

ARTICLE

On Music in Samuel Beckett

Xuyan Shen*

What is the importance of music in Samuel Beckett's aesthetics? This essay discusses Samuel Beckett's writings from the perspective of music as a thought-mechanism. The main focus of my essay lies in the subtle meanings contained in the trope "music", rather than any specific musical composition. I shall start by reading closely the coda of Beckett's *Proust* and formulate several key elements in defining the Beckettian "music". The following Interlude on John Keats's 'To Autumn' discusses the relationship between language and the imagination of "music". The poem can help us better understand Beckett's aesthetics. Then with reference to Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou, I offer an analysis of three specific kinds of languages Beckett uses to process the "music" in his writings – the language of cutting, the language of blending, and the language of gap, each of them as a stride closer to the imagination of "music".

Introduction

Samuel Beckett's relationship with music can be studied from many perspectives. One can study the significance of music in Beckett's life. One can explore the influence of Beckett's writings in the music of various composers. What this essay will focus on is the importance of music in Beckett's aesthetics. Here by music I do not simply mean the music that could be listened to. Instead I shall explore the music as a trope, a metaphor, a thought-mechanism which drives writing.

Before explaining the definition of music employed in this essay, I shall examine a few articles which also study Beckett's aesthetics from the perspective of music. Beckett's works, with the paring-down of phrases and the use of pauses and silence, strike the readers with a sense of musical rhythm. Hence it may be spontaneous for people

to have recourse to musical analogies to describe Beckett's writings. For instance, in a short essay, Walter Beckett, claims that the names of Gogo and Didi are more musical and rhythmical than Estragon and Vladimir, because the use of the repeated consonant is a staccato repeated note. In an even more subjective vein he says that he hears a diminished seventh chord in the beginning passage of *Krapp's Last Tape* (1998: 181). Walter Beckett's basic strategy is to use a sequence of musical terms to describe his impression on Beckett's writings. What is lacking in his analysis is a focal musical concept which can subsume all the other musical analogies. It is difficult to adhere to any one of the analogies and develop it into further arguments. What he leaves the readers with is just a sequence of impressive musical analogies without being sewn together into a whole.

What about choosing a musical analogy as a central paradigm of reading Beckett's works? For instance, Harry White tries to base his entire argument on an analogy between Beckett's writing and serialism. His

* Centre for Intercultural Studies, UCL (alumni)
xuyan.shen.10@alumni.ucl.ac.uk

concern is to establish an affinity between Beckett's preoccupation with the sequential order and the same preoccupation in musical serialism, but what in effect he focuses on is simply the structural organisation and the elemental condition of language (White 1998: 162-165). In other words, one can still approach Beckett's writings within the linguistic perspectives and without the aid of musical serialism. I think that the insistent resort to serialism does not advance White's stated aims in his essay. The analogy does not reveal a deep connection between music and Beckett's writing.

The insoluble problem in White's methodology is the unavoidability of reducing music to language. Serialism is consistently reduced to thoughts of a 'fixed order' or a 'structural organisation'. Once reduced to these words, the concept of serialism can be kept at a remove. One good example of this kind of problem can be found in the following quotation from Mary Bryden's essay 'Beckett and the Sound of Silence':

In this respect one might draw together the resonant silence which ensues after the bell-sound at the conclusion of Stravinsky's *Les Noces* and the 'chime even a little fainter still. Pause for echoes' which concludes Beckett's play *Footfalls*. As Pierre Boulez describes in his tribute to Roger Désormière: 'No passing-bell could have been more apt than the last page of *Les Noces* as he had once conducted it, giving an extraordinary reality to the "paralysis" of the final chord, where sound melts into silence.' These moments – the closure of *Les Noces*, the closure of *Footfalls* – are not so much withdrawals of sound as intensifications of the surrounding silence; they are perfect examples of the elasticity of acoustic presence and absence. (Bryden 1998: 28)

The essential information of the above argument has nothing to do with music. Bryden

only uses music as a bridge to introduce Boulez's description of the bell-sound, which she might think can illuminate our understanding of Beckett's aesthetics. In fact the central point can be made in a simpler and more straightforward way, without the mediation of music: the chime in Beckett's *Footfalls* is a sound melting into silence which can be interpreted as both acoustic presence and absence.

At this point we are already approaching the concept of music I shall explore in this essay. Since any resort to music will finally fall into words, why not see music directly as a trope in language? In other words, I shall treat music as a concept formed in language, rather than any specific piece of music or compositional technique. My central concern is thus the following question: what might the concept of 'music' mean to Beckett? In that light I would like to examine the meaning of 'music' in Beckett's 1930 monograph *Proust* (1970: 78-79.89-92) at first. After elucidating the meaning of music in Beckett's writing I shall analyse how Beckett reaches a state of music by inventing a new language. An interlude on Beckett and Keats will be set for explaining the concept of 'music' with the help of the poem 'To Autumn' (Keats 1983: 232).

Music as a process of vegetation

If we take a closer look at Beckett's monograph *Proust*, especially its coda, we can see that to Beckett music is a process of vegetation. Here I would like to spell out how this formulation could be established. First, Beckett states that music is the Idea that is beyond rationality. 'Music is the Idea itself, unaware of the world of phenomena, existing ideally outside the universe, apprehended not in Space but in Time only, and consequently untouched by the teleological hypothesis' (Beckett 1970: 78-79.89-92).

Second, Beckett thinks that the majority of the characters in Proust's works are 'vegetal' and 'having no conscious will'. He sees vegetation as a way to achieve the state of music. 'When the subject is exempt from will

the object is exempt from causality (Time and Space taken together). And this human vegetation is purified in the transcendental apperception that can capture the Model, the Idea, the Thing in itself' (Beckett 1970: 78-79.89-92).

Further, if we add the following snippet, we can unfold the subtlety in the metaphor 'vegetation'. 'The Proustian stasis is contemplative, a pure act of understanding, will-less, the "amabilis insania" and the "holder Wahnsinn"' (Beckett 1970: 78-79.89-92). Like 'amabilis insania' and 'holder Wahnsinn', the word 'vegetation' contains oxymoronic meanings. On the one hand, it points to the state of stillness; on the other, it has the connotation of growing. It is active and passive at the same time. It is the act of will-less contemplation rather than the simple collapse of will. In this sense, the more vegetal and inactive one is, the closer to the Idea one is – a state of plenum.

One interesting example of such an understanding of 'vegetation' occurs in *Waiting for Godot* (1952). In this play the tree is in a state of stillness. In Act One, it is leafless and Vladimir even claims that '[i]t must be dead.' However, in Act Two the tree has four or five leaves and Vladimir notices this change. As Dirk Van Hulle argues, the tree in *Waiting for Godot* has the qualities of the Beckettian character par excellence. Not going anywhere, the tree is still and silent, and yet it goes on 'growing' (Hulle 2008: 126). At the beginning of Act Two the life of leaves suddenly and quietly breaks out of the inactiveness, and in the rest of the second act the tree returns to its inactiveness again. The moment of activeness in the beginning of Act Two is thus a moment of plenum.

Beckett furthermore adds one more layer of meaning to the formulation by acknowledging the impossibility of achieving a pure state of music. He argues that 'this essential quality of music is distorted by the listener who, being an impure subject, insists on giving a figure to that which is ideal and

invisible, on incarnating the Idea in what he conceives to be an appropriate paradigm' (Beckett 1970: 78-79.89-92).

It is self-evident that music cannot do without the listener. Hence, Beckett here is not criticising the impure subject who sullies the music s/he hears, but indicating the inapproachability of music resulting from the inevitability of listening itself. At this point, we encounter the question of representation: how can the state of pure music be represented through writing, with the medium of language? In writing, the writer plays the same role as the listener: s/he gives a visible 'figure' (words) to the invisible. That is to say, when one starts to write, there is no longer pure music. As Susan Sontag writes in her essay 'The Aesthetics of Silence', language has its dual characters – its transcendence and its 'fallenness'. On the one hand, language is a medium with an apparently essential function in the project of transcendence, of moving beyond the singular and contingent. On the other, language is the most impure, the most contaminated of all the materials out of which art is made (Sontag 1994: 14). In my opinion, it is precisely this dualistic character of language that stimulates Beckett to write in his unique style. To Beckett, the aim of writing is not to finally achieve a state of music, but to indicate the tenacious process of achieving it. The way to approach a transcendental state of music in writing is to 'vegetate' the 'fallen' language. In short, the formulation becomes the following: music is a process of vegetation.

In this sense music is on the one hand the Idea, the plenum of meaning. On the other, it is indicated by a process of subtraction, of becoming still, inactive, void. To make a condensed formulation: void is plenum. Such a mechanism, oversimplified as it may appear, is the kernel of this essay. In Beckett's writings, the death-like, still, motionless syntax can generate pulsations of unspeakable meaning.

As the analysis above indicates the concept of music breaks down binary concepts

such as active/inactive and plenum/void. Daniel Albright, in his book *Beckett and Aesthetics*, proposes a pair of interesting and important figures. He uses the story of Apollo and Marsyas as a paradigm to understand Beckett's aesthetics. Marsyas was a satyr excelling at playing the *aulos*, a kind of reed instrument. He once challenged Apollo to a music contest, whose judges were the muses. In the end, Apollo won the contest because of his unbeatable lyre-playing skills. Moreover, he was so irritated by the impertinence of Marsyas that he tied him to a tree and skinned him alive. Consequently, the whole body of Marsyas was one wound, his viscera quivering in the air. In the myth, this was then the origin of wind music (Albright 2003: 138).

Here Apollo and Marsyas stand for two sides of a coin. For Apollo music is order: an inquiry into system and proportionality; for Marsyas, music is disorder: wind, breath, animating spirit. Apollo's lyre represents transcendental calm, Marsyas's *aulos* ecstatic convulsions. Interestingly, the ending of the story merges the two sides: the calm Apollo became so enraged that he himself became Marsyas by killing him. To Beckett, the order of form is the way to express the disorder of authentic feelings. As Albright argues: in a system with few elements, chaos can be fully displayed in an orderly table of permutations – an orderliness that offers no relief from disorder, for it is one with it (Albright 2003: 138).

One explicit example of this can be found in Beckett's novel *Watt* (1953). In part III of this novel Beckett depicts Watt's strange symptoms of linguistic illness stage by stage:

- **Stage 1:** inversion of words in sentence
- **Stage 2:** inversion of letters in word
- **Stage 3:** inversion of sentences in the period
- **Stage 4:** inversion of the words in the sentence together with that of the letters in the word
- **Stage 5:** inversion of the words in the sentence together with that of the sen-

tences in the period

- **Stage 6:** inversion of the letters in the word together with that of the sentence in the period
- **Stage 7:** inversion of the letters in the word together with that of the words in the sentence together with that of the sentences in the period
- **Stage 8:** simultaneous combination of stages 4-7 (Beckett 1953: 164-169.203-205)

This is a typical example illustrating the Apollo/Marsyas relationship. One can compare it to the twelve-tone composing system of Arnold Schönberg, namely serialism. The rigorous, Apollonian method of composing can create chaotic Marsyasian music. (Schönberg's blasphemous 'Dance before the Golden Calf' in his opera *Moses und Aron* is a typical example.) Similarly in Watt's case, though there are such strict principles of programming the syntax, the language finally turns out to be chaotic and it reflects Watt's mental disorder. In his essay 'The Exhausted' (1992), which will be further explored in the rest of this essay, Gilles Deleuze uses what Blanchot says about Musil to describe the writings of Beckett: 'the greatest exactitude and the most extreme dissolution; the indefinite exchange of mathematical formulations and the pursuit of the formless or the unformulated' (1998: 152-174).

When comparing writing to music composition, I should still be careful about the differences between the two. What the twelve-tone system and Beckett's writing techniques share is the tension between the formal order and the spiritual disorder, yet one further element in writing must again be noted – the 'fallenness' of language. As the relationship between music and listener shows, people are inclined to search for impure 'meaning' in pure sound. In languages, the sound of words as signifiers cannot evade their signified in social contexts. Writing can thus be seen as contaminated music. In the above example from *Watt*, the meaning of words are peeled off by stages and become

closer to pure sound; however, as Sam (the 'listener' in the novel) states, he can still recognise and understand the meaning of these words when he gets accustomed to Watt's speaking manners. In this sense I would claim that Watt's wordplay, even in its final stage, is not music but a process of struggling for a state of music through the destruction of language in a rigorous manner. The meaning of the words, though recognisable to the listener, becomes less and less significant. What the readers catch in the end is the wild craziness of Watt.

I would like to refer to this process of meaning destruction as the search for 'the oldest poetry'. In discussing Giambattista Vico's theses in his critical essay 'Dante... Bruno. Vico... Joyce' (1929) Beckett claims that to Vico, human language was born in poetry, metaphors. Here 'metaphor' refers to a primitive, poverty-stricken language without ornamental or abstract sophistication, yet it is a language full of sense and imagination (Beckett 1961: 10). As the example in *Watt* showcases, the primitive, almost meaningless language can represent the inner wildness of Watt's mind.

Two questions apropos of the 'metaphor' will thus be discussed in this essay. First, how can a primitive metaphor be seen as a thought-mechanism that drives the act of reading and writing? What is the relationship between the primitive 'metaphor' and the imagination it can trigger? Second, what specific forms do these 'metaphors' take in Beckett's writings? What can be defined as a primitive or 'vegetated' language? The first question will be discussed in the following section. The second will be elaborated in the fourth section.

Interlude: understanding Beckett through Keats

The aim of this interlude is twofold. First, it is a dialogue with an implicit point Beckett made about John Keats in *Proust*. Second, through an analysis of Keats's poem 'To Autumn', it further elaborates on the rela-

tionship between plain, 'vegetated' words and imagination.

In *Proust*, in contrast to the 'Proustian stasis' quoted in the second section, Beckett mentions the Keatsian stasis – the panic-stricken stasis, crouched in a mossy thicket, annulled, 'drowsed with the fume of poppies' and watching 'the last ooziings, hours by hours' (1970: 78-79.89-92). It is evident that Beckett is talking about Keats's poem 'To Autumn' (1820). To Beckett, the Keatsian stasis is simply the 'collapse of will'. Through the following close reading of 'To Autumn' I would like to showcase that the Keatsian stasis in the poem is not simply 'terrible panic-stricken'. The mechanism in this poem might be viewed as an insightful footnote for Beckett's own approach to writing.

Beckett is correct in the sense that there are several lines of collapse and decline in Keats's poem: firstly, the seasonal passage from blooming, fruition, harvesting (cider-making) to the barrenness afterwards (denuded stubble-plains); secondly, the spatial movement from the central cottage to the surrounding of the farm and, in the end, up to the sky, the emptiness; thirdly, the daily temporal sequence from dawn mists to the heat of noon, in which the reaper drowns, and finally to the sunset; and fourthly, from the personified figure of the season to its disappearance into the sound of 'music' in the third stanza. The entire poem indicates a decline from plenitude to barrenness (Vendler 1983: 245-255).

On the other hand, I would like to argue that it is precisely this gradual *process* of collapse that is similar to the process of achieving a state of music. It is noteworthy that the listener in the last stanza inclines to reach the state of human vegetation. The listener does not himself wander from hill to river to hedge to croft; rather, he keeps rooted at one spot. Along with this state of vegetation, the sounds of autumn, from the places closer by (river and hill) to the upper boundary of the sky, converge toward the listener. Thus two opposing forces emerge in this stanza:

the centripetal power of the listener who keeps still and takes notice of the sounds of his small society, and the centrifugal power of the sounds which are from directions further and further away and become ever more purified. That is to say, the result of human 'vegetation' is the approximation to the pure state of music. As I have suggested in the previous section, in the act of writing human vegetation can be operated through linguistic transformations. Although in this poem the process of linguistic 'vegetation' is not as explicit as the case in *Watt*, we can still find valid evidence in Keats's diction. We can clearly see that the sound-describing words change from those containing strong senses of pathos to simple, 'primitive', objective ones: from 'wailful choir [...] small gnats mourn', 'full-grown lambs loud bleat' to '[h] edge-crickets sing [...] red-breast whistles [...] swallows twitter' (Vendler 1983: 245-255, my italics). In those verbs of pathos, like 'mourn' or 'bleat', one could still see that the listener is in the 'panic-stricken stasis' and stricken by the final barrenness of the season (Beckett is correct here). However, in words like 'sing', unmodified by any adjective or adverb, one can note a final effort to refuse the pathos, a will to reach a will-less stasis exactly like the Proustian stasis in Beckett's eye. But as Vendler argues, 'to banish pathos entirely is as untrue as to yield to it utterly, and so the modifiers of these two admirably neutral verbs are allowed some fleeting measure (introduced more by reader than by writer) of pathos' (1983: 245-255). That is to say, the state of pure music is still contaminated by pathos. There are two reasons for this: first, even though the listener in the poem manages to achieve vegetation, it does not mean that the reader of the poem can reach such a state. Even in the most objective words like 'sing' the reader can still catch a sense of pathos. The lack of pathos arouses the nostalgia for it. Second, the writer is unable to pen the autumnal barrenness as such. The only way to present the final barrenness is to go through the plenitude before it.

I would like to refer to this writing mechanism as 'compensatory imagination'. It functions in two senses in Keats's case. The writer uses imagination to fill the hole of the unrepresentable barrenness, while to the reader, even the plainest words can still trigger his imagination. The poem moves asymptotically from imagination to the autumnal nothingness. Imagination and barrenness compensate for each other in symbiosis. After the imaginative descriptions in the first two stanzas the poet finally subsides into the barrenness that stimulated Keats's compensatory imagination. What he leaves is not pure music, but his poem, his words – a sullied, thinning music.

Beckett's writing mechanism continues the thinning music in Keats's poem. He pushes the 'compensatory imagination' to its extreme. Keats's writing projects plenitude to barrenness while in Beckett's writing, even the first two stanzas are omitted. That is to say, even the imaginative plenitude is emptied. Beckett's writing is thus an invitation for a more extreme 'compensatory imagination': further strengthening the state of vegetal stasis, his language almost takes the form of barrenness itself. Yet still, under the function of 'compensatory imagination', a stronger sense of fullness can be achieved, which is closer to the state of music. This Beckettian type of 'compensatory imagination' is touched on in Kenneth Burke's essay '(Nonsymbolic) Motion/ (Symbolic) Action' (1978: 809). In this essay, 'motion' is non-symbolic, the human vegetation, the brutal 'fact', while 'action' is symbolic and meaningful. Burke expounds on many possible connections between 'motion' and 'action', among which the following can be regarded as typically Beckettian: 'The fall from such a state (whereby the fullness, *pleroma*, of purely symbolic exercising gives way to a sense of its underlying emptiness as tested by a similarly structured physiological counterpart) is called "accidie", *acedia*, sloth, torpor, drought' (1978: 809).

In short, Keats's poem can be viewed as a process to barrenness, the autumnal music. It is precisely the barrenness in the third stanza that triggers the imaginations in the first two stanzas. Beckett takes this process further and hence reaches a state closer to music. The following section will examine how Beckett uses different kinds of languages to approach a state of music.

Processing music – three languages

How does Beckett further the Keatsian stasis and step closer to the state of music in his writings? How does he invent his own 'vegetated' languages? What forms do the 'vegetated' languages take in his writings? In this section, I shall draw together two essays, Deleuze's 'The Exhausted' (1992) and Alain Badiou's 'The Writing of the Generic: Samuel Beckett' (1989), because in my opinion both concern the three kinds of languages Beckett employs. I shall describe them under the following headings: one, the language of cutting; two, the language of blending; and three, the language of gap.

Deleuze's idea of 'exhaustion' is crucial here. I shall see the process of 'vegetation' as writing in a language of exhaustion, namely a language attempting to exhaust all possibilities and to reach a state of stasis. The language of exhaustion states the possible, but not only by readying it for a realisation. One combines all variables of a situation (*Watt*) on the condition that one is in complete objectivity, renouncing any order of preference; yet one does not fall into a peaceful unity of contradictories, nor is one passive. One remains active, for nothing (Deleuze 1998: 152-174). This is precisely the mechanism I have discussed in the previous sections: void is plenum.

Here comes the question: how could language combine what has no name, the object *x*? Namely, how could language approach the state of music? Deleuze discovers three kinds of languages which can be used to present the '*x*', while Badiou, from my perspective, also touches on similar issues in his

'The Writing of the Generic: Samuel Beckett', though put in different terms. The three languages can be seen as three staircases, each leading us a step closer to the state of music.

The language of cutting

The first kind of language is the language of cutting, namely cutting the language into basic atoms – plain nouns and verbs, and, more importantly, forming them into exhaustive series of things. It pushes the 'plainness' of words to extreme. This is a kind of special metalanguage in which the relations between objects are exactly the same as the relations between words. Consequently, words no longer give realisation to the possible but create for themselves a possible reality, which is precisely exhaustible. Deleuze calls this kind of language in Beckett *language I*: atomic, disjunctive, cut and chopped, a language of names, of enumeration (1998: 152-174).

To Badiou, there are three kinds of localisations in Beckett's writings. The first of them is a closure. In Badiou's words, a closure is an enclosed space where the site's set of traits are denumerable and exactly nameable. The aim is to make 'what is seen' coextensive with 'what is said' within a closed space. The human in such a closure is vegetated or, in Badiou's term, ascetic (2008: 251: 286).

If we read Deleuze and Badiou together, we can see that in order to achieve the state of music (a sense of Allness in the form of Nothingness), Beckett writes in a kind of atomic language: it is often used to describe enclosed places and the men in such places who are often ascetics although they may be on the move all the time.

Again, Beckett's novel *Watt* abounds with such examples. Here I choose the language Beckett uses to depict Mr. Knott and his room as an example. First of all, Mr. Knott, like Murphy, is an odd ascetic: it seems that he lives a normal man's life, but he has a will for being will-less, a need for being needless. This is the core of the Proustian stasis from Beckett's point of view. Next, the room of Mr.

Knott is exactly like the closure in Badiou's sense. Furthermore, the permutation of furniture in the room is like a grammatical drill seeking to exhaust all the possibilities of movement.

If he ate, and he ate well; if he drank, and he drank heartily; if he slept, and he slept sound; if he did other things, and he did other things regularly, it was not from need of food, or drink, or sleep, or other things, no, but from the need never to need, never never to need, food, and drink, and sleep, and other things.

... on the Sunday, the tallboy on its feet by the fire, and the dressing-table on its head by the bed, and the night-stool on its face by the door, and the washhand-stand on its back by the window; and, on the Monday, the tallboy on its back by the bed, and the dressing-table on its face by the door, and the night-stool on its back by the window, and the washhand-stand on its feet by the fire; and on the Tuesday... (Beckett 1953: 164-169.203-205)

By cutting language into plain nouns and verbs, Beckett decomposes the meaning of language and composes his 'music'. The less ornamental or abstract meaning the language contains, the less contaminated the music is. The reduction of meaning is intended to reveal that language only repeats cliché, nothing new. Furthermore, by repeating the language atoms in absurd lengths, even the basic meaning of words are scraped off: words are inclined to become pure sounds.

Here one might raise the question: what certain kinds of 'plain' words does Beckett often use in his writings? If we take a closer at the plain words Beckett employs, we will discover that they are usually 'closed-class' words, as Ann Banfield mentions in her article 'Beckett's Tattered Syntax' (2003: 17). The language of cutting exploits the non-productive process of language. These 'closed-class' words can be grammatical nouns (one, self, thing, place, time, way), grammatical verbs (be, become, get, have, come, go), grammatical adjectives (other,

same, different) and most prepositions. Also, most nouns and verbs are used without any ornamentation (like the verb 'sing' in Keats's poem). Beckett uses these kinds of words because they are the least descriptive. In *Proust*, Beckett argues that Proust is contemptuous to the literature that 'describes', namely realism and naturalism that only transcribe the surface, the epidermis, behind which the Idea is the prisoner (Beckett 1970: 78-79.89-92). In order to release the Idea, the music, from words that 'describe', Beckett opts to write in the most non-descriptive words.

In sum, the language of cutting has the following features: first, it is made of 'atomic', non-descriptive words; second, the words repeat in patterns of permutation, in an effort to become pure sound; third in order to realise exhaustive permutation, the words often form a enclosed place in which all the possibilities could be achieved; and fourth, the human lives in such a place are often in a mentality of stasis.

The language of blending

The language of cutting pushes the Keatsian stasis to its extreme – it not only uses plain words, but also repeats them in great lengths and with various permutations. But this is not the end of the Beckettian exhaustion. The language of cutting can still be exhausted by another form of language – the language of blending. If one attempts to exhaust the possibility of words, one must exhaust the words themselves.

Thus, as Deleuze states, another kind of metalanguage, *language II*, is needed. This kind of language is not of names but of 'voices'; not of atomic words but of 'blendable flows'. What is this flow of 'voice'? Deleuze calls it 'a true silence'. What interests me here is Deleuze's diction: he regards silence as a kind of voice. Silence could be the continuation of voice – it blends voices together. Even if words are dried up into silence, the silence is still not an absolute one (Deleuze 1998: 152-174).

This understanding of the relationship between silence and sound is close to what John Cage states in his book *Silence* (1968). There are two basic principles in Cage's theory of music: first, there is no absolute silence; second, any sound can be music. To Cage, where there is sound, there is music. Any noise can be listened to as music. In this sense, our life is permeated with music. As he claims in 'The Future of Music: Credo', when we start to listen to noise we find it intriguing: the sound of a truck, static between the stations, rain. Composers can use such noise as musical instruments (Cage 1973: 8).

The two principles can be seen as the keys to comprehend what Deleuze implies by saying that silence is a kind of voice in Beckett's writings. For instance, the beginning of the 1957 play *Endgame* (Beckett 2006a: 93) is a 'voiced silence' – Beckett fills silence with sounds: the shuffling of feet, the dropping of things. The whole play starts from silence: bare interior, grey light, Hamm motionless by the door. Soon the sounds come: Clov staggers around the room, stands under the windows, laughs briefly, opens and closes the ashbins, and then finally Clov starts his first line: 'Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished'. The pattern is the following: silence-sound-words. The same pattern can be found in the beginning of *Waiting for Godot*: silence-sounds-(Estragon trying to take off his boot, panting)-words (Estragon: Nothing to be done). In these two cases words grow from silence. Another slightly different kind of silence can be found in *Waiting for Godot*. Both acts of the play end in the following way:

Estragon: Well, shall we go?

Vladimir: Yes, let's go.

[They do not move.] (Beckett 2006: 88)

Here the pattern is reversed: words-silence. Still, the silence in the ending tableau is not an absolute one: silence grows from words. The silence on the one hand promises an act of 'going', while on the other hand it could be interpreted as a kind of inactiveness –

'Nothing to be done.' Such a double function of silence is precisely the same as the trope of 'tree' in the play: it is simultaneously progression ('wait-go') and regression ('go-wait').

Badiou has a different set of terms for such a language of blending. In contrast to the closure depicted by the language of cutting, to Badiou the language of blending creates a totally different space: an open space of trajectories and of varieties of pathings (2008: 251: 286). In the 1961 *How It Is* (Beckett 2009: 23), the space is the purgatorial black mud where the larval human crawlers live. Like the closed spaces, the spaces of wandering also suppress all descriptive ornamentations. On the one hand, there are images of the earth and sky, spaces of wandering; on the other hand, there are spaces that themselves are sort of motionless simplicity.

To Badiou the most typical example of such a space of trajectories can be found in Beckett's late prose *Lessness* from (1995: 197-198). It is a special text consisting of 120 sentences. The second sixty are the repetition of the first sixty in a different order. The method Beckett employs to write this text is the following: he writes each sentence on a piece of paper, mixes them in a container, and picks them out in random order twice (Hulle 2008: 126). Apart from the repetition of sentences, the text also repeats phrases like 'ash grey', 'little body', 'ruins true refuge' in a random way. Beckett infuses the limited syntactic atoms with chance, arbitrariness, and randomness. The space Beckett creates with these limited little linguistic units is, moreover, not a closure but a boundless, motionless open field which enables possibilities of all movements. Thus the text is a fusion of closure and of open, or errant, space. The enclosed and the open become merged together. Just as the ending of *Waiting for Godot* implies, it turns out to be impossible to know whether it is destined to movement or rather to motionlessness (Badiou 2008: 251: 286)

Badiou's take on the spaces of trajectories can help us have a further understanding on the language of blending. I think

that both Deleuze and Badiou point at the same thing – Deleuze uses acoustic terms, while Badiou uses spatial ones. What both of them touch on are the strong spiritual movements triggered by the random repetition of limited elements. Such spiritual movements can be viewed as moments of the ‘Sublime’, the Kantian concept which Lyotard uses to characterise modern art. In his essay ‘Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?’ (1982), Lyotard explains that the ‘Sublime’ is the unrepresentable Idea beyond imagination:

The sublime takes place when the imagination fails to present an object that might, if only in principle, come to match a concept. We have the Idea of the world (the totality of what is), but we do not have the capacity to show an example of it. We have the Idea of the simple (that which cannot be broken down, decomposed), but we cannot illustrate it with a sensible object which would be a ‘case’ of it. We can conceive the infinitely great, the infinitely powerful, but every presentation of an object destined to ‘make visible’ this absolute greatness or power appears to us painfully inadequate. Those are Ideas of which no presentation is possible. Therefore, they impart no knowledge about reality (experience); they also prevent the free union of the faculties which gives rise to the sentiment of the beautiful; and they prevent the formation and the stabilization of taste. They can be said to be unrepresentable. (Lyotard 2008: 416)

If we read the ‘Sublime’ in the light of the Beckettian ‘music’, it could be understood as following: first, the Idea, the music, is unrepresentable; second, the very presentation of music can only be the ‘contaminated music’; third, though the music is beyond imagination, it can still trigger endless compensatory imagination in language.

Here I would like to situate the ‘Sublime’ back into Deleuze’s theories. For Lyotard, the Kantian ‘Sublime’ escapes or exceeds the possibility of representation. It is something very like Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of ‘rhythm’ and ‘deterritorialisation’. The voiced silence, the spaces of trajectories in Beckett’s writings can be viewed as the sudden burst into the ‘Sublime’. What they create is ‘rhythm’, a musical term used in many of Deleuze’s books. For instance, in the conclusion of *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), the following part gives a clear-cut explanation of the term: ‘Between two strata or between two stratic divisions, there are interstratic phenomena: transcodings and passages between milieus, intermixings. Rhythms pertain to these interstratic movements, which are also acts of stratification’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 502-503). Between the strata of voice and silence, rhythms are generated. To Deleuze, Beckett’s writings can be compared to assemblages. Every assemblage has a ‘home’ – it is basically territorial. Many of Beckett’s characters have their ‘territories’: Murphy has his rocking chair; Nagg and Nell have their trash bins. If one compares the ‘territories’ to the closure in Badiou’s sense, then what the language of blending sketches is the momentum of deterritorialisation – leaving home. Here we come back to the relationship between Apollo and Marsyas, order and disorder. The language of blending is the Apollonian form representing the Marsyasian outburst. To Deleuze, such a match between form and content is necessary because a too sudden deterritorialisation could be suicidal or cancerous. Without an Apollonian form, it will end in chaos, the void or destruct itself.

Beckett’s shortest play *Breath* (1969) is most suitable to exemplify such momentum of deterritorialisation. Without a plot, without a spoken word, without a visible character on stage, it is a play of pure sound and light. If we examine the change of light and sound in this play respectively, we could see that both follow the framework of nothing-something-nothing, or inaction-action-inaction:

- **Light:** faint light (about five seconds) – *slow increase of light to maximum – slow decrease of light to minimum* – faint light
- **Sound:** silence (about five seconds) – *faint brief vagitus* – inspiration (about ten seconds) – silence (about five seconds) – *expiration* (about ten seconds) – *repetition of the faint brief vagitus* – silence (about five seconds) (Beckett 2006: 369)

The italicised parts are those moments of deterritorialisation. As one can see, they are strictly organised into a pattern. The duration of those moments are accurately controlled in order to prevent them from self-destruction. In this sense, the language of blending is more than just silence. It also consists of the pattern that organises silence and gives it voice. The rhythm in Deleuze's sense is generated in the interaction between territory and deterritorialisation.

That is to say, the language of blending, in a broad sense, is a dynamic power created by the pattern and the drive for breaking the pattern. It is not limited in the voice-silence relationship. In Beckett's play *Rockaby* (1980), for instance, 'fuck life' abruptly explodes into the play's mesmerising pattern:

v: ...
 so in the end
 close of a long day
 went down
 let down the blind and down
 right down
 into the old rocker
 and rocked
 rocked
 saying to herself
 no
 done with that
 the rocker
 those arms at last
 saying to the rocker
 rock her off
 stop her eyes
 fuck life
 stop her eyes

rock her off
 rock her off (Beckett 2006: 441-442)

The two words form a crack in an established pattern, another kind of instant of deterritorialisation. Its function consists of two sides: on the one hand, it is a 'voice' breaking out of the mesmerising pattern; on the other, the pattern is unaffected and still continues afterwards. Thus it turns out to be a black parody, a pseudo-event of the 'happening' of something, while actually nothing happens at all.

After examining the deterritorialisation in *Breath* and *Rockaby* one might ask what kind of deterritorialisation, what sense of 'music' we can find in *Lessness*, which I mentioned earlier in this section. In *Lessness* one cannot easily find any voice/silence or words suddenly breaking the pattern. What we have is a series of patterned sentences depicting spaces of trajectories. That is to say, nothing happens in the text, not even a black parody; yet in the light of the mechanism of 'compensatory imagination' the surface structure of 'barrenness' can still be read as a pathos of the lack of the 'Sublime' moment. On the barren open field created by the text, trajectories of deterritorialisation may break out at any time. They are just in a state of 'waiting'.

To summarise, the language of blending is the voiced silence, the interaction between territory and deterritorialisation, or even merely the territory awaiting deterritorialisation. What it generates is a sense of 'rhythm'.

The language of gap

The might of Beckett's writing is that he can always find room for further subtraction and exhaustion, which proves the ending of *The Unnamable*: 'I can't go on, I'll go on'. To Deleuze, the language of blending can still be exhausted and then becomes the language of gap, which is closest to the state of music. It is therefore a *language III*, which no longer relates language to enumerable or combinable objects, nor to transmitting voices, but to hiatuses or holes (Deleuze 1998: 152-174).

The hole does not present itself as the absolute nothing. Instead it becomes a visual or aural Image. The Image is always the becoming-Image. It is not an object but a process. Though attempting to rid itself from the language, the hole or the void could only be inserted into language. To rephrase in Badiou's terms: though the Beckettian state of music should be uttered uniquely as void it is being as void in-exists in language. The void can thus be put into such a formula: the said is equal to the missaid. This equivalence reveals that the missaid is the essence of saying. It claims that being in-exists in language and as a consequence, all language is a *gap* of language (Badiou 2008: 251-286).

This gap, like the gap between different strata, is filled with 'rhythm'. In this sense, it seems difficult to distinguish the language of blending from the language of gap. The void becomes the Image which is defined by its form, namely, by its 'internal tension' or by the force it mobilises to create a void or to bore holes (Deleuze 1998: 152-174). In this sense, the language of gap has a stronger 'internal tension'. The difference between the void and the language of blending is that the former is far more powerful: it is a kind of dangerous deterritorialisation in Deleuze's sense. What counts is not the meagre content but the energy – mad and ready to disappear – that the Image tries to harness. Like particles, the Image can never last long. The only way to make them last is to repeat them. To Deleuze, the Image is a little visual or aural *ritornello*. It dissipates quickly because it is the means of having done with itself. Making itself implode, it is transient. One typical kind of Image in Beckett's writings is the moments of involuntary memory. In *Proust* Beckett states that the Proustian involuntary memory is a kind of explosive and immediate deflagration: 'It is an unruly magician and will not be importuned. It chooses its own time and place for the performance of its miracle. The whole of Proust's world, including Combray and his childhood, comes out of a teacup' (Beckett 1970: 78-79.89-92). In my

eye, compared with Proust's pages of regaining the past events, the moments of involuntary memory in Beckett's writings are more 'explosive and immediate'. They are precisely the Image in Deleuze's sense. One can hardly develop a complete narrative from them. They are merely atomic fragments of an individual's reminiscence, recollections of the transient, obscure life scenes. Many Images of involuntary memory can be found in Beckett's late works. Most parts of *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), *Play* (1962-63) and *Not I* (1973) are basically composed of such images. Here is an example from *How It Is*, where we have pages of such beautiful memory scenes:

I look to me about sixteen and to crown all glorious weather egg-blue sky and scamper of little clouds I have my back turned to me and the girl too whom I hold who holds me by the hand the arse I have

we are if I may believe the colours that deck the emerald grass if I may believe them we are old dream of flowers and seasons we are in April or in May and certain accessories if I may believe them white rails a grandstand colour of old rose we are on a racecourse in April or in May. (Beckett 2009: 23)

Apart from the involuntary memory, the Image can also take other forms. In Beckett's 1975 television play *Ghost Trio* (2006: 411-414) examples of the language of gap, along with the other two languages I have analysed, can be found. First, the play takes place in a closure. The faint recorded voice uses atomic language to introduce everything in the room to the audience. Along with the close-ups of every object the room is cut into fragments. What the voice says, moreover, is neutral and blank, without any intention or depth. Second, one may claim that the play also contains a visual language of deterritorialisation. Many objects in the room plunge into the void: the door opens into a dark corridor;

the window looks out into a rainy night.

Here, as mentioned before, it is difficult to judge if the void should be seen as a 'voiced silence' or a becoming-gap. One can argue that it is a plunge into the infinite 'Sublime', while one can also argue that it is a hurtle into self-destruction. But it should be noticed that near the end of the play the image of a boy appears on the screen. The image of the boy proves the following two points: first, the silence/blackness of the corridor and the night can be regarded as the state of waiting for an event, a change (the boy), rather than self-destruction; second, the image of the boy itself is the Deleuzian Image at its purest – it appears briefly and implodes immediately.

At this point, what I would like to focus on is how we can see the play as a whole as an Image exhausting its energy and finally flinging itself into the void. The play can be divided into two parts: one part (I and II of the play) with the voice (v) introducing the objects in the room and the movements of the figure (F), the other (III) a silent film. The former exhausts the voice and ends in music; the latter exhausts the space and again ends in music. The brief moments cut from the Largo of Beethoven's Fifth Piano Trio are the last transition to the absolute void. 'The visual image is carried along by the music, the sonorous image that rushes toward its own abolition. Both of them rush toward the end, all possibility exhausted' (Beckett 1953: 164-169, 203-205). That is to say, Beckett uses the music Image as the best representation of the void. In addition another kind of 'music' of more import should be noted in the play. It is a gap between two elements: the aural one and the visual one. As we know, Beckett writes both radio plays (plays without visual images) and silent television plays (plays without words). The voice in *Ghost Trio* can be seen as a kind of radio play and the pictures can be regarded as a film without words. There is no definite connection between the two. In other words, the two are not necessarily coexistent. The formal gap

between them is the very place of void. As Deleuze states, between the off-screen voice and the pure field of space, there is a scission. It is as if a radio piece and a silent film were being played simultaneously. Or rather, it is like a split frame, on one side of which are inscribed the silences of the voices, and on the other the voids of space (jump cuts) (Deleuze 1998: 152-174).

Such a gap, I claim, is the last stage of the Beckettian exhaustion. In Deleuze's theory we can find two terms for it: one is 'fact'; the other is rhythm, again. The two concepts are correlated to each other. The 'fact' is like the Idea, the 'Sublime', the unrepresentable. Deleuze employs this term when he discusses a kind of gap in the paintings of Francis Bacon. In Bacon's paintings there is also a Beckettian process of exhaustion. In order to avoid the figurative, illustrative, and narrative character the Figure in a painting must be isolated from the place. The relation of the Figure to its isolating place defines a 'fact'. Thus isolated, the Figure becomes an Image, an Icon. Hence there is a gap between the Figure and the place. Deleuze calls such a relationship between the Figure and the place *matters of fact*, as opposed to intelligible relations (of objects or ideas) (2003: xv.2). In addition, Deleuze notices another kind of gap in Bacon's triptychs. A triptych has three thoroughly separate sections, truly distinct from each other, which negate any possible narrative that would establish itself among them. On the other hand, Deleuze thinks that there can be a kind of brutal force unifying them together, making them interrelate in a way that is freed from any symbolic undercurrent (2003: xv.2). Similarly, we can view Beckett's *Ghost Trio* as a radio play and a silent film forced together by a brutal force. Such a force also unites the Images of transient involuntary memories. The gap thus charges Bacon's triptych as well as Beckett's plays with rhythm and becomes the essence of the work of art. In the triptych rhythms, as in a piece of music, become characters themselves. To Deleuze, the gap can be both

an absolute void ('fact') and a pure centre of energy (rhythm). In this sense, a special kind of blurriness is achieved. It is not obtained by indistinctness but by the operation that consists in destroying clarity by clarity – a clear-cut isolation (Deleuze 2003: xv.2). This again brings us back to the Apollo/Marsyas relationship about order and disorder: a form of order is the embodiment of a spirit of disorder.

Deleuze further divides the rhythms in Bacon's triptychs into three categories: one steady or 'attendant' rhythm, one rhythm of crescendo or simplification (The Figure climbs, expands), one rhythm of diminuendo or elimination (The Figure descends, contracts) (Deleuze 2003: xv.2). Interestingly, Badiou also discovers a three-in-one structure in the subject in the twelfth *Text for Nothing*. First, there is the subject of enunciation, the one who speaks: 'one who speaks is saying, without ceasing to speak' (Beckett 1995: 149-151). Second, there is the subject passivity, the one who hears without understanding: 'one who hears, mute, uncomprehending, far from all'. Third, there is the subject who upholds the question of identification, the one who insists on the question concerning what he is: '[a]nd this other now [...] with his babble of homeless mes and untenanted hims'. If we map Badiou's terms to those of Deleuze we can see the first kind of subject as the rhythm of crescendo, the second kind the rhythm of diminuendo, the third kind the attendant rhythm. The subject, like in a triptych, is pulled among the three. It should be noted that if we try to conjoin them, to count all three as a whole One, all we find is the void of being, a worthless nothing, as the ending of the twelfth *Text for Nothing* suggests: 'nothing ever but nothing and ever, nothing ever but lifeless words'. This is precisely the self-destructive power of the Image. In this sense, Beckett's *Ghost Trio* itself as a whole can be viewed as the Image, tearing itself into pieces from inside, rushing to the music of Beethoven, and finally the void.

At the end of this section I would like to invoke another metaphor to restate the beauty of the language of gap. When travelling in Japan Roland Barthes showed a special interest in the theatrical face masked in *Noh* theatre. The white paper masked on face, in my view, could be an intriguing metaphor for the language of gap. To Barthes, the white face erases all anterior trace of the features to transform the countenance to the blank extent of a matte stuff. The white paper can be viewed as a screen, a gap, which makes the male actor behind it absented from the play: he neither plays the female nor copies her, but only *signifies* her. The actor seeks to show the gesture of femininity rather than the complete representation of it (Barthes 1982: 88-91). Here, if I substitute 'femininity' with the 'Sublime' or the 'music', I would claim that the language of gap functions in the same vein: the gap between the Images shows a *gesture*, an *idea* of the 'music'.

Conclusion

As I hope to have shown in my analysis of Keats's 'To Autumn', the poem is a beautiful example of the process towards linguistic barrenness, which can still trigger compensatory imagination. Beckett steps further in this direction and creates three kinds of 'poverty-stricken' languages in his writings. In his novel *Murphy*, one can find a triad structure in Chapter Six. Beckett writes that there were three zones in Murphy's mind, which I think have close relationships with the three kinds of languages I have discussed. In this conclusion I would like first to summarise the three kinds of language along with my reading of Chapter Six of *Murphy*. Then I would like to reflect again on the question about music and language raised at the beginning of this essay: how can 'music' be represented in language? I will also reflect on the methodology I have employed in this essay.

In the first zone of Murphy's mind, there are the forms with parallel – the elements of physical experience are available for mental arrangement (Beckett 1993: 65-66). There

are interactions between the physical and the mental, the non-symbolic and the symbolic. The language of cutting, to me, comes between the first zone and the following second one, when the physical overwhelms the mental, the non-symbolic takes over the symbolic: elemental non-descriptive words repeat in permutation and at great lengths, creating an enclosed space where all the possibilities of movement could be exhausted and the human being is often in mental stasis.

In that second zone, there are the forms without parallel. Here the pleasure is contemplation. The mental takes over and words turn into silence. It should be noted that in both the first and the second zones Murphy feels sovereign and free: he could either move between the physical and the mental, or be pleased by the unparalleled beatitude. In such movements we can find the traits of the language of blending. It can be viewed as a kind of voiced silence. In a bid to present the unparalleled 'beatitude' or the 'Sublime', a certain pattern, or, in a Deleuzian term, a territory is needed. The moment of the 'pleasure of contemplation' is when the silence/voice breaks into the voice/silence, namely the moment of deterritorialisation. Moreover, it can even be a state of awaiting a deterritorialisation which does not materialise (*Lessness*). It is in the blending of territory and deterritorialisation that the unrepresentable is suggested.

The third zone in Murphy's mind consists in a flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms. It is nothing but forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming. Such a description corresponds to the concept of the Image. It contains a strong power of self-implosion: it cannot exist for long because in itself it is the means of self-destruction. The Image takes many forms in Beckett's works: the transitory moments of memory, the objects on television, sound and picture isolated from each other. It is noteworthy that there are gaps among the Images – the

Images have nothing to do with each other, while the absolute juxtaposition of them generates a rhythm, the language of gap. It is in such gaps that lies the self-destructing power of the Image. In those moments of void, the most unrepresentable 'music', the 'fact', the Fullness, is signified.

Having reviewed the three languages along with the three zones of Murphy's mind, I would like to come back to the word 'music' itself. Here we return to the question: since the genuine music is inexpressible in language, how can it be represented, indicated or imagined? One can easily notice that the word 'music' has many synonyms and analogies in this essay: void, gap, nothingness, emptiness, 'the oldest poetry', the Idea, the 'Sublime', the Fullness, plenitude, beatitude, the 'fact', rhythm, the white face, and so on. As a metaphor, music triggers ripples of concepts and further metaphors. This is, I claim, the very essence of a metaphor. The state of 'music' is implied in the process of such metaphorical transformations. To Kenneth Burke, a metaphor substitutes itself for a perspective. It is a device for seeing something in terms of something else. It brings out the thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this (Burke 1969: 504). There is an inherent 'incongruity' in a metaphor because the seeing of something in the lens of something else involves the 'carrying-over' of a term from one realm into another. The two realms can never be identical. In the case of music, when it is talked about metaphorically in language, it is removed from its own realm. Fritz Mauthner, who influenced Beckett greatly, also holds to the theory that all language can only express an approximation of reality. Language is by nature metaphorical. It consists in pictures of pictures of pictures (Ben-Zvi 1980: 190). This is the reason why I have emphasized the *process* of approaching a state of music: the three languages employed by Beckett are his approximations to the 'music'.

I hold that the 'fall' of music into language does not indicate the impotence of language. Rather, it reveals language's metaphorical

power. My exploration into Beckett's relationship with music is thus not simply a matter of cross-fertilization, as Harry White seems to suggest in his essay, but rather a study of Beckett's aesthetics that are developed from the 'incongruity' within the metaphor of music. It is this incongruity itself that is the driving force of meaning production. To make use of such an inherent 'gap' we can deliberately explore the use of contradictory concepts. As this essay attempts to show, many concepts used to describe the music are contradictory in relation to each other – emptiness/fullness, order/disorder, and so on – because the concept of music itself is based on inherent gaps: the connotations of both 'activeness' and 'inactiveness' can be developed from the word 'vegetation'; the music (pure)/listener (impure) relationship. The reconciliation between these polar concepts is achieved by putting them in constant flux. This could be the nearest verbal approach to not only music, but maybe also reality. Reality as a whole cannot be assumed or achieved in a synthesis that would follow thesis and antithesis. The real course of events is necessarily, at all times, in the interplay of connection and disconnection. The unification of these concepts is precisely based on the gap, the incongruity between them. That is to say, the gap as the essence of language is the fountainhead of the meaning. This is the real beauty of Beckett's writing: by drilling gaps and holes in language it invites incessant readings to fill it with meanings and imaginations.

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