

Charlotta P. Einarsson

Beckett's Drama

Mis-Movements and the Aesthetics of Gesture

SAMUEL BECKETT IN COMPANY

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For Ishrat Lindblad who told me to trust the authenticity of my own voice.

Let “found” or “made” mean as they work here as Beckett finds and makes us. Once we are “made” in Beckett's way, we say “oh yes,” that always “was,” we always “were” that way. But this “was” is retroactive. Only afterward does that seem to have been there before. Imagination makes and then something “was.” How imagination works this way defines this “made,” this “found,” and “was.” ... But you will have noticed that when I rejected an old concept of “imagination,” I had something else to point to, instead. I called on you to let the word mean as it worked. I said we could let “magination” mean how Beckett wrote and what his characters do to us.

EUGENE GENDLIN (1985)

It is one thing for an artist to lack talent of vision and thus to make mistakes or make poorly through lack of skill, or time. But it is another to do what Beckett did: to mismake *on purpose*, to mismake *by design*—and to do so not to denigrate oneself, or one's audience, nor even to reconnect with a child or a savage within, but from the belief that such mismaking is in the interest of art and will shape its future.

LELAND DE LA DURANTAYE (2016)

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List of Abbreviations

TN I The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Vol I

TN II The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Vol II

TN III The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Vol III

TN IV The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Vol IV

Preface

This book is a revision of my thesis, “Mis-Movements: The Aesthetics of Gesture in Samuel Beckett’s Drama” (2012, Stockholm University), which focused on the significance of the idiosyncratic movements and gestures that Beckett’s characters perform, *viz.* mis-movements. My interest in mis-movements was generated partly by phenomenology and partly by my previous experience as a dancer. Going back to revise this text more than a decade later has entailed travelling back in time to recall what I was trying to convey but could not then explain. It has also entailed identifying and unpacking ideas merely implied in the thesis, once again facing the limits of my own thinking. Yet, then as now, it is precisely such thinking from the edges of one’s ideas that makes the carrying forward of ideas possible.

The phrase ‘carrying forward’ is taken from Eugene Gendlin’s ‘new phenomenology’ (2004). According to Gendlin, the process of carrying forward is “a deliberate way to think and speak with what is more than categories (concepts, theories, assumptions, distinctions . . .)” (2004, 127). It is a way to think from that which exceeds the words we use and so it is a way to think with “the excess” that constitutes “our situated experiencing in the world” (Gendlin 2004, 28). The excess or felt sense is *always already* meaningful even as we cannot describe it at first, let alone explain it. Yet, “[i]f we do not have the felt meaning of the concept, we haven’t got the concept at all—only a verbal noise. Nor can we think without felt meaning” (Gendlin 1997, 5–6). Thus, it is only because the felt sense exceeds language that it is possible to know and feel *more than* one is able to say. The process by means of which experience arrives to be conceptualized necessarily involves carrying felt sense forward, and in Gendlin’s phenomenology this important insight is rendered as an ellipsis comprising five dots “(.....)” (1997, xi).

In revising my thesis, then, I have been working with the assumption that mis-movements mean something *more than* and *other than* what I previously was able to say. At the point in time when I was

writing the thesis, the concepts I used seemed appropriate enough to the task of investigating mis-movements, but my understanding of those concepts did not quite capture my felt sense of their significance. As a result, my thinking about mis-movements remained a kind of *knowing without ta concept*. In fact, whatever conclusions there were in the thesis, I owed to my supervisors, most notably to Ishrat Lindblad, but also to Matthew Feldman and to Richard Begam, who generously agreed to read the thesis in its final stages. Revising the text has therefore involved thinking from old ideas in ways that imply new ideas. The difficulty is merely knowing when to stop thinking, writing, and editing etc. Words are essentially incomplete and, perhaps while striving to convey senses, using them pushes one to produce *more than* one intended: more and new perspectives, ideas, openings, difficulties, complexities, intricacies etc. Indeed, carrying forward never stops, and on that note, ‘.....’.

Stockholm 21st November 2023
Charlotta Palmstierna Einarsson

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