in speech gains possession of a voice in *How It Is*: 'I'll have a voice no voice in the world but mine' (H 84; GII 464). The voice will no longer always be the voice of the other. With this unity between self and other comes a unity between the world above and the world below. The world above in the light which has previously only been present in memory to the speaker who travels below in the mud is now present in vision:

had a life up above down here I'll see my things again a little blue in the mud a little white our things little scenes skies especially and paths (H 84; GII 464)

Even though the narrator asserts the coincidence of his voice and that of Pim, he also suggests a distinction between them, wondering whether Pim speaks 'the way I do part three the way I murmur in the mud' (H 87;

GII 467). With this suggestion comes an emphasis on the transience of the voice, 'my voice is going', and the plurality of the voice, 'it will come back my first voice no voice' (H 87; GII 467). Yet, it is only the body which can give voice. Without the continuous cycle of bodies interpenetrating bodies nothing could be said, and without this saying there is no story, for

if Bom never came if only that but then how end the hand dipping clawing  
for the tin the arse instead of the familiar slime all imagination and all the  
rest this voice its promises and solaces all imagination dear bud worm  
(H 88; GII 467)

The fiction of *How It Is* is intimately entangled with the manner in which it is written. The text speaks in the pants and gasps of the narrator who speaks only because he is, like Beckett's text, being written. The surface of the body and the surface of the page are inscribed by the voice which, without this physical support, would remain imagination.

As part two of *How It Is* comes to a close Beckett draws his focus away from the intimate relationship between tormentor and victim and introduces two dispassionate figures, the witness Krim and the scribe Kram.<sup>19</sup> In a process of repetition and reduplication Beckett rewrites the story of the figure travelling in the mud, sleeping, breathing and fitfully muttering, occupying himself with his sack of tins and opener, from the perspective of the witness and scribe. The 'I' of the voice which passes through the bodies in the mud is exchanged for the 'I' of the observer. The voice moves from being the subject of the narrative to being the object of the narrative. The observations of Krim are recorded by Kram in three notebooks, one blue, one yellow and one red. The first of these notebooks records the physical movements of the figure in the mud. The second notebook records his mutterings 'verbatim no tampering' (H 90; GII 469). The third records the comments of the witness. The voice of Krim as recorded by Kram is distinct from the voice which is embodied in the various Pims and Boms. But this observing voice has endured for as long as the embodied voice, through a series of Krims and Krams which stretch back through 'Kram the Seventh' (H 90; GII 469) and beyond 'the great Kram the Ninth' (H 91; GII 470). The uninterrupted lineage of Krim and Kram, of which this incarnation is 'the thirteenth generation' (H 91; GII 470) attests to the interminable circularity of the relationship between Pim and Bom. The lineage of Krim and Kram is perhaps also interminable for 'even if I hear

<sup>19</sup> Krim is similar to Gaber of *Molloy*, the function of whom is to read instructions from his notebook, and to Horn of the fizzle 'Horn came always' who 'consulted his notes by the light of an electric torch', in *For to End Yet again and Other Fizzles*, Beckett 1976, pp. 31–36, 33.

thirteen lives I say thirteen but long before who knows how long how many other dynasties' (H 92; GII 470). There is always the figure travelling in the mud and there is always the observer watching the figure. The voice of the one who mutters in the mud is distinguished from the voice of the one who records these mutterings, since it is 'not the voice of here' (H 92; GII 470). The place of Krim and Kram is the place of recording not production: 'say nothing when nothing' (H 91; GII 470). Here the voice neither originates nor is transmitted. The voice is removed from the flow of the 'vast stretch of time' (H 9; GII 411) and fixed at a specific moment on the physical support of the page of the yellow notebook. But the distinction between recording and production, between the light of the observing eye and the sound of the murmuring voice, becomes blurred as Krim and Kram admit that 'this voice yes the sad truth is there are moments when I fancy I can hear it and my lamps that my lamps are going out' (H 92; GII 470). As the lamps which illuminate the figure in the mud wane, the voice which propels that figure seems to become present to the observer. At this moment the place of recording becomes the place of production, a production which is also a transgression:

little private book these secret things little book all my own the heart's  
outpourings day by day it's forbidden (H 92; GII 471)

With this confusion between production and recording, the voice of Kram becomes the voice of the figure in the mud who dismisses the story of Krim and Kram as an interlude, 'that's enough end of extracts', and reasserts his position 'all alone in the dark the mud and yet' (H 92; GII 471). Yet while the narrator acknowledges the figure 'bending over me noting down one word every three two words every five from age to age', he also dismisses this figure as 'impossible for the moment quite impossible' (H 95; GII 473). Is the extract featuring Krim and Kram a narrative separate from the one which is spoken by the figure in the mud? Or is it, like the memories which infiltrate from the world above in the light, part of the story which must be recounted by the figure in the mud? If this second option is the case, then the status of the existence of Pim must also be called into question. The meeting with and torture of Pim might simply be part of the story which is being recounted by the narrator. However, there is also the possibility that it is the figure in the mud rather than Pim who is the fiction for, through the tale of the tormentor, Pim might be describing the means by which he was given to speech. Beckett offers no resolution to these questions. What endures throughout each manifestation of Pim or Bom, Krim or Kram, is the presence of the voice which

passes through the boundaries of one body to the other, this voice which is 'the voice of us all' (H 108; GII 483).

The longer passages and the increasing intensity of the voice as it strives to finish the second part of *How It Is* – 'quick then end at last part two how it was with Pim' (H108; GII 483) – give way to shorter passages and a sense of relief in part three: 'here then at last I quote on part three how it was after Pim' (H 111; GII 485). With a sense of recapitulation the narrator characterises Pim's journey as a search for unity of self and for a resting place for that self: 'he sets out to seek out all of him sets out to seek out the true home' (H 111; GII 486). Pim's search echoes that of the unnamable who must look for the story in which 'it will be he, it will be I, it will be the place, the silence, the end, the beginning' (U 131; GII 406). The unnamable's search for a place of unity between self and other is enacted through a voice which is always on the verge of dissolution:

waiting for the voice, the cries abate, like all cries, that is to say they stop,  
the murmurs cease, they give up, the voice begins again, it begins  
trying again (U 131; GII 406)

The voice of which the unnamable speaks is the voice of *How It Is*. It is this voice which forms itself from the cries of the body, which is incarnated in one body after another in a cyclical succession through the 'vast tracts of time' (H 43; GII 501). There is only one voice. It is always 'the same voice the same things' (H 124; GII 495). The voice is incarnated in and transmitted through an unending series of bodies which meet, couple and depart at the same instant:

as long as I with Pim the other with Bem a hundred thousand prone glued  
two by two together vast stretch of time nothing stirring save the torment-  
ors those whose turn it is (H 121; GII 493)

The logical precision and closed circularity with which these encounters take place is emphasised by the speaker, who depicts the course through which each figure travels as a 'closed curve' containing a rough million figures in constant motion, the

number 1000000 on leaving his tormentor number 999999 instead of  
launching forth into the wilderness towards an inexistent victim proceeds  
towards number 1

and number 1 forsaken by his victim number 2 does not remain eternally  
bereft of tormentor since this latter as we have seen in the person of number  
1000000 is approaching with all the speed he can muster (H 127; GII 497)

The victim who abandons his tormentor travels on to assume the role of tormentor of one other. And the tormentor who is abandoned by his victim does not wait long to assume the role of victim of one other. The tormentor becomes the victim, and the victim becomes the tormentor, 'turn and turn about' (Beckett 1976, p. 64).

The moment in which the body gives voice, tormentor and victim become one, 'glued together like a single body in the dark and the mud' (H 132; GII 501). This is the moment of self-recognition. In speaking for the self, the other recognises himself as that self. The tormentor sees his own eyes in the eyes of the victim: 'Pim to speak he turns his head tears in the eyes my tears my eyes if I had any' (H 83; GII 464). But the tears in the eyes of Pim obscure his gaze and prevent him from recognising himself in the one whom he sees. As Maude avers, 'blurring in Beckett highlights the physiological limitations of sight, and the constraint the eye as an organ lays on our field of vision' (Maude 2009, p. 87). It is the victim who has the eyes with which to see and to cry, and the mouth with which to speak. Through the body of the victim the murmur which enters the ear of the tormentor as an ancient voice is incarnated as speech. The victim who speaks substitutes for the tormentor who is silent. Here we see the gaze instantiated as a reciprocal modality of response between self and other within the matrix of a split subjectivity, one that will, I argue in Chapter 4, become a central dynamic of *Rockaby* and *Ill Seen Ill Said*.

The victim who speaks is not aware of his own speech. There is no intentionality to this spoken word. There is also no originary source for this speech, since each body which speaks does so only under duress and at the prompt of the other. If this is the case, who has the authority to speak? Under whose authority does the tormentor write his text on the back of the victim? Olga Bernal questions the consequences of this lack of linguistic authority when she remarks:

There must be someone behind this consciousness so that it ceases to be anything other than a blade without thickness, something other than suffering without being. But how could there be a person if he who speaks is not sure that it is indeed he who speaks, if he knows himself composed of words, words that are spoken in him.

(Il faudrait qu'il y ait quelqu'un derrière cette conscience pour qu'elle cesse d'être autre chose qu'une lame sans épaisseur, autre chose qu'une souffrance sans être. Mais comment pourrait-il y avoir une personne si celui qui parle n'est pas sûr que c'est bien lui qui parle, s'il se sait composé des mots, des mots qui se parlent en lui.) (Bernal 1969, p. 92)

The eternal circularity of substitution in which the murmur of language is given voice through the pain of the substituted body can never lead to self-recognition. He who says 'me Pim' speaks these words as an empty recitation prompted by another. He who looks with tears in his eyes can never see his own eyes in the eyes of another, or see the other's eyes in his own. The recurring couples of *How It Is* are always front to back, never face to face. In saying 'me Pim' the speaker immediately posits himself as other to himself. The victim becomes torturer and the torturer, victim. The name Pim identifies a crossing or intersection between the voice and the body. At this point of contact where body meets body and the voice finds a passage through the open wound in the skin, language is translated from the murmur without to the ancient voice within and emerges as speech. This is the speech that the unnamable identifies as the impossible but obligatory task of speaking of oneself. The aporia at work in Beckett's writing involves the impossibility of speaking of oneself because in speech one is always other to oneself. The body which speaks is always divided. The ear which hears is always parted from the mouth which speaks. In the act of speaking the couples which inhabit the closed curve of *How It Is* approach unity, but this unity or self-identity is illusory. The speaker never speaks of himself. He always speaks of the other, in the words of the other. In speech the speaker is always other to himself, and therefore can never reach 'the silence, the end' (U 131; GII 406) for which the speaker of *The Unnamable* longs. There is no end and no beginning, only an eternal cycle of incarnation and repetition in which epistemological certainty is always deferred.

### What Where

Though it was first performed almost twenty years after *How It Is* was written, Beckett's late play *What Where* (composed as *Quoi où* in 1983) reconfigures the novel's agonistic movement of substitution and circularity through which the body gives voice, within the frame of an implacable authority. Beckett's short play brings into a very close focus the issues which occupy prose such as *The Unnamable*, *Texts for Nothing*, *How It Is*, and other of Beckett's works for theatre such as *Not I* and *Play*, by tracing the obligation and impossibility of saying what must be said and the inevitability, but futility, of corporeal torment in the attempts to get the other to 'say it'. The mutilation and abjection of the body through which speech is produced in *How It Is* is not productive in *What Where*: though subjected to the full range of physical torture – 'the works' – the bodies of



*What Where* cannot, or will not, subject themselves to the law of language. Whereas in *How It Is* the victim speaks under the coercion of the tormentor, in *What Where* the victim does not speak and dies under the torture to which his body is subjected in the attempts to elicit speech. The circularity of *How It Is* in which tormentor and victim exchange roles into infinity becomes an ever-decreasing spiral in *What Where* in which the victim dies and the tormentor becomes the victim who will also die.<sup>20</sup> The law that controls the figures of the play does not reside with the tormentor since he is as subject to the law which demands confession as the victim, and so he must be substituted for the unspeaking victim in a cycle of subjection that leads only to solitude and silence. Georges Bataille – whose review of *Molloy* praises the ‘creative violence’ of Beckett’s language, and anticipates *The Unnamable* by positing that ‘only an unrestrained flow of language would have the power to achieve this absence [of humanity]’<sup>21</sup> – identifies excess and exhaustion as key tropes in Sade’s writing. Within a logic defined by ‘enumerating to the point of exhaustion’ Sade writes of this cycle of substitution and subjection as an ‘endless and relentless tornado, [in which] the objects of desire are invariably propelled towards torture and death. The only conceivable end is possible desire of the executioner to be the victim of torture himself’ (Bataille 1985, p. 116), an end played out in *What Where*.

Issues of repetition, substitution and obligation as they relate to speech and the self are explored by *How It Is* and *What Where* in a prose which becomes theatrical and a theatre which approaches music. In conversation with Charles Marowitz, Beckett speaks of his search for a theatre composed of ‘a stratum of movement which underlines the written word’, the ‘kind of form one finds in music, for instance, where themes keep recurring’ (Marowitz 1962, p. 44). The ambivalent relationship between voice, body and subjectivity which Beckett explores by means of textual experimentation in the prose is refigured under different terms in the drama. Writing of *What Where*, Ruby Cohn argues that ‘Of all of Beckett’s plays *Quoi où* seems to me unique in trying to translate to the stage the problems of his recent fiction. The imagining self seeks distance from his work, and yet he tries to pierce the whatness and whereness of that work’ (Cohn 2001, p. 377).

<sup>20</sup> For an analysis of the role of the spiral in Beckett’s work, see Israel 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Bataille 1951, pp. 387–96. In his letter to Peter Suhrkamp, 9 January 1954, Beckett remarks, ‘On *Molloy* Maurice Nadeau and Georges Bataille seem to me the best’ (LII 442–43).

*What Where* is a vital reworking of the logic of *How It Is* within the material contingencies of space and time. Cohn identifies *What Where* as ‘the last of Beckett’s “torture” pieces in which a victim is coerced to speak’ (Cohn 2001, p. 377). Irish theatre production company Mouth on Fire staged four of these works (translating some from their original genre) – *Catastrophe*, *As the Story Was Told*, *Rough for Radio II* and *What Where* – under the title *Tyranny in Beckett* in the Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin on 11–20 November 2011.<sup>22</sup> *Tyranny* appears early in Beckett’s work. In her nuanced study on the ludic in Beckett, Laura Salisbury posits that ‘Le Concentrisme’ or ‘Jean du Chas’ (1930) could be considered ‘as being part of a peculiarly Beckettian tradition that describes and worries away at the uneasy power struggles between author/editor/narrator and readers by means of a comic form in which textual sadism and masochism inhabit the same space’ (Salisbury 2012, p. 71). Jean-Michel Rabaté notes the Sadean environment of Mr. Knott’s house with its Kafkaesque ‘obscure laws’ (Rabaté 2005, p. 91) and the torture of its inevitable logic, arguing that ‘*Watt* posits a Sadean fantasy staging the torture of thought: rational knowledge is a machine that barely hides relations of domination’ (Rabaté 2013, p. 117).<sup>23</sup>

In 1952, shortly after the completion of *Texts for Nothing* Beckett began a short text – subsequently abandoned – which begins ‘On le tortura bien, jusqu’à ce qu’il parlât’ (‘He was thoroughly tortured, until he spoke’) (Cohn 2001, p. 205). Mark Nixon advises us that Beckett’s initial phrase was ‘Je l’ai bien torturé’, which Beckett subsequently corrected by hand, shifting the narrative from the first- to the third-person perspective (Nixon 2014, p. 289). The sixteen typescript pages feature three characters, Pat, Mat and Nat (originally called Popol, Matt and Emmanuel) who torture a victim (called ‘le narrateur’) in a tent. Pat, Mat and Nat sleep together, and have sex, spending much time changing clothes in response to the arrival of a new victim. Mat, the narrator (not the victim) prefers to stay outside the tent where the torture takes place, as Cohn describes: ‘Reluctant to witness cruelty, our narrator waits outside the tent after instructing Pat in the application of torture, while Nat records the utterances of the victim’ (Cohn 2001, p. 205). Mark Nixon identifies a correspondence between the character of Mat and that of the writer since Mat ‘shares Beckett’s

<sup>22</sup> See David O’Shaughnessy’s review of the production at <http://entertainment.ie/theatre/feature/Tyranny-in-Beckett-Mouth-on-Fire/211/2029.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> Jean-Michel Rabaté notes that the ruins of Sade’s castle were visible from Roussillon where Beckett hid from the Gestapo from 1942 to 1945 (Rabaté 2005, p. 94).

birthdate and Irish heritage' (Nixon 2014, p. 289). While the date of this text suggest that it is informed by the horrors of World War II, the narrator's identity gives it an additional resonance as Beckett writes that Mat has memories of the Great Hunger of Ireland from 1845 to 1852: 'je suis né à Boghole, un vendredi saint, étonnante coincidence en effet, l'année de la terrible maladie de la pomme de terre' (Nixon 2014, p. 289).<sup>24</sup> The victim, called 'le narrateur', is tortured in a tent, as is the victim in the later text, 'As the Story Was Told' (1973), written for a memorial volume for German poet Günther Eich, who committed suicide aged sixty-six and whose lines American poet James Dickey used as an epigraph for his poem 'The Firebombing', lines which run 'Just think, after the great destruction / everyone will claim that he was innocent': 'Denke daran, daß nach den großen Zerstörungen / jedermann beweisen wird, daß er unschuldig war' (lines which resonate in the context of Eich's wartime activities). In his acceptance speech for the 1959 Georg-Büchner-Preis, Eich warns against a neo-Nazi totalitarianism against which writers need to keep guard. His position was not welcomed, as Glenn Cuomo explains:

The controversial point of Eich's mention of the dangers of language misuse and cultural manipulation for political purposes lies in his claim that the threat of manipulation had not ended with Nazism's defeat but was still a present danger, even in the current democratic regime. (Cuomo 1989, p. 6)

A contemporary reading of *What Where*, in the context of current political exigencies at the intersection of security, intelligence and defence, recontextualises Eich's concerns regarding the misuse of language. There has been considerable debate whether *What Where*, and other of Beckett's writings, can be considered to directly address issues of torture. Tyrus Miller argues against Knowlson's view that *Rough for Radio II* and *What Where* are about the artistic rather than the political act, and feature the 'tormented, creative artist' rather than the victim of political power, arguing against the position that these works express 'the impossibility of understanding human existence' (Miller 2000, p. 258). Tracing the tropes of terror through Badiou, Blanchot and Beckett, Christopher Langlois takes a similar position, arguing that 'terror persists into and across the impasse of *The Unnamable* and *Texts for Nothing*, and so it would be the imperative of this persistence that makes *How It Is* a part of what we might

<sup>24</sup> 'I was born in Boghole on a Good Friday, indeed by surprising coincidence the year of the terrible potato disease', trans. Nixon 2014, p. 289.

begin to understand as Beckett's lasting encounter with a literature of terror' (Langlois 2014, p. 78). Emilie Morin's incisive analysis of Beckett's political imagination explicates the ways in which Beckett's depiction of torture in his writing 'resonate[s] with wider shifts around the idea of "modern warfare"', arguing that *Rough for Radio II* and *Rough for Theatre II* 'borrow heavily from the conventions of the detective inquiry, and both examine the figure of the torturer and its common recasting as investigator' (Morin 2017, pp. 224, 220).

*What Where* is the most specific instance of what Marie-Claude Hubert calls 'the modernity of Beckett's theatre', a theatre which 'consists precisely in the fact that it provides the setting in which the body subjects itself to a brutal interrogation' (Hubert 1994, p. 63). *What Where* focuses on the obligation to tell in a manner which emphasises the necessity of the body for the production of speech. The alternate bodies of *What Where* are induced to confession by a series of physical tortures. This torture does not seem to work. The tormentor returns to report that the victim did not tell what needed to be told and died in the process. However, the tormentor is not believed and is, in his turn, subjected to the same torture that he has administered. Yet, since the scene of torture takes place off-stage, beyond the designated playing area 'P', the audience can never be sure whether, as Bam believes, the victim does confess 'it' and the tormentor lies or whether the victim does not confess and the tormentor tells the truth.<sup>25</sup>

*What Where* features four figures, Bam, Bem, Bim and Bom, who are physically indistinguishable, each clad in a long grey gown with long grey hair. The fifth element of the play is V, the voice of Bam, which takes the shape of a 'small megaphone at head level' and is situated apart from the rectangular playing area in which the four figures appear and disappear. *What Where* is controlled by a disembodied voice, V, which is also attributed to the figure of Bam. V controls the overall movement of the interaction between the four figures, while Bam controls the immediate relationship between each figure. The play opens with the announcement by V that: 'We are the last five.' With this statement Beckett immediately problematises the relationship between the voice and the body. V is described in the stage directions as the voice of one of the protagonists; 'VOICE OF BAM (V)' (C 369), but this voice presents itself in the first line of the play as distinct from the body of Bam. The identity between V and BAM is further emphasised when the light reveals a stage containing

<sup>25</sup> The stage directions specify a 'Playing area (P) rectangle 3m x 2m, dimly lit, surrounded by shadow, stage right as seen from house' (C 470).

only Bam: 'BAM *alone at 3 head haught*', followed by the comment by V: 'Good. / I am alone' (C 471). V is located 'Downstage left, dimly lit, surrounded by shadow' (C 470). V acts as an interjector in the action of the play. He adjusts and modifies the speech of the others who occupy the stage.

The play is divided into two parts. The first part of *What Where* is a dumb-show in which the four protagonists enter and exit the playing area, alternatively raising or bowing their heads. This part resembles the dumb-show of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* which, as Ophelia comments, 'imports the argument of the play' (Act III: scene II). The show which Hamlet stages for the court of Denmark seeks to elicit a confession or show of guilt from the accused Claudius. Beckett's dumb-show also concerns confession, but rather than indicting the audience it seeks to elicit a confession from the characters of the play itself. The second part replays the action of the dumb-show, this time with words. The second part is divided into three sections in which the protagonists exchange places in a cycle of futile torture. Each of these parts and these sections is marked by a small speech by V, the voice from the megaphone, who controls the action of the play. His statement, 'I switch on', brings light onto the playing area. He evaluates the scene which is presented in the playing area and pronounces it 'Not good'. His words cause the light to be switched off and he starts again with the speech:

It is spring.  
Time passes.  
We are the last five.  
First without words.  
I switch on.

(C 471)

The first statement of V's speech draws attention to a distance between the voice and the speaking body. This distance is further emphasised by the artificial source of V, who takes the stage 'in the shape of a small megaphone at head level' (C 469). Even though the voice which emanates from this megaphone is attributed to the body of one of the players, Bam, this body does not speak, and does not have control over the timing or content of the speech which is produced by V. The second statement, 'It is spring', recalls the opening passage of *Not I* in which the birth of speech in the old woman takes place in 'early April'. Spring is only one of the four seasons which provide a structure and sense of progression in *What Where*. Each section of the second part of the play is marked by the speech with which

V opens the play. As the play progresses 'spring' is substituted by 'summer' (C 474), followed by 'autumn' (C 475) and then 'winter'. The enumeration of the seasons reinforces the sense of circularity and repetition in the play. The last speech in which V states, 'It is winter' (C 476), brings the play to a close while also presuming an inevitable continuation in which winter will always be followed by spring. The third statement, 'Time passes', underlines the temporal progression indicated by the seasons which change. This statement remains the same throughout the play. The fourth statement announces the dumb-show which prefigures the spoken action of the play. In V's third speech, after his first false start, this statement changes to 'Now with words', and is followed by dialogue. The fifth statement causes the commencement and closure of the scene. This statement brings light to the stage, at first on the unsatisfactory scene of 'BAM at 3 head haught, BOM at 1 head bowed. Pause' (C 470), which is extinguished by the words 'I switch off', then a second time on the dumb-show, and then a third time on the action with dialogue. The play is closed by V with his words 'I switch off' (C 476), but there remains the possibility that he will switch on again.

The first speech of the play contains all of the above statements and an additional statement which comes after 'We are the last five'. This statement is: 'In the present as were we still' (C 470). The tone of this statement echoes the incantatory tone with which the narrator of *How It Is* announces his intention to tell how it was 'before Pim with Pim after Pim' (H 7). This statement contains a coterminous affirmation of the past, the present and the inevitability of the future. But this statement also confounds past, present and future. The 'last five' are situated in the present as they were in the past, but this past is continuous and of the same order as the present. The 'still' with which the statement ends enforces a connection between past and present. The placing of the word 'were' before the word 'we' negates a reading of this statement in terms of a continuous present, and reinforces the past as distinct from the present while presaging a future 'we still'. As Charles Lyons points out in his paper 'Beckett's Fundamental Theatre: The Plays from *Not I* to *What Where*', the

presence of the narration, with illustrative re-enactment that may or may not satisfy the narrator, suggests that the action is a representation of a series of earlier events; however the conflation of past and present in the voice's statement, 'We are the last five. / In the present as were we still' obscures a clear division between then and now, event and re-enactment (Lyons 1987, p. 95).

This inversion also introduces a note of uncertainty since the latter part of the statement can be read in the interrogative. The last speech of the play contains the statement: 'In the present as were I still' (C 476). This line is a repetition of the line discussed above, except that the plural 'we' is replaced by the singular 'I'. The movement from the plural to the singular underlines the movement of the play itself in which the four players are progressively reduced to one player, Bam, who, in his turn, may be subjected to the torture which leads to death.

The progressive reduction of the players takes place in a repetitive and stylised manner which is emphasised by the dumb-show which prefigures the dialogic action. This act without words reinforces the seeming interchangeability of the players who appear and disappear alternately with head haught or bowed:

BOM *enters at N, halts at 1 head bowed.*

*Pause.*

BIM *enters at E, halts at 2 head haught.*

*Pause.*

BIM *exits at E followed by BOM.*

*Pause.*

BIM *enters at E, halts at 2 head bowed.*

*Pause (C 471)*

Without words there is no way to distinguish between the players who are directed to appear 'as alike as possible' with the 'same long grey gown' and the 'same long grey hair' (C 469).<sup>26</sup> While obscuring any difference between each player, this appearance also obscures gender differentiation. It is only within language, when each player is referred to as 'he', that the gender of the players can be ascertained. Paul Sheehan identifies 'the procedural cruelties' of Beckett's works for theatre, noting how 'the interchangeability of positions produces a monstrous confounding of self-other distinctions, whether it takes shape as the violence of representation (*Catastrophe*) or the Nietzsche-inflected "training" routines that reveal the ultimate meaninglessness of meaning-producing torture (*What Where*)' (Sheehan 2009, p. 99).

<sup>26</sup> Beckett's emphasis on the similarity of his dramatic figures extends also to *Come and Go*: 'Apart from colour differentiation three figures as alike as possible' (C 356); to *Ohio Impromptu*, in which Listener and Reader are directed to be 'As alike in appearance as possible' (C 445) and to *Quad*, in which the players are to be 'As alike in build as possible' (C 453).

With words the dynamic interaction between language and the body is played out. The light fades up on the figure of Bam, alone on-stage and approved by V: 'Good'. V then announces the appearance of the next player: 'In the end Bom appears. / Reappears' (C 472). This statement announces the commencement of the play, 'I start again' (C 471), but alludes to the continuation of action of which the audience sees only a part. Bom's appearance is the first appearance of a player in the play as we read or see it, but it is described as both an appearance and a reappearance by V. This appearance and reappearance does not really mark the beginning of the spoken play for it is situated temporally by V 'In the end' (C 472) rather than in the beginning.<sup>27</sup> However this is not a simple inversion of beginning and end since at the end of the text of the play V states again 'In the end', followed by the substitution of himself for the other body. It is no longer Bom, Bim or Bem who appear, it is Bam, he who has become I: 'In the end I appear' (C 476). Beckett problematises the notion of progression and development in the play, and also the forms of continuity and circularity which echo the structure of a work such as *How It Is*. *What Where* is characterised by a futile progression and a teleological circularity. The impossibility of beginning or ending is a condition of the required *récit*. *What Where* can be understood in terms which Jacques Derrida describes as:

an analysis of the account that can only turn in circles in an unarrestable, inenarrable and insatiable recurring manner – but one terrible for those who, in the name of the law, require that order reign in the account, for those who want to know, with all the required competence, 'exactly' how this happens. (Derrida 1980, p. 217)

The account which is demanded in *What Where* presumes an epistemological stability in which the what, where, and it required can be known in order to be related. But the very act of eliciting this account undermines the very possibility of knowledge. When the tormentor returns to report that the victim said nothing, he is not believed by the controller. In successive turns Bam refuses to accept the account from Bom, Bim and Bem that there is no account, that there is nothing to tell. The conditions in which knowledge is sought preclude the very possibility of knowledge. Knowledge is as much a construction as it is something to be discovered. V's closing statement, 'make sense who may' (C 476), alludes as much to

<sup>27</sup> The phrase 'in the end' recalls the repetitive phrase of *Rockaby*: 'till in the end / the day came / in the end came' (C 435).



the performative action in 'make sense' as the derivative action through which sense is to be found. As the eponymous Watt discovers, sense, or meaning, is not something that can be extracted or discovered, it must be produced.

The account is the story or report which the tormentor must supply to Bam, and V. But it is also a demand to account for oneself. This is an impossible demand since the self for whom one is required to account is continuously deferred in the series of identical yet distinct players who step into the shoes of the other in order to elicit the account of what and where which will circumscribe the self. The obligation to tell how it is, to say what and where, propels the drama in an ever-diminishing circle which has neither beginning nor end. The 'now' of the drama is, as it was, in a continuity which is marked by negation rather than progression. The conflation Beckett effects between the present, the past and the continuity between both which presumes a future relies on a conception of time and development which is both linear and circular. Annamaria Sportelli distinguishes between conceptions of linear and circular time in her analysis of *What Where*:

in Greek-Roman philosophy time was represented as circular and continuous and its continuity was determined by its measurability and divisibility into 'instants'. In some way antithetical to this, the Christian experience of time developed along a line proceeding from the Genesis to the Apocalypse according to a succession of such fixed points as 'before' and 'afterwards'. (Sportelli 1988, p. 122)

In *What Where*, as in *How It Is*, Beckett draws on both conceptions of time. *How It Is* is situated in a continuous and circular time in which the encounters between the figures in the mud will repeat to infinity. This infinity is broken into a series of instants during which speech is produced by the body of the victim. This instant is marked by the ticking of the wristwatch on the arm of the victim. *How It Is* also draws on a linear conception of time in which there is a before and an after the now in which the narrator speaks. These times are described in the novel as 'before Pim with Pim after Pim' (H 7; GII 411), Pim being the now which is marked and made possible by the act of speech, the situation of that speech in a specific speaking body and the naming of that body as Pim. *What Where* undermines both views of time. There is the circularity of time in which the beginning is also the end, but there is not the continuity of *How It Is* in which each encounter between the figures will be repeated, for in *What Where* each encounter between the players results in the disappearance of

one, and as the play closes the one player who remains is situated at the brink of an encounter with himself which will lead also to his disappearance. Beckett also uses the concept of linear time in *What Where* in so far as the 'what' and the 'where' which must be told presume a past in which the knowledge was gained and a future in which this knowledge will be told. But the idea of such linear time is undermined by the impossibility of telling 'what' and 'where', which suggests the non-existence of past and future and the tenuous grasp of the present.<sup>28</sup>

The bodies of Bom, Bim and Bem are substituted for each other according to specific locations on-stage. The diagram which describes the playing area of the four players outlines a rectangle, '3m x 2m', marked by three entrances, W, N and E, and three places from which to speak which are numbered 1, 2, 3, to correspond with the entrances. The stage directions of the play specify that the first tormentor, Bom, enter at N in order to report to the authority, Bam, who stands at W3. Bom's unsuccessful report brings about the introduction of another tormentor, Bim, whose very appearance, at E2, transforms Bom from tormentor to victim. The exit of Bim, tormentor, and Bom, victim, both occur at E. When Bim returns to report to Bam, he does so through entrance E. As a result of his unsatisfactory report Bim is entrusted to the hands of Bem, who has entered the playing area at N, which is the entrance the first victim, Bom, used when he was a tormentor. Like Bom, the transformation of Bim from tormentor to victim is indicated by his change of place from E to N as he leaves the playing area, not by the entrance through which he came in, but by the entrance used by Bem: '[BEM exits at N followed by BIM]' (C 475). As tormentor, Bem reenters the playing area at N, through which he exited and, further to his unsatisfactory report, leaves through W behind Bam. The transformation of torturer into victim is carefully orchestrated by Beckett in terms of the players' location within the playing area. Like the name in *How It Is* which designates a position rather than a person, the place on-stage in *What Where* determines the status of the player. The names of the players of *What Where* serve a related function to those in *How It Is*.<sup>29</sup> They are

<sup>28</sup> The players of *What Where* are, like the characters of Proust's writing, 'victims of this predominating condition and circumstance – Time; victims as lower organisms, conscious only of two dimensions and suddenly confronted with the mystery of height, are victims: victims and prisoners. There is no escape from the hours and the days. Neither from tomorrow nor from yesterday.' See Beckett's monograph on Proust (Beckett 1987, pp. 12–13).

<sup>29</sup> Beckett's choice of names in *What Where* recalls the names of *How It Is*: 'Bom Bem one syllable m at the end all that matters' (H 118).

similarly monosyllabic and bear no referential connections.<sup>30</sup> They, like the bodies of the players they name, are ‘as alike as possible’ (C 469), with only a vowel change to distinguish one from the other.<sup>31</sup> This multiplicity in identity recalls the figures of *How It Is* who are both innumerable – ‘there are millions of us’ – yet identifiable – ‘and there are three I place myself at my point of view Bem is Bom Bom Bem let us say Bom it’s preferable’ (H 123; GII 494). The imploding circularity of the play is emphasised by Beckett’s omission of the last vowel, U. The first victim of the play carries the name identified by the last of the chosen vowels, O. The subsequent victims are identified by the vowels I and E, as Beckett works backwards through the alphabet of chosen vowels until he arrives at the beginning, A, from which it all started. This counting back of the vowels of the players’ names parallels the stripping away of corporeal presence until there is only one body left, a body which, standing ‘*head bowed*’, is itself under sentence.

The location of the body on-stage is the ‘where’ of *What Where*. It is the ‘where?’ which Bam springs on the unsuspecting tormentor Bim, who was only charged with finding out ‘it’:

BIM: What must he confess?

BAM: That he said it to him.

BIM: Is that all?

BAM: And what. (C 473)

...

BAM: Well?

BIM: Nothing.

BAM: He didn’t say where?

V: Good.

BIM: Where? (C 474)

<sup>30</sup> In his study *Reductionism in Drama and the Theatre: Samuel Beckett*, Gerhard Hauck notes the progressive reduction of the names given to dramatic figures which occurs in tandem with their physical disintegration: ‘The reduced names given to the characters (GoGo, Didi, Flo, Vi, Ru, He, She, M, W1, W2, A, B, C, V, W, etc.), as well as their reduction to the functions performed by them (Speaker, Reader, Listener, Voice, Mouth, ...)’ (Hauck 1992, p. 105). For a note on the relation between the names in Beckett’s early work and biographical reference, see Baker 1994, pp. 81–83.

<sup>31</sup> James Knowlson notes the association of Rimbaud’s ‘Voyelles’ with *What Where*: ‘The figures in the play are Bam, Bem, Bim, Bom and they are distinguished by Rimbaud’s: “Black A, white E, red I, green U, blue O – vowels”’ (Knowlson 1996, p. 686). Knowlson also remarks on the absence of the vowel U in the play, quoting Martha Fehsenfeld’s report of Beckett’s affirmation that there would be ‘no green’ (Fehsenfeld 1986, p. 233). The vowel U would have fixed the name with a rather too fundamental reference.

The substitution of 'where' for the 'what' previously demanded ensures that Bim's report will be unsatisfactory. The 'where' which cannot be discovered because it was never asked causes a change in the 'where' of the speaker who must now move from his position at E to exit at N. The location of the players on-stage is intimately linked with what cannot be said. In this play the epistemological determines the ontological in so far as the epistemological folds in to negate itself. That which cannot be known determines the fate of the player more surely than that which can be known.

*What Where* enacts a corporeal substitution which is the antithesis of that of *How It Is*. In the novel one body tortures another in order to produce speech. All that is required is that the murmur of language be translated through the body of the victim. The body is figured also as the site of production of speech, but this speech is the story of the other which the victim must only recite. In *How It Is* the tormentor ceases to torture the victim when speech is produced and he continues his journey knowing that he will, in his turn, become the victim of another tormentor. The relationship between the body and language is markedly different in *What Where*. Rather than a series of substitutions between tormentor and victim which begins in silence and ends in speech, the substitutions in *What Where* begin in speech and end in silence. They are substitutions which result not in speaking but in a silence which announces the absence of the speaking body.

The spoken drama of *What Where* concerns the obligation and impossibility of saying a specific set of utterances. What must be spoken pertains to 'it', 'what' and 'where'. Bam, in conjunction with V, controls the manner of the attempts to produce these utterances by subjecting the victim to 'the works': 'BAM: You gave him the works? / BOM: Yes' (C 472). The 'works' to which the victim is subjected are a set of physical tortures which elicit screams and supplications for mercy and result in loss of consciousness and death (C 472). The violation of the body through torture results in inarticulate weeping and screaming and even the articulation of a plea. Like *How It Is*, physical duress results in the production of language. However, *What Where* moves beyond the aims of the novel whose protagonist is satisfied with the production of speech as distinct from cries or song. The tormentor of *What Where* is required to produce a specific utterance. It is not sufficient that he report that the victim 'didn't say anything' for at this juncture in the dialogue V interjects with the comment 'Not good. / I start again' (C 472). V causes the preceding dialogue to be replayed and replaces the question

'And he didn't say anything?' with the question 'And he didn't say it?' (C 472). The substitution of 'it' for 'anything' makes specific what must be confessed. As in *The Unnamable* and *Not I* there is some thing which must be told. The unnamable 'must speak of that' but cannot; and she of whom Mouth speaks must 'tell': there is 'something she had to . . . tell' (C 381). Both of these obligations to speak are obligations to confess since there is something specific which must be said. It is an obligation which results from the law since that which must be spoken is determined by a power other to and above the speaker. That which must be said is never known. What is 'it' about which V is so specific? Why does V substitute the question 'where' for the question 'what' with which Bim had previously been charged to discover? The pensum of *The Unnamable* has become an impossible and unavoidable question in *What Where*. It is a question the subjection to which results in the annihilation of the speaking body.

The body in *What Where* disappears under the force of language. This body is made viscerally present by Beckett through the tormentor's report in which the victim's tears, screams and supplications are vividly enumerated. Beckett leaves no doubt that the body of the victim ceases to function as a result of the torture to which it is subjected:

BAM: Then why stop?  
 BOM: He passed out.  
 BAM: And you didn't revive him?  
 BOM: I tried.  
 BAM: Well?  
 BOM: I couldn't. (C 473)

The force of the question is greater than the force of the body. The question is inscribed on the body through the pain of torture. The confession which the victim is obliged to produce is not 'anything' but rather concerns 'it'. This 'it' can be understood in terms that Elaine Scarry explicates in her book *The Body in Pain*: "The "it" in "Get it out of him" refers not just to a piece of information but to the capacity for speech itself" (Scarry 1985, p. 49). For Scarry the aim of torture is the appropriation of speech through the subjection of the body to pain. Through pain, voice and body are placed in an antagonistic relationship which neither survives:

The goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it. (Scarry 1985, p. 49)

The crux of Beckett's *What Where* is that there is no answer to the questions that V, through Bam, poses. What is required of the victim is speech itself. But here, speech cannot be sundered from the body, and the body of the other cannot be made to speak for the self. In *What Where* Beckett emphasises the inextricability of speech and the body.

In the last section of *What Where* Bem returns, again, with head bowed. There are now only two figures left within the playing area, Bem and Bam. In this section the way in which the charge of extracting a confession alters. The duty to obtain a confession and the obligation to confess moves from a discussion in the third person to a discussion in the first and third person. 'He' must no longer find out that 'he' said it to 'him'. The self, who refers to himself as 'I', is implicated by the other, who addresses that self as 'you'. The obligation to speak has moved from the realm of the third person to the realm of the first and second person:

BEM: What must I confess?

BAM: That he said where to you. (C 476)

The 'he' to whom the speakers refer no longer exists. The mutual positing of self and other in the exchange of 'I' and 'you' is conflated in the process of torture into a single 'I'.<sup>32</sup> When Bam returns after giving Bem 'the works' he is once again alone:

V: ...

In the end I appear

reappear.

[BAM enters at W, *halts at 3 head bowed.*]

V: Good.

I am alone.

In the present as were I still. (C 476)

But this 'I' has failed as all the other players have failed. Bam does not succeed in getting Bem to confess. Bam cannot appropriate Bem's speech for himself. Bam stands, 'head bowed' at the transition between tormentor and victim which is the transition between self and other. This last scene returns us to the first scene. Bam stands alone in the playing area as he is spoken for by V. V is the voice of Bam in so far as V refers to the viewed body of Bam as 'I'. The means by which Beckett stages the play makes clear that the 'I' which speaks is other to the body which this voice claims as self. Bam and V are located in distinct areas of the stage. Bam is up-stage right and V is down-stage left. Both are separated by a shadowed area.

<sup>32</sup> See Benveniste 1966, esp. p. 260.

He who says 'I' is physically other to the body who is claimed as the self. Through the medium of drama Beckett is able to enact the dilemma of the unnamable who in the act of speaking is always other to himself. The unnamable says 'I' knowing that the 'I' is far from the one who speaks (U 131). In *What Where* he who says 'I' is never 'I', for the body which the voice appropriates as the location of the self is always other to that voice. Bam and V never conjoin. The 'What' and 'Where' of the play circumscribe an aporia concerning speech and silence so eloquently described at the conclusion of *The Unnamable*:

the story of the silence that he never left, that I should never have left, that I may never find again, that I may find again, then it will be he, it will be I, it will be the place, the silence, the end, the beginning, the beginning again. (U 131; GII 406)

For Marie-Claire Hubert this relationship between voice and body can best be explored in theatre for 'the theatrical situation, with all its inherent ambiguity, is particularly suited to symbolizing this problem, since the imaginary body of the character can be perceived only through a referent: the actor himself, a person of flesh and blood'.<sup>33</sup>

The stories of the 'I' and of the 'he' become one within the speaking body of *How It Is*. Yet, in the novel, the congruence of 'I' and 'he' does not lead to 'the silence' (U 131) in which the unnamable longs to find peace. This silence is only possible when the speaker speaks of himself, yet, as Beckett's novel makes clear, the speaker of *How It Is* can never speak of himself. The union of tormentor and victim does give voice to the body, but this voice is never the voice of the self: it is always a quotation, a repetition and reduplication of the voice of another which is interminably reincarnated in the body. The speakers of *What Where* can never tell what must be told. In *How It Is* and *What Where* Beckett writes a scene in which one body is forced to speak for another body. The coercion through which this speech is produced involves the violation of corporeal boundaries and the infliction of physical pain. It is only by violating these boundaries that the pensum of speaking of oneself can be discharged. Pensum as punishment and pensum as lesson: both meanings are present in Beckett's *How It Is* and *What Where*. The lesson to be learned is the lesson of speaking of oneself, but speaking of oneself involves violating the limits which distinguish between self and other. This violation or transgression of the borders between self and other is necessary if one is to speak of oneself.

<sup>33</sup> Hubert 1994, p. 63.

The pensus of speaking of oneself necessitates the transgression of limits. This transgression is the strange sin of *The Unnamable*, and from it is produced the strange pain which is the material of language.

Yet the dynamic of power and pain outlined in *What Where* has implications beyond the agonistics of a material language. In their book *Trauma and Healing under State Terrorism* Inger Agger and Søren Jensen bring the private and the public element of this dynamic together when they argue that giving witness or testimony, and truth telling, has both a private and a public dimension. The first is confessional and spiritual; the second is political and judicial. Writing of *The Unnamable* and *Texts for Nothing*, David Houston Jones invokes Agamben to underscore the risks of bearing witness since to do so 'is to fracture one's own subject position, to inscribe one's subjectivity with that of the absent, voiceless other' (Jones 2008, p. 59). In this context, what are the implications of Beckett's *What Where* for a wider, public discourse?

The aporia surrounding speech and silence typical of Beckett can be rethought in a larger sphere in terms of Chantal Mouffe's democratic paradox. At the core of Mouffe's argument is the conviction that 'power is constitutive of social relations' (Mouffe 2000, p. 98). Mouffe constructs an adversarial vision of society in which 'the aim of democratic politics is to construct the "them" in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an "adversary", that is, somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question' (Mouffe 2000, pp. 101–2). This idea of democratic politics privileges affect over reason, recognizing the necessary and inevitable conflict inherent in society. However, Mouffe makes an important distinction between antagonism and agonism which has implications for my reading of *What Where*: 'Antagonism is struggle between enemies, while agonism is struggle between adversaries' (Mouffe 2000, pp. 102–3). This is a subtle but vital distinction which makes possible a vibrant and dynamic democracy in which struggle is constructive rather than destructive. *What Where* presents a dystopian vision of democracy in the twenty-first century. We glimpse in *What Where* a perversion of Mouffe's vision of 'agonistic democracy' in which the adversarial nature of intersubjective relations undoes the possibility of democracy itself. By undermining the constitutive elements of subjectivity through an interrogation that destroys both questioner and questioned, Beckett makes visible the brittle traces of an authority without agency and a power without mandate.