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## The image that strengthens the assault on reason : "Ohio Improptu" by Samuel Beckett

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humanistica 21 1, 193-214

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2017

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Joanna Burzyńska-Sylwestrzak

## **The Image that Strengthens the Assault on Reason: *Ohio Improptu* by Samuelel Beckett**

### **Abstract**

The article entitled ***The Image that Strengthens the Assault on Reason: 'Ohio Improptu' by Samuel Beckett*** is an attempt to interpret the minimalist, experimental play by Samuel Beckett whose complexity reaches far beyond the cryptic simplicity of the text. As a drama specimen *Ohio Improptu* makes use of drama conventions (spoken word, stage visualization) yet, it incorporates them into an overall concept of *iterability*. As a result, the play does not yield to the interpretative tools of the methodology of drama interpretation. Moreover, it does not yield to any interpretation methods based on the categories of binary thinking that have their roots in the opposition reason-emotion used by a man equipped with the conceptual categories worked out by reason. There is a multifarious image at the centre of *Ohio Improptu* embracing various spatiotemporal dimensions, theatrical codes, conventions, based on iterability and transferring the sphere of experience beyond reason onto the recipient. The very mode of evoking the experience is strikingly similar to *koan*, a Buddhist prayer, which obliterates the meaning of the communicated words to give the full expression to experience.

**Key words:** image, iterability, experience beyond reason, the imaginal, *koan*

### **Abstrakt**

Artykuł zatytułowany ***The Image that Strengthens the Assault on Reason: 'Ohio Improptu' by Samuel Beckett*** jest próbą odczytania minimalistycznej, eksperymentalnej sztuki Samuela Becketta daleko, w jej złożoności, wychodzącej poza szczupłość tekstu. Jako dzieło sztuki dramatopisarskiej *Ohio Improptu* czerpie wprawdzie

z konwencji dramatu (np. słowo mówione, wizualizacja sceniczna), wkomponowując je, przede wszystkim, w derridowską koncepcję powtarzalności (*iterability*). W efekcie sztuka neguje nie tylko wszelkie możliwości interpretacyjne w zakresie metodologii badań dramatu, ale wręcz wszelkie możliwości interpretacyjne opierające się na kategoriach binarnego myślenia wywodzącego się z opozycji rozum-emocja, którymi człowiek współczesny wciąż posługuje się, dysponując instrumentarium koncepcyjnym wytworzonym przez rozum. W centrum *Ohio Improptu* znajduje się wieloaspektowy obraz sceniczny skupiający w sobie różne wymiary czasoprzestrzenne, kody teatralne, konwencje, oparty na powtarzalności, przenoszący sferę doświadczenia (*experience beyond reason*) na odbiorcę. Sposób wywołania jednostkowego przeżycia (tytułowe *improptu*) przypomina buddyjską modlitwę, która w założeniach, zaciera sens przekazywanych słów na rzecz głębokiego doświadczenia – czenia.

**Słowa kluczowe:** obraz, powtarzalność, doświadczenie, *the imaginal*, *koan*

The article will offer an interpretation of *Ohio Improptu*, a dramatic piece which began as a favor to Stanley Gontarsky, who requested a dramatic piece to be performed at an academic symposium in Columbus, Ohio, in honor of Beckett's seventy-fifth birthday. *Ohio Improptu* is a minimalist play, characterized by total espousal of logic, causality and accompanied by extreme poetic richness. Even more than the earlier plays does it negate all the traditional ingredients of drama: characters involved in the action and operating against a recognizable time and space, causality and referential meaning. The approach taken by Beckett excludes the possibility of individual identity to constitute the crux of the play which, in fact, deconstructs Cartesian identity of the self, blurring at the same time any distinction between the self and the other. *Ohio Improptu* is plotless, it breaks with the classical, narrative driven paradigm.

Beckett adopts in *Ohio Improptu* an elaborate set of formal philosophical concepts and formal conventions of literature, he mobilizes a single image as a model for dramatic expression and uses it as an alternative to the communicative constitution of language in drama. The image of *Ohio Improptu* is a construct – formed by elaborately worked out visual, sonic, verbal, kinesthetic and other codes. It is brilliantly composed, vibrating, fully autonomous and extracted from any possible fictional or extra-fictional contexts and thus essentially non-relational. The vibrating image, used in multiple iterative contexts, leads the recipient out of the limits of reason and judgment to plunge him in the state of mental weightlessness beyond reason in which the play is to be experienced. Extending the accomplishment of W.B. Yeats and his appropriation of the oriental Noh drama conventions, Beckett finds even more elaborate means for his drama to side-step intellect and to reconnect its recipient with a reality too vast for a rational mind to comprehend. The whole play, echoing the elaborate philosophical ideas and coded with numerous, elaborately worked out conventions, turns out to be a Buddhist *koan*, a meditation whose very nature evades semantic implications and transfers its recipient into the realm of experience beyond reason.

Encountering the mature work of Beckett we realize an extent to which it subverts Western, rationalist paradigms of thinking. We are reminded that along with the faith in reason, human beings found themselves imprisoned by a relatively narrow range of experience, constrained not only by our abilities of comprehension, but by the dominant philosophical systems. It also serves as a reminder that the Western pre-postmodernist theories, with their principles based predominantly upon language oriented-cognition, still lack criteria for explaining

perception that goes beyond language, to account for more varied forms of experience.

Experience beyond reason, into which the recipient of a late Beckett play is exposed may be more appropriately described with the aid of an alternative way of thinking rooted in the civilizations of the East. Among others, it finds expression in the work of the Islamic philosopher Henry Corbin (1903-1978), James Hillman (1926-2011) and Eastern philosophy of Zen. Experience into which the recipient is plunged may also be described with the aid of Western philosophical theories of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that build up their systems of thought outside any kind of binary oppositions, like the self and the outer world or the self and the other. Most prominent points of reference in this respect are the philosophy of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and Chaos theory. Thus, experience into which the recipient is plunged in *Ohio Improptu* will be scrutinized against the broadest assumptions of the systems of thought which transcend divisions that used to channel our western cognition and from which Beckett diverges.

It can be claimed that through his work Beckett is reaching for the heightened state of experience in the recipient - in the area beyond the senses, beyond language and beyond reason, in the sphere that the scholar of Islamic mysticism, philosopher and theologian Henry Corbin calls the *imaginal*. The imaginal reality, in Corbin's view, precedes divisions and reductions of the discursive mind. Extracted from the mechanical sequence of causes and effects it manifests autonomously as a pure image. James Hillman, the continuator of Corbin's preoccupation with the *imaginal*, points out an extent to which we traditionally think in Cartesian categories, differentiating between the outer, tangible reality and inner states of mind while, in his view, the two categories coexist in the state of fluid interaction.

Paramount to the methodology of the present article is Hillman's emphasis on the priority of the image and its polysemous, imaginative possibilities. Crucial for the considerations are also the assumptions of the *imaginal psychology* which, while undermining the view that imagery is a non-essential, secondary product of the human mind, attributes image its primary epistemological status.

The *imaginal psychology*, which is a soul psychology, or depth psychology, rather than an ego one, surpasses the order of common empirical perception enclosed in a personal vision, sensory knowledge or rational understanding and shows a definite preference for the poetic or mythopoetic modes of perception and discourse. The *imaginal psychology* offers an ontological view of an image that locates psyche beyond language and beyond conscious mind.

At the generalized level of thinking adopted in the present article, there is a remarkable affinity between Hillman's *imaginal psychology* and deconstructive approach of J. Derrida. Both scholars arrived at similar conclusions by totally different and independent means. The concept of individual psychology, that Hillman revisioned imaginally, is remarkably similar to Derrida's deconstruction of Western paradigms of thinking. Both scholars realize that our western way of thinking, the legacy of the Enlightenment, is a strongly rationalist one. The predilection for thinking in rationalist categories, that persisted for centuries, is responsible for imprisoning human minds by a relatively narrow range of experience which, in turn, led to minimizing the role of images.

In spite of differences and totally different backgrounds out of which they emerged, Chaos theory and Zen Buddhism also share a common denominator. They allow to scrutinize Beckett's plays, including *Ohio*

*Improptu*, from a perspective in which a noisy, non dualistic world, is the one of a vast positive potential.

*Ohio Improptu*, like other dramaticules, is an experiment marking the turn away from the public as opposed to private, intimate dimension. Beckett manages to overcome here the physical distance created by large auditoria, elaborate sets and orchestras. The dramatist makes assault on our conventional Western notions on what it is to see, to apprehend, to perceive and to take in. *Ohio Improptu* shows an extent to which Beckett was intrigued by the creative possibilities of experiencing the state of mental weightlessness beyond reason. He achieves it by concentration of vision, his gaze forces the perceiving self merge with the experience emanating from the stage image, whose scarcity brings the opposing effect of heightened intensity.

There is an active, vibrant image at the heart of *Ohio Improptu* - the only one present. Hence, the image gains its resonance without interacting with anything beyond, for there is nothing but void beyond (Essif: 2001). Behind overt stillness that first reaches the recipient on the basis of visual information, there will be an inner vibration and resonance of its multiple aspects, dissonant yet put into new relationships: visual, verbal, sonic, kinesthetic. At the core of the visual aspect of the play is **darkness**, very much unlike the normal theatrical blackout. "It is part of the weave of the work" (Weiss: 2013, 132). Darkness cancels the awareness of the division into the auditorium and the stage, transforms the relations between the characters and stage sets, throwing the spectator into a physical void. Used in this way, darkness creates in the audience psychological dependence upon the image that will appear. Even the visual aspect of the image shows that Beckett's is an art transcending the limits of reason and judgment, it is an art through which all

our mentality is overcome and all the finite judgments are shown to be insufficient.

A telescoping lighting effect, having no source outside the image, but **emanating** from it, focuses on two figures, or rather **figure fragments** (the white heads and hands) : “as alike in appearance as possible” (Ol: 285), bent over the table, with hidden faces, lowered eyes, immobile within their long, black coats – constantly present. Light emanates from the heads and hands, from the table top revealing the black wide-brimmed hat in between two fragmented figures. *Ohio Improptu* is a first Beckett play to present a Doppelganger on the stage. It is another representation of a Beckett pair - this time presented as mirror reflection, without an indication which is the image and which is its reflection. This is probably the first visual sign deconstructing the Cartesian identity of the self and blurring the Western concept of the self and the other.

Solid objects fade, the interplay of light and darkness denatures the persons and obliterates the borderlines between human and non-human world. Prominent are the attempts to de-narrativize any possible relation between the visualized components of the image. Practically none of the elements exists as a part of the narrative order, narrative sequence or narrative relationship. Due to the interplay of light and darkness, which shapes the image, each element is deprived of its primary function and involved in the web of relationships inexplicable from the perspective of empirical reality. Instead of the three dimensional individuals there are mirror-like figure fragments: Listener (L) and Reader (R), not involved in the live speech.

In the world denatured by the interplay of light and darkness, the figure fragments do not signify three-dimensional individuals, nor do the objects recreate exterior reality in which they exist. Beckett

sacrifices psychological truth about the individual for figural imagery. The initial visual signals already imply Beckettian dissolution of the idea of a person as a discreet unit existing in its environment. Consequently, the performer has no character to represent. He just looks a certain way, contributing to the image which gains something eternal about it. The objects are deprived of their primary function and operate as visual components of the image. They all suggest the possibility of an alternative, imaginal realm where realistic detail is of little consequence. In this way, by redirecting referential force away from the fictional reality and the empirical one likewise, Beckett reestablishes theatre as a medium triggering imagination much rather than offering a materialist illusion.

Behind the overt stillness of the image there is an inner vibration. The image **emerges** out of the void and seems to be at the same time floating and fixed – with fixedness far transcending what we traditionally associate with the stage border. Being the only image in the play, it does not interact with others, it is self-contained, instead of being a part of a larger pattern. In spite of echoing archetypes or cultural symbols, the visual aspect of the image does not primarily strike a familiar cord in the recipient's image bank, it does not resonate with any definite semantic implications operating in culture. The visual image floats like an inexhaustible spring originating far beyond the limited world of human comprehension and cognition. Its primary function is to reconnect the recipient with a reality too vast for the rational mind to comprehend.

The visual aspects of the image establish a relatively stable point of reference throughout the play and an initial stage through which the elaborately designed process of reaching the recipient begins. Beckett does not abstain from using formal conventions of literature and the concepts of

philosophy and significantly incorporates them into his plays and his vision of the theatre. The visual image will turn out to be part of the complex, iterative narration of a tale read from the book onstage in which, apparently, there are no speakers and no speech understood as the expression of living immediacy. The play shatters the drama's claim to embody what Derrida called *the metaphysics of presence*, which consists in representing words actually spoken by the dramatis persona in front of the recipient. Throughout its history, the theatre relied on the live, palpable speech, not on the dead writing removed from its intentional situational and performative context. Beckett denies that tradition and builds the central image of the play upon the device of *iterability*, characteristic for writing, where the full capacity for repetition, citation and transfer from one temporal or spatial context comes into the fore. In *Ohio Improptu* we witness the attempt to retract, efface almost cancel human speech in the theatre (Connor: 2013, 121). While the visual image involves one figure reading to another from the book, the only live word is the Reader's **yes**. Thus, instead of the interaction of the dramatis personae, the recipient is confronted visually with what constitutes a remote aspect of the iterative process: the book, the old, worn volume.

In the absence of self-present speech, substituted by the printed text, the recipient is automatically looking for some story that the book will bring to its reader and its listener. There are remnants of the story indeed, yet they are accompanied by evasions rather than full-fledged evocation of the events and characters. It is only through the Reader's words that the recipient gleams a remnant fictitious **story** about a grieving man who desperately tries, but fails to escape the memory of his love:

In a last attempt to obtain relief he moved from where they had been so long together to a single room on

a far bank. From its single window he could see the downstream extremity of the Isle of Swans. (OI: 285).

He painfully remembers the moments of being together in an *unfamiliar room*:

Relief he had hoped would flow from unfamiliarity (OI: 285).

Sometime later, the man is being comforted by his beloved who comes to him at night and reads a story from the book. The traces of the original story are buried deep behind the array of repetitions, assonances, alliterations in which the text abounds.

Could he not now tum back? Acknowledge his error and return to where they were once so long alone together. Alone together, so much shared. (OI: 286)

Instead of moving in the direction of consolidating the scattered information about the stages of the story, the play decomposes its traces endowing them with a poetic function which is clearly reflected even in the graphic organization of the text. The play does not determine the mode of being or the gender of the *dear face* or the *dear name*. Apparently, the object of mourning is almost completely absent from the text. As a result, the story described as *the sad tale a last time told* becomes recessively pointless in itself. The self of the mourner and the *dear face* become blurred through insistent repetitions: “so long alone together”, “alone together so much shared” (OI: 286).

Critics have often noted the trend towards minimalization, progressive shrinking scale in Beckett’s dramatic works. Characteristically for Beckett, the play leads to the point where nothing could be said or done that that would bring to the fore a different, more positive understanding of reality. Here, delving into the past, sheds no light on the story read from the old worn volume, a part of the visual image. The words: “Nothing is left to tell” (OI: 288) with

which Reader closes the book, epitomize the tendency of closure and ending, the end of the story, the end of the narration. They seem to close off any further development of the play which devalues the primacy of the plot, narrative, logic and causality and destabilizes the notion of the story and character, its prime agent.

Typically for Beckett, however, ostensibly negative drive towards the point where nothing could be said or done entails an essentially positive movement. Signals of finality coexist with those of the ever opening horizons (Kundert-Gibbs: 1999, 172). *Ohio Improptu* does not explicate the story read by the Reader to the Listener, but it plays upon the vast possibilities of generating almost endless power of the visual aspect of the image by putting it in the context of the other aspects of entire image, the only one in the play. The complex visual image of two identical figures bent over the old worn volume is not existing in its own right, but turns out to be part of the complex process of *iterability* inscribed into the multiple components and layers of the play. They reflect two inseparable aspects of the idea of iterability i.e. Latin idea of again (*iter*) with the Sanskrit idea of other (*itara*).

The image open for visual perception is not a singular, original and irreplaceable, unique event once-and-for-all occurrence, but a very distant, iterable projection having links with the story of a lone man pacing the Isle of Swans, inscribed in the book, read on the stage by the Reader and directed to the identically looking Listener. The dramatic interest of the play appears to be directed towards the emerging relationship between what is described in the book and what the recipient sees in front of him. One instance appears at the beginning of the story read over the table:

Day after day he could be seen slowly pacing the islet. Hour after hour. In his long black coat no

matter what the weather and old world Latin Quarter hat (OI: 286).

The mourner of the story is wearing his long black coat and a characteristically looking hat, like the figures on the stage.

The text of the play brings further superficial similarities. The internal narrative tells of how the mourner was, one night visited by a man, sent by *the dear name* to comfort him:

(...) drawing a worn volume from the pocket of his long black coat (...) sat and read till dawn (OI: 287).

There are parallels between the situation described in the inner narrative, read by the Reader to the Listener, and the visual image. There can be no doubt that the visual image is an iterative one. Yet, it is by no means a simple add-on, an extra that comes along after the fact of an original form or presence. It gains its validity being inscribed in the form of the image along with its all supplementarity. In *Ohio Improptu* Beckett is playing upon mixing text, voice and stage image, each endowed with its characteristic mode of being. The slightest possibility of following the rational trait of thought that would identify the mourner with the figure on the stage is excluded for more than one reason. There are two identical looking figures on the stage, the Reader and the Listener, and it is by no means clear which of them is the original and which its reflection. Thus, identification of the mourner with the figure on the stage is not possible as the visual aspect of the image alone indicates the dissolution of the idea of a self. The patterns of *iterability*, and – even more importantly – slippages between the modes of being, shatter out the possibility of identifying the characters of the internal story with the simulacra of human forms on the stage.

As the narrative progresses, the identity of the characters of the iterative contexts becomes immaterial, it is of no consequence for the further developments whether the Reader and the Listener are sharing the narrative of themselves or whether they are telling of another couple. It is immaterial which of them is the mourner and which comes with consolation, as the play does not predominantly bring a drama of character and narrative. The element of similarity in the story about *the dear one*, with its visual emanations is muted down as Beckett is obviously playing upon mixing voice, text and visual aspects .

The visual image constitutes a relatively stable point of reference from which nearly all motion has been removed. The essentially static nature of the visual image is, however, being constantly undermined by seemingly inconspicuous and restrained gestures which enrich it with the kinesthetic dimension. The Listener periodically knocks on the table, which makes the Reader repeat the last sentence.

In his dreams he had been wamed against this change. Seen the dear face and heard the unspoken words, stay where we had been so long together, my shade will comfort. you. (Pause. Knock).

Could he now not tum back? Acknowledge his error and return to where they were once so long alone together (OI: 286).

The Listener's left hand checks the Reader's left hand when he tries to tum back the pages of the book he is reading, the Reader turns a page. The Listener's knocks are wordless requests for the Reader to stop and re-read particular passages from the book. After each knock the reading resumes. The patten of the minimized, choreographed movement continues when two duplicate figures lower their right hands to the

table, raise their heads and look at each other. “Unblinking. Expressionless. Ten seconds” (OI: 288). The famous gesture, one of the most memorable ones in the Beckett canon brings an iterative echo of the frequently repeated phrases from the old worn volume “so long **alone together**”, “where we were so long **alone together**”, “**alone together** so much shared” (OI: 286). Mysteriously, the final gesture corresponds with one of the moments of reading and listening recorded in the old worn volume: “With never a word exchanged **they grew to be as one**” (OI: 287). The final gesture in *Ohio Improptu* is another instance of the logical slippage consisting in the fact that to be able to read the text the Reader should be staying temporally out of it. Thus, what occurs in the narrative being read, crosses over from relating past events to relate the impossible: what will take place next in the stage reality (Kundert-Gibbs: 1999, 166). The recipient is given the chance to experience iterability *in statu nascendi*.

Formal devices, in the manner of Chinese box composition or Ezekiel’s wheels within wheels abound. The play introduces a story inside a story, inside a story. The scales of time and space cease to exist in a logically connected, continuous sense of *before* or *after*, *here* and *there* (Connor: 2013, 126).

Beckett is infinitely playing upon the possibility of extraction and citational grafting. It is as if every sign could be cited, put between quotation marks and break with any new context. As a result, the whole play depends upon the mood of grief and loss accelerated by multiplying the acts of telling, by the continual modification, an iterative review of the visual image and kinesthetic one in the light of the text. The visual image, one of the most powerful in the Beckett canon, drops the recipient into the floating world with iterative elements denying any logical associations and flowing in all directions.

The play does not bring a series of distinct signs and images, it is not based upon a system of logic and causality. It blurs the identities, repeating instead and foregrounding the emotion of grieving in iterative contexts. *Ohio Improptu* calls in the recipient preparedness to *experience* much rather than to apprehend experience to which the dramatis personae are subjected. The play is endowed with the potential for restoring in the audience members cognitive abilities that human being possessed before the forces of rationalism and technocracy imposed their rigorous limitations upon his mode of thinking.

The complex formalist design upon which the play is built, combining numerous iterative contexts within the confines of the play, and mixing the modes of being, brings to the fore the sonic image which parallels and complements the visual and kinesthetic ones (Weiss: 2013, 140). There is a slippage between the sonic and the visual-kinesthetic, as the former is the result of the reading of the story from an old worn volume and not of the live, palpable speech.

Even the printed text of the play inscribes the quality of the delivery of the Reader's voice. It is slower than normal and becomes toneless and expressionless. The bulk of the monologue read by the Reader is related in simple, third person neutral speech. The sense of the mechanical impersonality is almost inscribed into the text:

(...) Through the single window dawn shed no light. From the Street no sound of reawakening. Or was it that buried in who knows that buried in who knows what thoughts they paid to heed? To light of day. To sound of reawakening" (Ol: 287-288).

The language of the narrative bears the mark of **written and metalinguistic**.. "(...) and here he **named** the dear one (...)", "(...) then disappeared without a **word.**", "(...) saw the dear face and heard the

**unspoken words**”, “So the **sad tale** a last time **told** (...)”, “Little is left to **tell** (...)”, “Nothing is left to **tell.**” (OI: 287-288).

The performer’s verbal delivery is inscribed into the text as an abstraction possessing enormous magnitude. Beautiful cadences reveal the moments of remembering the shattering loss and grievance: “(...) day after day he could be seen slowly pacing the islet” (OI: 286). The sonic image is used as a receding presence, an evanescence, a toneless murmur in which sound coalesces into language stripped of rhetoric (Weiss: 2013, 138). Its delivery is inscribed in the phrasing, in incremental repetitions of which much of the text is built.

What thoughts who knows. Thoughts, no, not thoughts. Profounds of mind. Buried in who knows what profounds of mind. Of mindlessness (OI: 288).

The sonic image cancels the possibility of the recipient’s sentimental response to individual suffering, it desentimentalizes and removes the empathy of the recipient for the mourner. In an equal measure does it strike the ear and the brain: concrete words of one or two syllables express bereavement, death and torment of consciousness – the feelings we are all familiar with. The sound of the book read is less and less a drama of bereavement of an individual mourner and more and more the musical score. The referential meaning is practically non-existent, muted down, replaced by the abstraction of music. The play yields to interpretation in terms of tone and tempo much rather than semantic implications.

What he had done alone could not be undone. Nothing he had ever done alone could ever be undone. By him alone (OI: 286).

The sound of words, beautiful cadences of speech coalesce with the visual image and both appeal to the imagination, bound by analogies. Just as the visual image emerges out of darkness and void, the sound of the words read by the Reader emerges out of silence (Weiss: 2013, 143). The mode of being of the two even further diminishes a possibility of representing bereavement as experienced by the individual self. Sound as image moves away the experience from particular life, it universalizes and focuses the experience of suffering onto the recipient. Extended darkness and silence, out of which the visual and sonic images emerge, break the communal bond turning the recipient inward.

There can be no doubt that the play puts emphasis on the activities of seeing and hearing, paramount to the experience the play seeks to impose upon its recipient. Through the operation of iterability, the play brings many interlacing layers, eroding any stable centered meaning. There is no polarizing consciousness on the stage which will claim objective self-existence within a given time and place. The duality of past and future are destabilized, identity of the characters is blurred. The Reader, the Listener, the mourner, *the dear name*, the messenger, the sound of repeated words and phrases are, like notes in a symphony, interwoven in the multi-vocal relations. They all mark the movement toward re-visioning perception of our world in terms of non-closed, unself-conscious state. The recipient is, in an equal measure, haunted by the sound of the language, ritual and strange imagery, repetitions, iterations – deeply moved and stirred without being able to explain why. The present moment, the *improptu* of the title, is freed to flow unlimited (Weiss: 1013, 156). The experience that gradually accumulated in the play is passed on to the recipient.

As the considerations of the article are hoped to have revealed *Ohio Impromptu* destabilizes our Western paradigmatic view of life, art and experience. It deeply delves into the void that exists beyond the rational mind. The recipient is, as if, made to retrace the whole trajectory of arduous self-critique of the Western Mind. *Ohio Improptu* shows that having aggrandized itself, the rational mind is still capable of mindlessness (Moorjani and Veit: 2001, 40).

Several inspirations have proved crucial for the understanding of the play. One of them is the concept of the *imaginal reality*, which precedes divisions and reductions of the discursive mind. Extracted from the mechanical sequence of causes and effects, *imaginal reality* manifests itself autonomously as a pure image, beyond language and beyond conscious mind. In *Ohio Improptu* it is the self-contained image that gains its resonance without interacting with anything beyond. Behind the overt stillness that first reaches the recipient on the basis of visual information, there is an inner vibration and resonance of its multiple aspects: visual, verbal, sonic, kinesthetic which intercross with the complex pattern of iterations. Beckett manages to delve deep into the void that exists beyond the rational mind. The multifarious image upon which the whole play is built, strengthens the assault on reason reconnecting the recipient with a reality too vast for a rational mind to comprehend.

As the considerations of the article have revealed, Beckett does not extract himself from the Western paradigms of thinking. Qualities of ambiguity, multivocality of *Ohio Improptu* arise from the extensive use of formal devices like iterations, contradictory concepts and juxtapositions or repetitions that grind the text as well as slippages in the mode of presentation. They are not the essential elements of human experience but constructs of human mind and the legacy of the Enlightenment. They are extensively

used by Beckett to de-center the order of bio-polar vision and overcome any trace of reliance on logic, reason, causality that restrict human perception. “We feel as if we were retracing the whole trajectory of arduous self- critique of the Western mind from Descartes to Deluze” (Mooriani and Veit: 2000, 40).

Beckett compresses the apparent polarities and de-centers aspects of the bio-polar vision into a fluid union which can be explicated with the aid of the theories of Chaos and Zen Buddhism. In spite of having different cultural and philosophical backgrounds they open up horizons for explicating Beckett’s late plays, including *Ohio Improptu*, from a perspective in which a noisy, non dualistic world is one of a vast potential (Kundert- Gibbs:1999, 166). Each theory offers, in its own way, the release from the preconceptions of the rational mind, each helps to escape the coercive structures of order and finally, each offers the freedom to experience each moment fully.

While the traditional science deals with predictable phenomena like gravity, electricity or chemical reactions, Chaos theory deals with the phenomena impossible to predict or control. In Chaos theory, a branch of modern physics and mathematics, the noisy, chaotic and fractal nature of the world is not seen as a negative opposite of constructed systems and equations. The more chaotic system is, the more information it produces, the more capable it is of giving a new insight into the nature of the world. Thus, chaos is not envisioned as an absence or void but a positive force in its own right (Hayles: 1990, 3).

The play also functions on several levels as a Zen **koan** (Kundert-Gibbs: 1999, 157), a succinct paradoxical statement or a brief anecdote, used as a meditation discipline for novices, particularly in the Rinzai sect. A **koan** is intended to confound and exhaust the analytic, discursive intellect and focus the

mind on meditation which is a step to transcend dualistic thinking and promote enlightening experience (Heine and Wright: 2000). Like a **koan** *Ohio Improptu* presents many contradictory concepts and juxtapositions that cannot be resolved systematically. The play yields to interpretation in terms of Zen koan practice much rather than in terms of traditionally conceived drama. Its numerous devices like ritual repetitions inherent in the readings of the *sad tale*, projected onto the visual/kinesthetic aspects of the image and emphasized by its sonic characteristics, the iterative patterning of the readings, knocks and constant repetitions grind the stability of the text and the image. They take the recipient's mind "(...) out of the rationalistic habit of thought into true mindlessness" (Dole, 1987:73). On closer look, none of the distinctions of the play are valid, discarded almost as soon as they appear: light and darkness intermingle, motion and stillness interpenetrate, borderlines of past and future are blurred, order as well as distinction and stability give way to the even richer pattern of chaos. Everything flows: identities, the river, reminiscences, thoughts, half-thoughts, words, sounds. Like in a Zen **koan**, repetitive patterns lead to the state of thought without thinking, of consciousness without thought:

(...) What thought who knows. Thoughts, no, not thoughts. Profounds of mind. Buried in who knows what profounds of mind. Of mindlessness. Whiter no light can reach (OI:288).

*Ohio Improptu* shows an extent to which Beckett was intrigued by the creative possibilities of inducing in the recipient the state of mental weightlessness beyond reason, mind numbing experience when the mind enters a state of pure contemplation which leaves room for enlightenment. The play is far removed from the tradition of explication in which drama,

contemporary to Beckett, was still firmly grounded. Here, the mind of the perceiving self is forced to merge with the experience emanating from entire stage image whose scarcity brings the opposing effect of heightened intensity. Instead of presenting a philosophical viewpoint, Beckett gives an impulse for experience, what remains and really matters is its present moment, the *impromptu* of the title, that its author dedicated to the audience in Ohio.

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