Beckett the Spiritist
Breath and Its Media Drama

Balazs Rapcsak
Doctoral Candidate, Department of English, University of Basel, Switzerland
balazs.rapcsak@unibas.ch

Abstract

Most of the critical attention devoted to *Breath* has been focused on its adaptations and the affinities between its theatrical realization and the visual arts. Tracing Beckett's ambivalent attitude towards the staging of the play, this article offers a closer analysis of *Breath* as a textual artefact. It discusses various published and unpublished versions of the script and their relation to the sketch's infamous 'appropriation' in its first production as part of the revue *Oh! Calcutta!*, in an attempt to reconstruct three episodes of a media drama that unfolds in and around the play.

Résumé

Les études consacrées à *Souffle* ont, pour l'essentiel, porté sur ses adaptations et sur les affinités qui existent entre sa mise en scène et les arts visuels. En repartant de l'attitude ambiguë de Beckett à l'égard de la transposition de sa pièce à la scène, cet article offre une analyse approfondie de *Souffle* comme artefact textuel. On abordera les différentes versions, publiées ou non, du script et le lien qu'elles entretiennent avec la fameuse 'appropriation' à laquelle a correspondu sa première représentation en tant que partie de la revue théâtrale *Oh! Calcutta!*. On essaiera ainsi de reconstituer les trois épisodes d'un drame médiatique qui se joue dans et autour de la pièce.

Keywords

electronic communication, manuscript, medium, staging, textuality, voice
communication électronique, manuscrit, media, mise en scène, textualité, voix

In the spring of 1972, replying to Jenny Sheridan, who asked for the authorization of a production by the Northcott Theatre in Exeter, Beckett wrote the following: "I have come to the conclusion it is almost impossible to do *Breath* correctly in the theatre so must ask you to decline, with my regrets, this request—and all future ones for this piece" (2016, 295). Even though Beckett seems to have changed his mind two years later when he gave permission for a production of the play in the Théâtre Oblique in Paris (364), this comment highlights the fact that *Breath* is first and foremost a textual artefact, a theatrical script. In an effort to supplement and extend a critical debate that has been more concerned with the play's adaptations,[1] with the possible points of connection to Beckett's writing in various

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[1]   Rembert Hüser's essay provides an extended analysis of the most well-known adaptation of *Breath*, Damien Hirst's *Samuel Beckett's Breath* made for the *Beckett on Film* series in 2001 (2011). S.E. Gontarski discusses

periods (Blanchet) and with the affinities between its theatrical realization and the visual arts (Harari; Lozier; Goudouna), this essay takes as its point of departure—and as its guiding thread—the script's history and textual composition in order to outline a uniquely intermedial poetics that the play embodies in and of itself, and which can be located in the tension between the script as a textual construct and the performance it encodes.

Reading the scholarly discourse on *Breath*, one quickly realizes that the sketch is chiefly noted for three things. First, its extreme brevity; second, the apparently general critical consensus about its interpretation as an expression of "the pain and suffering of the human condition," as we read on the back cover of *Gambit*, in which Beckett first published the script in 1970; and third, the scandal that erupted after what came to be known as the play's appropriation in its first production in 1969 as part of Kenneth Tynan's erotic revue *Oh! Calcutta!*, when, unbeknownst to Beckett, the creators of the show decided to put naked bodies among the rubbish. Given the nature of this incident, which we can tentatively attribute to either a crass disregard for the integrity of the script or *its* falling short of being clear enough in its directions, we are invited to ask questions about the inherent relationship between script and performance, that is about the way in which, by virtue of its composition, the text positions itself vis-à-vis its realization on the stage. Accordingly, I would first like to inquire into the *mode of textuality* that Beckett's theatre script represents, and ask, in a related vein, how does this textual mode facilitate or, perhaps, obstruct its performance?

The Script and Its Dual Identity

In a very literal sense, the play is written *for* the apparatus. In fact, the script seems to be nothing but a set of technical instructions to be carried out by the theatrical machinery. The text is constructed according to the standards of precision and measurability, two concepts with which Max Bense starts the discussion of his informational aesthetics, *Programmierung des Schönen* (Programming the Beautiful), published in 1960. In this book, which sought to develop an exact methodology to replace arbitrary interpretations in literary studies, Bense describes Beckett's novels as a type of prose "whose linguistic beauty is rooted in a writing principle that follows statistical rules" (114; my translation). And in *Breath* too, from durations to lighting intensities, to repetitions and the sequencing of what seem like miniature dramatic acts—especially since, as Ruby Cohn notes, Beckett himself called the play " a farce in five acts" (4)—but can also be conceived of as instruction subsets in an algorithm, much of the information is conveyed numerically; the concern for quantification is evident. Here we have a textual strategy employed by Beckett, the aim of which is to render the script immune to 'interpretation,' to circumvent the always already too whimsical and unpredictable director. Indeed, to this end Beckett employed various techniques in many of his plays (see Uhlmann). This particular linguistic strategy— and the underlying conception of signification—shows a close affinity with contemporaneous developments in machine communication, automation and algorithmic programming which enable a semiosis that functions without the *human interpreter*, thus allowing a much higher level of precision in the execution of instructions. So, it would appear that the script strives to transcend literariness, its inherent figurativeness and ambiguity, and become something that allows the message received to be identical to the message sent.

If the script, then, approximates to an algorithm, it is, however, what is called a high-level description: a version of an algorithm that is written in prose, ordinary language, which is not addressed to the machine and cannot be directly implemented by it. And, indeed, there are two peculiar word

his own performance adaptation of the play as well as the hybrid art work *We Were Not Long... Together* and the installation *Breath+* by Adriano and Fernando Guimarães (2006, 441–443, 445–447).

choices, in central positions of the text, that add a layer of figurativeness to the otherwise extremely technical and unambiguous script, ground the script in literariness and, ultimately, make it untranslatable into performance: the words "inspiration" and "expiration" (Beckett 2006, 371). There is no way of representing in performance, at least when adhering to the stage directions, the surplus meaning inherent in these words compared to their more neutral synonyms, 'inhalation' and 'exhalation.' These words both *bring about* and *describe* the hermeneutic infection of the technical instructions. In short, despite its precision and technicality, the script is, after all, written in the language of literature, performs the fundamental operation of literature and stands for literature as that which captures the 'spirit' that animates the lifeless signifier and allows meaning to emerge and then disappear again. The only word in the script that invokes a semantics of time, as opposed to the technical notation of durations, is the word "expiration"; sharing its etymology—the root 'spirit'—with "inspiration," but implying lapsing and termination, it ironically undermines the promise of sense-making given by its counterpart, and suggests in and through its very own metaphoricity that textual meanings are only ephemeral, rhetorical effects of reading that cease as soon as the process of actualization is over.

This topos of literature, which reverberates strongly in *Breath*, may have originated in Plato's *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates decries written language as a mere image of the "living, *breathing* discourse" (qtd. in Koelb, 6; emphasis added). But it can also be found in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, where Paul makes the famous distinction between the dead letter and the living spirit, which then became generative of Romantic literature (Koelb, 3–43). And, perhaps more importantly in terms of a possible intertextual link, the figuration of the 'spirit' in *Breath* recalls a passage in Wittgenstein, whom Beckett had been reading since the late 1950s. In *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Wittgenstein notes: "Jedes Zeichen scheint allein tot. Was gibt ihm Leben? – Im Gebrauch lebt es. Hat es da den lebenden Atem in sich? – Oder ist der Gebrauch sein Atem?" (Every sign seems dead on its own. What gives it life? It lives in use. And there, does it have the living breath in itself? Or is use its breath?; §432; my translation).

Thus, as the script performs its own medium, literature, its whole claim to exactitude and monosemy is strategically undermined by the heightened rhetoricity grafted onto its language. The introduction of figurativeness shatters the univocality of the algorithmically constructed script. This structural aspect is mirrored in the polyphony of the performance, even if the multiplicity of voices tends to remain unnoticed by critics. Contrary to how we may perceive the vocal effects, the quick succession of which might prompt us to ascribe them to a single origin, the performance features the recordings of not one but two different voices. Ten-second-long inhalations and exhalations are not produced by new-born babies.

While the first half of the script describes the performance from the perspective of the audience, the second half contains directions that provide information about the technical realization. Interestingly, for such a terse text, the directions provided under the heading CRY seem to be redundant, only reiterating what is already clear from the first half. But there is one crucial difference. "Important that two cries be identical, switching on and off strictly synchronised light and breath" (371). Let us pay particular attention to the syntax here. It is literally—or at least grammatically, if not technically— the "vagitus" that *switches* on and off the electromagnetic sound and the electric light. Beckett's French translation preserves the controlling role of the vagitus both syntactically and in terms of phrasing: "Essentiel que les deux cris soient identiques, celui qui au commencement lance le tandem soufflé-lumière et celui qui l'arrête à la fin" (Beckett 1972, 137). Even if these are less conspicuously technical than the English 'switching,' the verbs 'lancer' and 'arrêter' can be used to refer to the switching on and off of electrical appliances. What function is given to the "vagitus" by this metaphor? It functions as a relay or a switchgear that opens and closes an electr(on)ic circuit. Thus, what in the imaginary appears as "inspiration" (visitation by and animation through the spirit) and "expiration" (its lapsing), in the technical execution turns out to be a switching on and off of audiovisual channels. It is a clear

testimony to the impossibility of shortcutting literariness in natural language that the technical real of switching is couched in emphatically metaphorical terms; and it isn't just any metaphor, but one that evokes, of all things, the genesis of human speech production.

From Written Signs to Replayed Sounds

The most widespread interpretation of the play, which has never really been challenged, requires us to fall into what we could call Beckett's spectral trap and start believing in phantasms, that is appearances that are not really there, hearkening back to a time where the voice was not technologically reproducible and thus presupposed both the bodily presence of the speaker and a conscious subject. This pre-Edisonian attitude remains faithful to the oft-quoted definition of the voice that Aristotle provided in *On the Soul*:

> Voice is the sound produced by a creature possessing a soul; for inanimate things never have a voice [...] Voice, then, is a sound made by a living animal [...] Hence voice consists in the impact of the inspired air upon what is called the windpipe under the agency of the soul [...] that which even causes the impact, must have a soul, and use some imagination; for the voice is a sound which means something, and is not merely indicative of air inhaled.
> 420b–421a

But we cannot escape the question concerning the status of the voices we hear in the performance of *Breath*. The dominant allegorical reading relies on the assumption that the two cries and the breath are not only an index of the biological body but, by extension, also a metonym for human life (Cohn, 4; Ackerley and Gontarski, 74; Bates, 4, 153). In this view, it is easy enough to find a biological explanation for the duration of the play. Dror Harari provides an intriguing argument to that effect: "ten seconds for inspiration and ten seconds for expiration, as Beckett demands in the play, are a reasonable length for a deep breath. In *Breath*, like in the contemporary manifestations of new theatre and action art that became frequent in the 1960s, time is actual or, in other words, it is 'breath time,' and not fictive or conventional" (431). According to this account, the play performs the materialization of time through the body, we are experiencing the time of the body determined by actual biological processes. As attractive as the proposition may sound, there is, in fact, not only a total lack of physical bodies in the play, but the very involvement of any human character is uncertain. Since the purely electronic generation of sounds had been possible for decades at the time—the first sound synthesizer having appeared in 1951, and the first programable synthesizer in 1957—, contemporary audiences were already sensitized to hearing synthesized sounds, that is simulations without an original, a phenomenon that became more and more common and increasingly difficult to distinguish from so-called natural sounds. In any case, Beckett insisted on the sounds being recorded on magnetic tape, which turns out to be a very particular choice when we consider that, in theory, they could just as well have been produced live by an actor offstage, with a seemingly similar effect. When in an alternative version of the script, which he provided in a letter sent to John Kobler on 21 April 1968, and which predates the 'final' version that was sent to Tynan and was later published, Beckett uses the phrases "*sound* of breath" and "vagitus-*rattle*" (Beckett 2016, 207; emphases added), he makes a crucial distinction pointing out that the breath and the cries *in the performance* have—or better, are only—an acoustic reality. The French translation of the work is even clearer: "bruit de l'inspiration," "bruit de l'expiration" (Beckett 1972, 137). The emphasis is only heightened by the redundancy inherent in the phrasing; after all, under the climatic conditions of a theatre hall even an actual exhalation is invisible and can only be perceived as a sound by the audience, unless made visible by using a special apparatus.

However tactile and presence-inducing in their effects, the recorded and amplified cry and breath are not technical extensions of the voice, but technologically processed and manipulated reproductions: a *sound montage* that does not replicate any linear temporality. On the contrary, it is a case of time axis manipulation (see Krämer), enabled by tape recording and manifested in the *identical* repetition of the cry—or the 'replay' of it in sound engineering terms—, on which Beckett explicitly insists in the script. The effect achieved is at the heart of contemporaneous artistic experimentations with the magnetic tape (see Connor 2014); a kind of elimination of time, the creation of a mediatic space in which no time passes, or only in a cyclical way, in a loop that always returns to the same point. As Michel Chion notes, "sound does have means to suggest stasis [...] The effect of a fixed sound can [...] be created by taking a variation or evolution and infinitely repeating it in a loop" (10). All that needs to be added is that one perfect loop already implies infinity. This not only suggests that there is neither bodily presence, nor actual body-time in the play, but it also undermines any sense of a chronological coherence of the events in the performance from which a narrative could unfold or be pieced together by an audience.

And so, we may ask the question: are the allegorical meanings that interpreters ascribe to *Breath* manifestations of the play's 'spirit' that we can manage to tease out using interpretive techniques, or rather an apparition of the spectral afterlife of hermeneutics itself? As Erhard Schüttpelz argues summarizing Marshall McLuhan and Edmund Carpenter's arguments that became foundational for media studies, "it is not the new medium that interferes with the old mediality of a culture, but the other way round; it is the old academic book culture, the socialization into the linearity of alphabetic writing and its internalized patterns of perception that interfere with the assessment of the new medium and with synaesthetic perception" (20; my translation). In other words, the interpretation of the play as a representation of human life is a result of—and is only made possible by—the complete subordination of the conditions of perception in electronic mediation, enacted in the performance, to the logic of a literary text. What we can only describe as the curious cases of interpretative re-writing, and what have become the point of departure for most, if not all, readings of the play, such as taking the second vagitus for a death rattle (for an early example see Cohn, 4), and the rubbish for "detritus" (Turbidy, 108)[2] or "debris" (Gontarski, 439), attest to the powerful need to re-semanticize the meaningless, to invest it with symbolic value (see Blau, 43), and to assimilate it into a narrativization of the stage procedure, reading it as an extremely condensed representation of human life. The tenacity of this reading seems to provide further credence to what Steven Connor, in a non-Beckettian context, has argued about the dynamic between the two paradigms: "the electromagnetic order has never been able to leave behind the pneumatic order, which survives as a kind of interference, or noise on the line" (2009, 80). But rubbish, unlike debris and detritus, which indicate something else other than themselves of which they are the remnants and are thus laden with overtones, is precisely that which lies outside the domain of symbolic representation, what has been excluded from economic circulation and divested of all cultural meaning. As Aleida Assman points out, "waste includes objects that are no longer of any use because they are worn out, broken, or have been replaced by newer items. [...] With its loss of practical use, an object naturally loses its function and its value: therefore, one can say that rubbish is those things in which society has lost interest and from which it has withdrawn attention. All that remains is the material of which it is composed" (370). Thus, rubbish is simply the material remainder of that which has been used up, from which all cultural and economic value has been extracted. In short, it is what does not take part in the process of signification anymore. For this reason, the visual element of the performance does not function as a symbolic system of images either. The phrasing of the 'alternative

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[2]   Although Beckett translated 'rubbish' into French as 'détritus,' we should note that the English 'detritus' and the French 'détritus' are partly false friends: the latter can mean simply 'litter' or 'refuse' without the strong connotations of disintegration attached to the English word.

script' sent to Kobler is possibly even clearer: "miscellaneous and unidentifiable muck" (Beckett 2016, 207).

But if the voices in the performance are unsettled in their indexical relationship to the biological body, in their narrative coherence and, consequently, in their status as a metonym for human life, then how can we better conceive of them? Let us bracket the question of technological reproduction for a moment to enable an interim step in the analysis of the sound event. The word "vagitus," a highly unusual and conspicuous choice—even if Beckett already used it in *Murphy*—, means the first cry of a new-born infant. It both captures the instant of biological individuation into a living being through birth and, as the word 'infant' suggests (from the Latin *in-fans*, meaning 'unable to speak'), represents a form of utterance in which the voice and the signifier are not yet connected; a pre-symbolic, inarticulate, intransitive vocal instance, an enunciation without a statement (Dolar, 26–28). So, what we have in the performance is the apparent emergence of a not-yet-speaking entity, the moment before communication through language enters the scene. In other words, the vagitus creates the "structure of address" (27), without transmitting any information.

The breath represents a no less liminal stage of communication. Our breath has to be held to produce speech, or at least adjusted to its rhythm and other requirements; we certainly have to break our regular pattern of respiration in order to speak. But, at the same time, the breath is, in a very concrete, physical sense, what enables speech; it is its material vehicle, as air is the principal medium of sound. Therefore, what a loud breath is, is the *noise of the channel of speech* that has to be excluded in order for speech to emerge, while being its condition of possibility.

Emanating from the loudspeakers though, as they do in the performance of Beckett's play, the "vagitus-rattle" and the "sound of breath" change their status once more. These sounds are neither semantic nor somatic, that is to say they do not convey any meaning but they do not issue from a body either. These *acousmatic* voices (sounds that keep their origins hidden) speak *à la cantonade*—to borrow the French theatrical term that Lacan uses to describe the directionality of the infant's babbling (Dolar, 27). 'Cantonade' refers to the wings of the stage which the audience cannot see, while the phrase 'parler à la cantonade' means to speak to both 'no one specifically' and 'everyone in general.' Thus, the addresser and the addressee remain elusive in equal measure in the performance; a communicative situation that recreates the specific structure of electronic broadcasting on the stage (see Peters, 206–226).

In sum, the sounds in the performance represent, first, the separation of the voice from the spirit or consciousness, its disentanglement from its metaphysics, from its Platonic conception as the authentic, direct expression of interiority or the 'soul'; second, the dissociation of the voice from the body; and third, a questioning of its human origin. The performance is composed of sounds that are reduced to their phatic function of establishing a channel, of referring to the conditions of their audibility, which the audience is made to perceive as reproduction, amplification, and time axis manipulation by technological means. And this leads directly to my thesis regarding the intermedial poetics of the play. Beckett's *Breath* is a script that performs its own literariness (both implementing and staging its rhetorical operations) and despite—or rather in accordance with—its untransposability, encodes a performance that, in its turn, stages the medial poiesis of communication in the age of analogue media technologies. Thus, as we turn from script to performance, Beckett's 'spiritism' undergoes a metamorphosis. As the reception situation shifts from textual interpretation to sensory affectedness, the 'spirit' as the vanishing presence of meaning, rhetorically enacted by the figuration of the script, transmogrifies into the ghostly presence of a technologically produced, acousmatic voice (for a historical survey of how new media technologies affect perceptions of the spirit-world, see Peters). For what happens in the intermedial transposition from script to performance? As electronic sounds replace written metaphors, and "inspiration" turns into the "sound of breath," the 'spirit' of language becomes the noise of its channel. Or, to state the same thing from the opposite side, the "vagitus-rattle"

and the "sound of breath" epitomize that noise which is constitutive of language but which literature, reliant as it is on signs and the alphabetic code, must exclude in order to become possible. The play between interiority and exteriority may have never been more condensed in Beckett's art.

In this respect it is particularly interesting that Beckett added a subtitle to his French translation of the play: "Intermède," while the English version has no subtitle. Could the reason for this discrepancy be that the English equivalent ('interlude') does not contain a reference to the medium in its etymology, to the in-between space of two media that is so central to the poetics of the play? In any case, through this extraordinary intermedial doubling of script and performance, Beckett creates a form of theatre in which nothing that contributes to the dramatic action appears on the stage—or only in its atmospheric effects. The play does not feature any technical objects *on* the stage, as a large number of Beckett's theatre plays do. And while the reliance on technical equipment in its performance is limited, it is in fact nothing but the deployment of these devices that constitutes the performance. There is no actor, plot, or speech; nothing associated with conventional theatre. Instead, what makes the play *happen* is the actuation of an audiovisual apparatus consisting of a magnetic tape, amplifiers, loudspeakers and lighting which add a certain temporal dimension, action, that is *drama*—as both the etymology of this word and Aristotle's foundational definition suggest—to the otherwise static and motionless spatial arrangement of objects on the stage. Thus, the actual realization of the play does not take place on the stage. It is completely hidden from the eyes of the spectator; from the perspective of the audience, in their phenomenal experience, this is purely a theatre of effects, produced by an invisible infrastructure of affective, atmospheric media of sound and light. It truly is a non-representational theatre. Or maybe we should say, the theatre of the non-representable: the processes of audiovisual mediation through invisible apparatuses and hidden technological procedures that underlie all transmission of messages in the electronic age (see Herrmann, 632).

If, then, *Breath* seems to be an artwork made to observe—and render observable—the elementary operations of the medium that allows it to exist, then this applies to both its literary and its theatrical manifestations, the latter enacting the conditions of perception in electronic audiovisual mediation. In this regard, we should note that, when translating the play from English into French, Beckett chose to replace the two instances of "Curtain" (2006, 371) with "Noir" (1972, 137). And interestingly, there is also an English version of the script, reproduced in Barney Rosset's *Dear Mr. Beckett* (237), whose first half also starts and ends with "Black" and does not feature the word 'curtain.' These changes highlight and reinforce the fact that the performance consists in the opening and closing of the two analogue communication channels—sound and vision; the play starts and ends with the two channels being turned off: "silence" and "black," as the script specifies. The separation of the optical and acoustic fields, also expressed in the heterotopic relationship between the scene heard (i.e. cries and breath) and the scene seen (i.e. scattered rubbish), corresponds to the technical reality of the separation of sound and image in analogue audiovisual media. Beckett's dramaturgical decoupling of the two sensory fields in the performance replicates their technological decoupling in analogue recording procedures. Indeed, the word "synchronization," which Beckett uses in the stage directions, is a technical term in film editing that implies separation and subsequent artificial correlation in time, but no actual connection. These aspects of the script may lead us to speculate that Beckett, in his letter quoted at the beginning of this essay, was in fact thinking about a possible televisual realization when concluding that the play was not suitable for theatre.

In a Letter to New York

However, as I argue, there is a media drama unfolding not only in but also around *Breath*. While the fact that Beckett sent his script to America for the New York premiere of *Oh! Calcutta!* in a letter may

seem like a circumstantial detail, it was precisely this particular form of mediation, with the specific range of manipulations it enables, that made the appropriation of the play possible.

Beckett uses a form of telecommunications, the postal system, and expects the letter to transmit his message noise-free. But while the script, as we have seen, is written for the technical apparatus, the letter is addressed to the impresario, Tynan (Beckett 2016, 135), who, together with Jacques Levy, the director, forms a control loop in the media network that constitutes a theatrical production. In other words, being only a high-level algorithm at best, the script has to go through the interpretive apparatus of the production team first before it can be realized in the technical apparatus of the theatre. By inserting the line about the naked bodies, they adjusted it to achieve the 'target value,' erotic titillation, which was the declared purpose of the revue (Sierz, 18). That is to say, they eliminated the disturbance—Beckett clearly intended his play to be an ironic comment on the show[3]—and returned the system to its norm, while at the same time acting as a Serresian parasite on Beckett's script: *interfering* with it. As an illustration of the extent to which this interference—in which interpretation, textual indeterminacy and authorial intention become menacingly muddled up—was made possible by the media configuration involved, here is how the leading actress of the show remembered Beckett's contribution: "Tangled, twisted and enmeshed in the trash are three naked humans. The light gradually intensifies, accompanied by pre-recorded sounds simulating female orgasm. [...] piecing the production into a coherent whole was chiefly Jacques Levy's job, and he selected Beckett's work for the opening because it got right to the point, it showed many members of the audience what their preconceptions were about sex and nudity and what they expected to see in the play: trash. But Samuel Becket was not only indicating what contemporary audiences think of sex on the stage; he was making a comment on society's hidden attitudes toward sex in any form. 'Look at the refuse in your mind,' he was saying, 'so you can begin to clear it away'" (Barrett, 30–31) And so, despite Beckett's effort and intentions—and certainly despite those of director and impresario—, his play about the conditions of mediation acquired yet another dimension and became even more resonant in its distortion.

But the story doesn't end here.

The Image and the Autograph

In a letter to Francis Warner of 16 February 1970, Beckett writes the following: "you will be edified to learn that as published by Grove Press, [*Breath*] is enriched by the phrase 'including naked bodies' inserted after 'unidentifiable rubbish'" (Beckett 2016, 223). What Beckett ironically refers to is the fact that not only did Tynan or Levy insert an additional stage direction into the script, but it was this adulterated version that was published by Grove Press in its 1969 edition of *Oh! Calcutta!* In it, there is even a picture of the performance showing the naked body parts next to Beckett's script, while the title of the play had been changed to *Prologue*. As Graham Saunders shows, it was upon discovering the interference with the text itself in a publication that Beckett withdrew the sketch from further productions of the show (189–192).

In his response, Beckett remains faithful to the intermedial poetics of *Breath*, a play that, as we have seen, is positioned in the *inter*, between script and performance, while reflecting and enacting the specific mediality of both. In a similar spirit, Beckett employs a tactic of intermedial conversion in order to rectify the damage inflicted by the unauthorized publication. Publishing a facsimile of the manuscript in the theatre review *Gambit* shortly afterwards (together with a typescript of the text), he reacts to and combats the Grove Press edition by reverting to a cunning media strategy that hearkens back to—and

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[3]   As he wrote in the letter to John Kobler already quoted: "If this fails to titillate I hand in my apron" (2016, 208).

draws its efficacy from—a previous cultural paradigm, the pre-electronic era characterized by the monopoly of writing as the medium of cultural transmission. The publication of the manuscript is an attempt at re-establishing a bygone discourse of authorship, but with the sole aim of reinstating the integrity of a *script* that is, above all, a depiction of the state of writing—and of communication—in the electronic age. The manuscript, the autograph is not there to be read; that's what the typescript on the opposite page is for. It should be looked at as an image, a bodily trace of the author that—supported by the organic continuity of cursive writing—conjures up the imaginary presence and authenticity of the person whom this inimitable handwriting belongs to, at once *creating* and *testifying to* the 'original' and its unalterable coherence. This medial trick turns out to be particularly ingenious when we consider the genetic history of the script, which makes the very idea of an original highly dubious. When sending him the script on 17 July 1968, Beckett told Tynan that "I write it down here for the first time" (Beckett 2016, 135), a statement which he repeated when sending a copy of the script to Alan Schneider on 3 October (134). However, in an earlier letter to John Kobler of 21 April, Beckett wrote that "I have it written down somewhere but can't find it" (207). And, as the *Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* notes, Ruby Cohn remembers Beckett reciting the play to her years earlier, adding that Beckett even wrote it down "on the paper tablecloth of a café," which is to be considered the original manuscript (73). The presentation of an image reproducing an autograph version of the script—no doubt made with the publication in mind and for that specific purpose—constitutes the first step in what we could call Beckett's intermedial one-two punch directed at the double "forgery" (Beckett 2016, 223) committed in the first edition of *Oh! Calcutta!*: the insertion of the extra line and the inclusion of an illustration showing the actors' bodies among the rubbish. In this first step, the script is transformed from a written text to be deciphered into an image to be inspected and deemed authentic based on its visual qualities. In this respect, the facsimile, in tandem with the clearly legible typescript on the other page, discredits the doctored text in the book version of the revue.

The second aspect of the intermedial to and fro that is inherent in the dual nature of the facsimile (which is text and image simultaneously) and that Beckett uses to maximum effect undermines the status of the illustration in *Oh! Calcutta!* For the manuscript on the left-hand page in *Gambit* is also a direct response to the image of naked bodies featured in the first Grove Press edition, reproducing its spatial arrangement on the left and right pages, with even the page numbers matching: page 9 shows the text, while page 8 features the illustration in both publications. It is a subtle battle of images that Beckett both engages in and, ultimately, masterfully subverts by providing a picture of the *script*, and thereby restoring the primacy of the symbolic over the imaginary, of the text over its interpretation.

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