

Outrunning Silence:
Adorno, Beckett, and the Question of Art after the Holocaust

by

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B.A., Dalhousie University, 2008

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Abstract

This thesis provides a detailed examination of Theodor W. Adorno's claim that "after Auschwitz all poetry is barbaric" in light of the greater framework of Adorno's thinking on post-Holocaust art. Because Adorno takes Samuel Beckett as the exemplary post-Auschwitz artist, I examine two of Beckett's early post World War II plays – Endgame and Krapp's Last Tape – insofar as these works embody the task for art after the Shoah. The fundamental thesis of this study is that, for Adorno, art after the Holocaust should portray this catastrophe only indirectly, and that Beckett provides such an oblique aesthetic remembrance. In conclusion I examine the possibility of more direct representations of the Holocaust and determine that the need for aestheticizations of the Shoah is less vital than the need for radical societal reconfiguration – the cultivation of conditions which would prevent the emergence of new Holocausts.

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Introduction

Why This Thesis? Precursory Remarks and Gestures of Justification

It was at Auschwitz that human beings underwent their first mutations. Without Auschwitz, there would have been no Hiroshima. Or genocide in Africa. Or attempts to dehumanize man by reducing him to a number, an object: it was at Auschwitz that the methods to be used were conceived, catalogued, and perfected. It was at Auschwitz that men mutilated and gambled with the future. The despair begotten at Auschwitz will linger for generations. (Elie Wiesel, One Generation After 170-71)

In “Cultural Criticism and Society,” Theodor W. Adorno asserts that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” and that “it has become impossible to write poetry today” (Can One Live After Auschwitz?¹ 34). While the often-cited first quotation entails some ambiguity due to the multiple possible meanings of the term “barbaric” (“*barbarisch*”), Adorno’s subsequent use of the word “impossible” (“*unmöglich*”) renders his meaning unequivocal (Prismen 31). He claims that there can be no poetry after Auschwitz. Significantly, Adorno later questions his own statement: “Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems” (Negative Dialectics² 362). Adorno ultimately admits the possibility of poetry after Auschwitz.³

¹ Here forward cited as COL?.

² Here forward cited as ND.

³ Adorno does not use the term “*der Holocaust*.” Auschwitz, the German name for Oświęcim, carries for him the connotations of the standard contemporary use of Holocaust in English. As Rolf Tiedemann points out, “Auschwitz . . . stands in Adorno’s texts merely as a signal that is intended to summon up the things that took place there and in other death camps” (xv). Like Adorno, many modern writers use “Auschwitz” as a word which symbolically holds the meaning of the Holocaust itself. When speaking of the individual concentration camp, most scholars will name the specific sub-camp, “Auschwitz-I,” “Auschwitz-Birkenau,” or “Auschwitz-Monowitz.” This thesis will use the term “Auschwitz” primarily in the general

However, poetry, and all art, must now take on a new form.⁴ Within the larger context of Adorno's thought, his qualification in Negative Dialectics suggests that, while one can still write poems, the unprecedented atrocities of the Holocaust have radically altered the nature of all art.⁵

sense to suggest the atrocities of the Nazi death camps, which reached a paradigmatic pinnacle there. For a critique of the vague usages of Auschwitz and the misappropriation of Adorno's phrase "after Auschwitz" as a mantra serving to invite the "commodification of the Holocaust" in scholarship, see Rothberg 46-48. For a critique of the word Auschwitz as a simplistic proxy of a large and complex network of atrocities, and a commentary on the contemporary site of Auschwitz as a tourist attraction catering to the "myth of the Holocaust," see Tim Cole's chapter "Auschwitz" in Selling the Holocaust.

⁴ Adorno's claims seem to apply specifically to poetry. However, his statements in fact apply to art as a whole. Rather than being limited to poetry, his suggestions extend to a broader concept of poetics. Many critics (see Yvonne Kyriakides, Michael Rothberg, and Meave Cooke, for example) take Adorno's claim to have implications for the artistic sphere generally. Furthermore, for Adorno, not only art but also philosophy must grapple with the epistemological problems posed by the Shoah. The Holocaust has not only tainted poetry; it has ineluctably marked all art, thinking, and politics for Adorno.

⁵ A clarification is needed here to excuse, if not to justify, my use of the terms "Holocaust" and "Shoah" in this thesis. While Adorno uses the word Auschwitz as an umbrella term which invokes the Nazi atrocities and the Final Solution, my own commentary will primarily refer to the Nazi brutalities with the words Shoah and Holocaust. In this thesis, these words are used interchangeably. Because I acknowledge the inherent inadequacy of any word that attempts to name this event, I use both Shoah and Holocaust only for want of a more appropriate alternative. I can only hope that my reader shares my working definition of these terms: all the brutalities and atrocities caused by the Nazis during their rule. For exhaustive discussions of the development of the word "holocaust" as the name for the Nazi atrocities see Anna-Vera Sullam Calimani's article "A Name for Extermination" as well as "Why Do We Call the Holocaust 'The Holocaust'" by Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman. As these scholars have noted (Garber and Zuckerman 198-99, Calimani 989), the etymology of the word "holocaust" carries the implication of sacrifice, or "burnt offering" (Garber and Zuckerman 199). It is my belief that thinking of those who suffered in the Holocaust as sacrificial victims is an extremely dangerous tendency insofar as it inscribes a narrative of redemption onto the senseless brutalities that occurred in this event. It is not my goal to support such thinking. Notably, the word "holocaust" also has the etymological sense of "total destruction" (Garber and Zuckerman 198), a closer meaning to the one I intend to convey with the term. I use the phrase "the Holocaust" only because, in contemporary culture, it carries the connotations of the concept I mean to evoke with it. I use it not in the older sacrificial sense, but in the modern, secular, and historically specific sense. Furthermore, I acknowledge the close relation between the word "holocaust" and the term "*shoah*." "Holocaust" came into the English language as a translation of the Hebrew word "*shoah*" (Calimani 988), and, like the former, the latter term carries its own set of difficulties. As Calimani points out, the word "*shoah*" is not a perfect solution to the long-standing debate about how we should refer to this event: "In Israel . . . a dispute has been going on for some time now over the mystifying use made of the term *shoah* by journalists and politicians (in reference to bomb attacks and other killings by the Palestinians) and the trivialization of the word in everyday language" (999). Ultimately, we are still left with no appropriate word with which to describe this event, so this thesis uses the closest ones available – Holocaust, Shoah, and Auschwitz. Perhaps, when we have more fully come to terms with the implications of the Holocaust, we will be equipped with a better lexicon with which to speak of this event. Until then, we are thrust into a similar dilemma to the one Clov faces in Endgame when he complains to Hamm about the inadequacy of his own language: "I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent" (44). Lacking new words and resisting silence, this study will continue with the old words, the only ones it has access to.

Adorno argues that “All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage” (ND 367). Filth and excrement pervade the society that remains in the wake of the “administrative murder of millions” (ND 362), and art must respond to the cultural waste surrounding it. Art becomes a scream, a lamentation, and “that which the stench of cadavers expresses” (ND 366). This thesis will undertake a detailed examination of two of Samuel Beckett’s plays, Endgame and Krapp’s Last Tape,⁶ in light of Adorno’s vision of the possibilities and limitations of the artistic endeavour after the Holocaust.⁷

For Adorno, Beckett is the exemplary post-Auschwitz artist: “Beckett has given us the only fitting reaction to the situation of the concentration camps” (ND 380). Beckett’s work exemplifies the legitimate post-Holocaust artistic endeavour by depicting the cultural wasteland remaining after the Shoah. As Adorno explains, in Beckett the “poetic process declares itself to be a process of wastage” (COL? 261), as the old artistic parameters melt away to reveal a new *locus* for aesthetic possibility in an age characterized by barbarism and pervaded by a legacy of catastrophe. In Beckett’s work, art facetiously laughs at itself, and at the ideas of transcendent truth and enlightened humanity. Beckett acknowledges that the Holocaust has left a rubbish heap in culture’s stead, and rather than attempting to push the trash to the curb he integrates it into his art. For Adorno, Beckett’s work exemplifies what art should aspire to in the post-Auschwitz era insofar as “What philosophy Beckett provides, he himself reduces to cultural trash . . .

⁶ Here forward cited as KLT.

⁷ There is also a tangential question which I will be unable to address in this thesis for reasons of concision. This is a question which I will leave as an open possibility for future investigation: can a modern reader understand art created *before* Auschwitz without taking the Holocaust into account? Can we forget the Shoah when we read Hamlet or The Odyssey? Ultimately, this is a question of how the present affects our historical understanding of literature. An answer suggesting that it is impossible to forget the Holocaust when reflecting on literature created before it, would call into question the very concept which drives Adorno’s thinking here: the notion of a definitive break between “pre” and “post” Auschwitz consciousness.

For Beckett, culture swarms and crawls” (COL? 259). Rather than ascribing transcendent meaning to existence, Beckett acknowledges and works within the excrement which marks contemporary culture. Adorno suggests that “sneering mockery of truth may be truer than a superior consciousness” (ND 364), and he locates such cynical jeering in Beckett’s work. Significantly, Beckett himself identifies a similar imperative for the contemporary artist: “there will be new form . . . of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else . . . To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now” (qtd in Driver 506). For Beckett, the artist must no longer seek to bring order into the confusion of existence. Rather, the chaotic wastage of existence must be confronted as such. Thus Adorno and Beckett share a similar vision for art in the post-Holocaust age; art must find itself amidst the cultural rubble which remains in the wake of the Shoah.

Certainly, Beckett’s drama reverberates with echoes of the Holocaust. Ronan McDonald maintains that “Beckett’s skeletal characters and desolate landscape are haunted by the ghosts of Auschwitz” (142). While McDonald’s assertion may be correct, the spectres of the victims of the Holocaust loom in Beckett’s plays only indirectly, never explicitly. It may well be possible to advance the thesis that Beckett’s characters represent inmates in concentration camps. Beckett denies his personae the significance of death itself, and places them in a world of constant and perpetually escalating suffering. Furthermore, he traps his characters within the confines of an inescapable physical space, and a time which continues indefinitely despite the apparent pointlessness of existence. Indeed, Beckett’s first play, Waiting for Godot⁸ has often been understood as a Holocaust analogy: “Pozzo’s treatment of Lucky reminded some of the earliest critics of a capo in a

⁸ Here forward cited as Godot.

concentration camp brutalizing his victim with his whip” (Knowlson 344). However, this thesis, in an attempt to do justice to the ambiguity and breadth of Beckett’s plays, and because I believe there is more to Beckett’s work than such a simple and straightforward analogy, will not confine itself to an interpretation of Beckett’s characters as concentration camp inmates. Rather, it will explore the themes of hopelessness, immobility, and endlessness insofar as they apply, not only to those against whom the Nazis perpetrated atrocities, but for all mankind as we struggle to move on in the wake of the Holocaust. The last sentence of Beckett’s The Unnameable – “I can’t go on, I’ll go on” (414) – not only epitomizes the fundamental pathos behind Beckett’s *oeuvre* but also embodies the larger fate of mankind in the wake of the Shoah. As a species, humanity after the Holocaust lives within a marked tension, a profound inertia: we are crushed by the weight of our collective past and yet we must go on. For both Beckett and Adorno, the Holocaust, as a catastrophe which is an essential part of the movement of Western civilization, is not distinct from the greater thrust of human history. To think the Holocaust we must think ourselves and vice versa. Thus, just as the legless Nell and Nagg futilely struggle to reach each other for a kiss in Endgame, so humanity must struggle to escape the ashcans of our own decomposing existence, even if this effort seems to be devoid of hope.

Beckett’s plays do not describe specific historical situations; rather, they seek to grapple with the malaise of the contemporary world, and with the degeneration of the human condition itself. This thesis will argue that Beckett’s early post World War II plays grapple with a culture which produced totalitarianism, fascism, and the mass murder of the European Jews in order to expose the horror of the contemporary situation

of humanity, and therein to illuminate the possible forward paths for human existence, thinking, and discourse. Rather than portraying the world of Auschwitz, Beckett presents the ethical and political junctures remaining in its wake. In short, Beckett does not present men in Auschwitz; rather, he presents the situation of mankind after Auschwitz. In so doing, Beckett's postwar plays – exemplified in this project by Endgame and Krapp's Last Tape – provide the most legitimate form of artistic response to the Holocaust for Adorno. These plays function as archetypal post-Auschwitz artworks neither by directly representing the catastrophe, nor by remaining silent about it, but, so to speak, by probing the intervals between silence and speech, between thought and incomprehensibility. Beckett does not “counter Wittgenstein by uttering the unutterable” (ND 9); rather, he gestures towards the possibility of utterance. For Adorno, Beckett does the most important work of the political not by sending a political message, identifying a political stance, or analyzing historical events but by providing an immanent critique of the society which allowed the unprecedented atrocities of the twentieth century to occur and which threatens to engender the emergence of new Holocausts.

The overarching thesis of this study is that Beckett's work, for Adorno, is the paradigmatic representative of post-Auschwitz art precisely through the indirectness of its approach to the catastrophe. Ultimately, Beckett's work becomes the most direct response to the Shoah precisely in its indirectness, by tackling the more fundamental questions of post-Holocaust existence and thinking rather than attempting to aestheticize this event itself. Adorno speaks of Beckett's oblique engagement with the Holocaust, “a situation he never calls by name, as if it were subject to an image ban” (ND 380). This “enigmatic quality” of Beckett's work turns out to define it as “authentic” rather than “resigned” art

(Aesthetic Theory⁹ 178, 221). For Adorno, Beckett's work becomes the definitive example of post-Holocaust art precisely in its refusal to name the catastrophe as such. Adorno does not seek a direct representation of the Holocaust; for him any attempt to directly render the catastrophe would only serve to fetishize, sensationalize, or reify this event. To treat the Holocaust as an isolated historical occurrence, as belonging to a past which we can now turn away from, is to ignore the greater implications of this event, and to attempt to absolve contemporary society of its deeply-inscribed complicity. As Wiesel points out, "We are all survivors" (169).¹⁰ We, that is, humans, are all survivors not in the sense that we were there, but simply in the fact that we live after the Shoah. As a species we caused the Holocaust and as a species we survived it. Thus it is our urgent task both to turn to the past from which this event emerged and to view the present and the future as sites which embody the residue of Nazi Germany and its atrocities. Therefore, it becomes an imperative of the highest order to prevent the recurrence of Auschwitz or its return in an augmented form, and Adorno locates the grounding of such resistance in Beckett's work.

My readings of each play under observation here will utilize the theoretical lens of Adorno's thinking on post-Holocaust art. Many other thinkers and theorists will provide frames of reference, from Friedrich Nietzsche to Giorgio Agamben. My analysis will be augmented by literary critics from Beckett's contemporaries to the present day, and by an assortment of scholars studying Adorno's work, The Frankfurt School, historical materialism, and questions of art and ethics after the Holocaust. Before proceeding

⁹ Here forward cited as AT.

¹⁰ Here Wiesel speaks specifically of Jews. However, addressing a hypothetical young Jew living in the post-Holocaust age, he extends the boundaries of his discussion: "With Auschwitz in their past, your comrades—Jews and non-Jews alike—rebel against those responsible for this past" (Wiesel 171).

through the main body of this thesis, a brief justification of each of the major thematic choices of this study will prove helpful as both an enframing device and a point of departure. What follows are these gestures of justification.

Why Adorno?

Why should a discussion of art after the Holocaust focus on Adorno? Or, inversely, why should a discussion of Adorno focus on the question of post-Auschwitz aesthetics? Alan Rosenberg and Paul Marcus count Adorno among the major twentieth century philosophers who “have failed to confront systematically the implications of the Holocaust” and have not “taken the destruction as anything like a major theme” (204). Likewise, Michael Rothberg suggests that “Few of Adorno’s commentators who have picked up on his Auschwitz hypothesis have been interested in his system of thinking as a whole . . . those who *have* been concerned with Adorno’s philosophical system have tended *not* to assign a central position to Auschwitz” (48). This very thesis is guilty of Rothberg’s charge. However, against Rothberg, this thesis argues that the Holocaust certainly becomes a fundamental, if not *the* fundamental, horizon for Adorno’s thinking. For Adorno, Auschwitz creates a situation which must be faced philosophically, because “There is no getting out of this, no more than out of the electrified barbed wire around the camps” (ND 362). In a sense, all post-Auschwitz thinking must reflect on and think through the new questions opened by the Holocaust. Thus, even as Adorno may not formulate a systematic philosophical framework of the Shoah, his every thought in the wake of the Holocaust rings with the reverberations of Auschwitz. Indeed, as Rothberg

explains, and as Rosenberg and Marcus point out, Adorno does not systematically think through the Holocaust. However, Rothberg is wrong to claim that the Holocaust does not occupy an important space in Adorno's thought. In fact, after World War II, there is no philosophical theme more important to Adorno than the Holocaust and the threat of fascism. Adorno's comments on the Shoah are often brief, always powerful, rarely argued rigorously, yet deeply recurrent. He does not seek to solve the epistemological, ontological, and conceptual *aporias* which Auschwitz gives rise to. Adorno does not find an answer, a "final solution," for this abyss; but he confronts it, continually probing the new depths of thinking which the Shoah illuminates.

Although he was unable to "think through" the Holocaust, it was certainly an event which he faced with the full power of his conceptual capabilities. As Tiedemann points out, the Holocaust became for Adorno "a 'never-ending task' of his thinking" (xv). After World War II, the Holocaust became a framework for everything Adorno wrote. It was for him a representative of all that had gone wrong with philosophy and politics, and thus the imperative to think through the implications of this event became the fundamental task of thinking itself. The mentions of Auschwitz we find in Adorno's texts are no mere passing conjectures or lighthearted remarks; his inquires into this event demanded the utmost courage, and the ability to face what so many thinkers of his generation were unable to acknowledge. Thus, in light of the brave steps forward in Holocaust Studies made by this groundbreaking thinker, there can be few more appropriate ways to approach his work than through the question of the Shoah. Likewise, there can be few more legitimate paths towards a discussion of post-Auschwitz art than through a reading of Adorno's texts.

Surely, Adorno's biography also merits an interrogation of his thought through the Holocaust. In a 1948 letter to Thomas Mann, Adorno succinctly explains his own biographical nearness to the Shoah: "I was born in Frankfurt in 1903. My father was a German Jew . . . I stayed in Frankfurt, where I taught philosophy until I was driven out by the Nazis in 1933. I left Germany in 1934, initially continued my studies at the University of Oxford, and then followed the Institute of Social Research to New York" (Gödde and Sprecher 24). Clearly, Adorno's reflections on Nazism are not mere abstractions. As a man who lived in Germany during the Nazi ascension to power and who was subsequently removed from his vocation by them, Adorno experienced anti-Semitic fascism first hand. Furthermore, while Adorno was lucky enough to escape from Hitler's dictatorship in 1934, his close friend and intellectual companion Walter Benjamin was not. Adorno was deeply troubled by "The appalling death of his friend Walter Benjamin during his flight from the National Socialists" (Clausen 6). Benjamin's death was doubtless simply one example of friends and relatives Adorno lost to the Nazis, but certainly one which signals how close his own life was to danger.

Adorno's empirical closeness to the Nazi atrocities surely contributed to his philosophical rejection of Nazism and fascism, but his objections to authoritarian ideologies were by no means simply subjective. Long before the atrocities of the Nazi concentration camps became a popular theoretical subject, Adorno was writing against fascist ideology and the authoritarian personality in many of the essays which would later comprise Minima Moralia and in the book he co-authored with Max Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment (Clausen 6). After World War II, it did not take long for Adorno to become one of the world's most famous and outspoken thinkers on the

theoretical ramifications of the Holocaust. In 1949, Adorno wrote to Mann, explaining that “Extremely close observation of the Nuremburg trials has revealed how this unspeakable guilt almost dissolves away into nothing, and the process appears to be repeated in even the most trivial aspects of everyday life” (Gödde and Sprecher 33). The Shoah, for Adorno, quickly became a horizon for thinking. He was one of the few thinkers to see, almost immediately, the drastic conceptual implications of this event. In 1955 he published *Prismen* (Clausen 6), a volume of essays which included “Cultural Criticism and Society.” In this essay Adorno wrote his notorious admonishment against post-Auschwitz poetry. While this famous statement may have been taken out of context by some, it is still the case that, as Charlotte Ryland notes, the Holocaust “functions as a paradigm of [Adorno’s] thought” (143). The Shoah quickly became a framework for thinking for Adorno, an event which brought many new questions to light, and which confirmed the death of metaphysics and the destruction of notions of human progress. The Holocaust changed the face of life and death, and altered the task of philosophy. Thus, for Adorno, it is crucial that art, as that which provides “the appearance of something death cannot touch” (AT 41), illuminate the way forward for thinking and politics. After Adorno identifies the new philosophical voids and chasms opened by the Holocaust, he seeks a gesture towards the future possibilities for thinking in the wake of this cataclysm. After the Shoah, the threat of nihilism looms ominously near to philosophy, and it is an imperative of the utmost importance to defend thinking against this threat. Adorno finds such a defence, and the search for a non-nihilistic way forward for human life and thinking, in Beckett’s drama.

Why Beckett?

Beckett lived in France for the majority of the Nazi occupation from 1940 to 1945, and participated in an information network of the French resistance, ultimately receiving the Croix de Guerre in 1945 for his involvement in it (Ackerley and Gontarski xxiii). James Knowlson maintains that Beckett was affected by the Nazi atrocities on a personal, rather than an abstract level: “Beckett was not as interested in political theories as he was in the human injustices being perpetrated by the Nazis” (223). For Beckett, the Nazi injustices were far from theoretical. His close friend Alfred Péron, a Jew and a poet who recruited Beckett into the resistance in 1941, ultimately perished in the concentration camp Mauthausen (Ackerley and Gontarski 431-32). Ackerley and Gontarski explain the impact of Péron’s death on Beckett’s writing: “The French Murphy is dedicated to Péron, but the lasting tribute is Waiting for Godot, with its images of brutality and inhumanity” (432). In addition to Beckett’s close personal relation to Nazi brutality and the horrors of the Holocaust, at the time he was writing Godot the extent of the atrocities of the Shoah was beginning to enter public consciousness: “The years just before Beckett wrote Godot had seen unimaginable revelations and horrific film footage about the concentration camps of Belsen, Dachau, and Auschwitz” (Knowlson 344). Knowlson points out that Beckett would have experienced “these accounts with a mixture of compulsion and horror,” because “He knew that, if arrested, he would have been in that same camp, subject to the same daily brutalities. And he knew that he would never have survived such an ordeal” (344-45). Beckett narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Nazis, and, as the years shortly after the war revealed the massive scale and the depths of the

barbarities perpetrated by the Third Reich, he must have become deeply conscious of the fragility of his own life. By 1949 when he finished writing Godot, Beckett was well aware of the magnitude of the mass murder of the European Jews (Knowlson 344). The composition of this play was no doubt permeated by the prevailing political climate, where knowledge of the death camps was entering the public eye. For a man who had experienced the Nazi occupation of France first hand, lost a close friend to the concentration camps, and narrowly avoided the same fate, the plays he wrote shortly after liberation must voice a response to the Shoah on a fundamental level.

While this thesis will not read Beckett's plays explicitly through his biography, it is important to note from the outset that there are empirical reasons for examining Beckett's works in light of the Holocaust. Not only does Beckett's biographical existence suggest that his thought must have been deeply influenced by this event, but much of his work, including the two plays under discussion here, bear clear thematic residues of the Holocaust. As Herbert Blau points out, "In Beckett's earliest attempts at drama . . . this holocaustic association was already there" (17). In Beckett's theatre, one cannot help but hear "all the dead voices" that "whisper," "murmur," and "rustle . . . like ashes" (Godot 40). Beckett's stark and dreary dramatic wastelands perpetually evoke images of the legions of dead which caused Adorno to assert that death had a new meaning after Auschwitz: "Men have lost the illusion that [death] is commensurable with their lives" (ND 369). The impossibility of death as it used to be, the brutal and sparse conditions of existence, and the perpetuation of arbitrary suffering in Beckett's plays certainly invoke vestiges of the Holocaust for readers and spectators. This thesis argues, however, that the Holocaustic reverberations in Beckett's plays serve not to provide a representation of the

Shoah itself but to describe the horror of the universal post-Auschwitz human condition – an existence necessarily characterized by mankind’s barbaric heritage.

Finally, a discussion of Adorno’s thinking on art after the Holocaust certainly has good reason to take Beckett as its exemplar. As Jack Zipes explains, “Adorno regarded Beckett as one of the most realistic and vital poets of the post-Auschwitz age” (156). Likewise, Stephan Müller-Doohm notes that “Beckett’s plays were the definitive expression of the epoch’s experience of catastrophe” for Adorno (360). Adorno first saw Endgame in the spring of 1958, and he immediately began to formulate his essay “Trying to Understand Endgame” (Müller-Doohm 357). From that time forward Beckett’s drama formed a crucial horizon in Adorno’s thinking. Not only does Beckett become essential for Adorno’s aesthetic theory, he becomes, by implication, a crucial exemplar of post-Holocaust thinking itself. Adorno’s discussions of Auschwitz inevitably return to Beckett and his discussions of Beckett invariably draw on the Shoah and the catastrophic history of humanity. For Adorno, all post-Auschwitz art, thinking, and existence must follow Beckett’s lead, as his works both acknowledge the horrors of the past and seek to illuminate the path forward in the wake of such a catastrophe.

Why These Two Plays?

While all of Beckett’s work could certainly be read through Adorno’s identification of him as the paradigmatic post-Holocaust artist, this thesis, in an attempt to maintain focus, primarily discusses two of his earlier plays. However, the decision to use Endgame and Krapp’s Last Tape is not arbitrary. After Waiting for Godot, these are Beckett’s first two

major dramatic pieces. Following the first production of *En Attendant Godot* (Waiting for Godot) in 1953, *Fin de Partie* (Endgame) met the stage in 1957, and *Krapp's Last Tape* followed in 1958 (Ackerley and Gontarski 172, 195, 302). Thus a discussion of these plays not only examines Beckett's initial dramatic reactions to World War II and the Holocaust, but also follows the progression of his theatrical works, the development of his attempts to stage the human condition in the wake of the Shoah. Furthermore, the plays under discussion here represent a thematic shift in Beckett's oeuvre. Beckett's choice, after World War II, to turn from the private spaces of prose and poetry towards the public venue of the theatre is a vital move for this analysis. Chapter Two in particular, which undertakes a detailed examination of Beckett's staging of silence in *Krapp's Last Tape*, draws on the significance of this move to the theatre. Not only is Beckett's turn to drama essential in the sense that he could therein open a more public space for dialogue and a community for the living reception of his works, the theatre also allowed him access to a new dimension within his own discourse. As a playwright who meticulously wrote and revised his stage directions, Beckett, in the theatre, encountered novel possibilities for textual interplay. As the lines on the page echo in the theatre, while the stage directions reverberate only in actions, Beckett accesses a new range of formal movements in his writing. In the theatre he gains a new layer of subtext; the written stage directions remain offstage, and Beckett gains the ability to stage the very absence of words. The theatre enables him to provide a word on the page before taking it away onstage, a movement which comes to characterize his dramatic technique. Furthermore, drama allows him to literally stage silence and the spaces between words. The theatre

provides the venue in which Beckett quickly masters a nuanced technique of verbal vacuity.

In addition to the chronological and formal pertinence with respect to the subject matter of this study, these two plays also share crucial thematic similarities. Like the bulk of Beckett's *oeuvre*, both of these dramas remove historical specificities, presenting universal human subjects. Martin Esslin correctly notes that "Waiting for Godot and Endgame . . . are dramatic statements on the human situation itself" (57). Historical particularities evacuate from these plays, replaced by the abstractions of bare humanity. Krapp's Last Tape continues in this vein, staging a human subject devoid of any apparent national or regional allegiances. The universality of Beckett's characters in Endgame and Krapp's Last Tape becomes crucial for the argument of this thesis insofar as Adorno advocates the recognition of an essentially human legacy of brutality, and finds the dramatization of this acknowledgment in Beckett's theatre.

The ending of each of these texts provides another significant strand of correlation. Endgame closes with Clov standing still in the corner while Hamm speaks his desolate final line: "You . . . remain" (84). Beckett then terminates the action with a moment of typically bleak immobility: "*Pause. He covers his face with his handkerchief, lowers his arms to armrests, remains motionless*" (Endgame 84). In Endgame, Clov spots a boy outside and determines to leave Hamm's room. However, this gesture entails its own negation, as the potential of movement fades away to reveal the always inevitable immobility which permeates Beckett's stage. Despite the suggestion of motion, Clov ultimately remains immobile. In Krapp's Last Tape, Beckett denies even the gesture towards motion. Not even imagining the possibility of escaping the wasteland of

Beckett's stage, Krapp simply sits "*motionless staring before him*" in the end (KLT 28). While the final moment of Krapp's Last Tape will ultimately serve as the crux of this thesis' argument by exemplifying Beckett's staging of silence, for now, suffice it to say that this play provides the culmination of the immobility Beckett brings to the stage with his turn to theatre. The physical restrictions Beckett places on his characters exemplify the greater psychological, philosophical, and political immobility of humanity itself in the post-Holocaust age. To be born into the world of mankind is to enter into an inescapable human existence and while, like Clov, we may imagine that we can escape, we will ultimately remain unable to transcend the structures of our own brutal condition.

Furthermore, while Endgame depicts an ostensibly post-apocalyptic world, marked by a massive-scale catastrophe which lurks in the backdrop, in Krapp's Last Tape, there is no such catastrophic precedent. By the time Beckett writes this play, the catastrophe has become entirely psychological. Endgame presents a realm devoid of modern luxury, a place where sawdust has become a commodity of the utmost value. In contrast, Krapp's Last Tape depicts a world where there are still bananas, pubs, tape recorders, prostitutes, books, and punt rides. Yet Krapp's world of comparative abundance, rather than appearing utopian and desirable, simply highlights his psychological depravity. While this thesis suggests that the fundamental horror in both of these plays is the deplorable psychical predicament of the post-Holocaust human condition, in Krapp's Last Tape Beckett takes his exemplification of this horrific state of affairs to a new level: here he presents the psychological catastrophe of humanity in its ominous nearness. For even as Krapp, like modern Western citizens, has access to luxuries beyond his basic survival needs, he calls into question the very need for his

survival. Beckett presents luxuries, commodities, and assets as ridiculous superfluities rather than desirable pleasures – cheap trinkets which decorate the existential void of human existence. Krapp’s access to goods highlights a more fundamental lack: the absence of meaning, hope, and happiness in his life. In Krapp’s Last Tape, the horror of post-Auschwitz existence becomes internalized and entirely psychological, and this renders it all the more horrific insofar as it brings it home, forcing readers and viewers to realize that we are all Krapps; the citizen of the post-Holocaust Western world lives like Krapp: having ‘things,’ yet having nothing, living with shelter and comfort yet living without psychological significance – naked in the void. This notion of nearness plays a central role in this thesis, insofar as Adorno’s thinking, as well as much of the discourse of Holocaust Studies which will be discussed here, and indeed this thesis itself, advocates an acknowledgment of the radical closeness of the Shoah. For Adorno, after the Holocaust there are few more crucial necessities for thinking than the recognition that post World War II Western democracy is not as far from Nazi Germany as we may be comfortable believing. Thus it is essential that we, historical subjects who bear the legacy of our fascist predecessors, must acknowledge our own complicity in our shared past, provide an immanent critique of our near-fascist society, and search for a way forward for humanity which would, first and foremost, seek to prevent the recurrence of Auschwitz. Adorno finds such a project for thinking in Beckett’s works, and, as this thesis moves through Endgame and Krapp’s Last Tape, Beckett’s exemplification of Adorno’s delineations of the post-Holocaust artistic project will continue to emerge.

Why the Holocaust?

One might still be tempted to ask: why the Holocaust? If one is going to speak about human destruction and evil in relation to Beckett's works, why use this particular event to do so? Why not, for example, write about the atomic bomb, and the explosions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Many critics read Endgame as a response to the fear of nuclear war (Hamilton 615, Cavell 137). Completed in 1957 (Ackerley and Gontarski 196), Endgame may well have been written from a historical vantage point wherein a nuclear strike appeared to be a more imminent threat than another Holocaust. Cavell articulates the *logos* of an age in which the bomb had "invaded our dreams and given the brain, already wrinkled with worry, a new cut" (136-37). Certainly, the fear of the atomic bomb and the explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki would have profoundly impacted Beckett's thinking during the composition of Endgame and Krapp's Last Tape. Likewise, the bombing of Dresden, the atrocities of the Russian Gulags, the death of millions of soldiers in the trenches of World War I and on the fronts of World War II, and countless other brutalities contribute to the horrors which took place in the first half of the twentieth century and continue beyond. David Toole speaks to the legacy of violence which characterizes the twentieth century: "Here, say historians, in the trenches of World War I, the twentieth century began—and what a beginning it was for the century that would produce Hitler and Stalin, Auschwitz and the Gulag, Hiroshima, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Chechnya, and, of course, Bosnia" (xiii). All of these events, and, now, several more recent ones, surely combine to influence any thinker's reflections on the capacity for catastrophe which humanity has demonstrated in recent history. Yet the Holocaust surely stands as a

culmination, a nadir, and a symbolic representative of the extreme potential for brutality which humanity demonstrated again and again in the twentieth century and which it continues to demonstrate into the twenty-first.

In To Mend the World, Emil Fackenheim argues against the notion that the Shoah is simply “one catastrophe to be classified with others, such as Hiroshima and Vietnam” (11), suggesting instead that it was a “unique and unprecedented evil” (9). Yehuda Bauer, mentioning various civilian internment camps in Cuba, South Africa, and the USSR, maintains that “none of these were quite like the Nazi concentration camps” (227). Adorno suggests that “what Auschwitz produced, the characteristic personality types of the world of Auschwitz, presumably represents something new” (COL? 25). Indeed, the Holocaust stands apart as an inauguration and a crowning achievement of man’s capacity for bureaucratized brutality. Of course, the critical debate over the question of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, of whether it is an unspeakable or unthinkable event, has raged now for decades. This thesis invariably comes down against the notion that the Shoah is fundamentally unique – such thinking can only serve to diminish the threat of the next Holocaust. Likewise, this study opposes notions of the unspeakability, unthinkable, or incommunicability of this event. Silence cannot be a productive response; it can only reproduce itself, it cannot warn against the recurrence of Auschwitz. However, the Shoah does stand as a sort of a peak of twentieth century human barbarity. While the Holocaust must remain within the context of the innumerable other murderous atrocities which mark the twentieth century, it also stands on its own as a paradigmatic event. In Zygmunt Bauman’s words, it is “the spectacular climax of a centuries-long history of religious, economic, cultural and national resentment” (31). While the

Holocaust cannot be set apart from the material-historical conditions which created it, it certainly presents a macabre testament to mankind's unprecedented potential for self-annihilation.

The death toll itself sets the Holocaust apart from the other atrocities of the twentieth century. Bauer estimates that between 5.7 and 5.9 million Jews perished in the Holocaust (368), far out-numbering any other genocide to date. While, as Adorno points out in "Education after Auschwitz," "to quote or haggle over the numbers is already inhuman," the fundamental point is that here "Millions of innocent people . . . were systematically murdered" (COL? 20). The organized, calculated, and meticulously executed method of this genocide renders it an unparalleled exemplification of human atrocity. The systematic nature of the Nazi death machine gives it a level of sterile efficiency unrivalled by any murders before or since. Unlike the fear, which Stanley Kubrick evokes so powerfully in his film Dr. Strangelove, that a madman could destroy the world at any instant, the Holocaust triggers different anxieties. Kubrick invites carnivalesque terror in the image of the frenzied Major "King" Kong shouting gleefully as he rides on the back of a dropping nuclear explosive, and in the notion of the Soviet "doomsday device." The Shoah, in contrast, embodies the fear evoked by a premeditated, calculated, and relentlessly thought through murder – taken to a massive scale. The *pathos* underlying the Nazi mass murders required a deliberate and careful organization, what Adorno calls the "coldness" of this event, its unparalleled bureaucracy. As Clausen points out, "what made Auschwitz possible" for Adorno "was not hatred but coldness" (58). The peculiar terror behind the Holocaust lies precisely in the fact that here murder was banal and routine, passionless and arbitrary, methodical and efficient. Ronald

Aaronson speaks to the particularity of the Nazis' methods of execution: "Certainly there have been massacres all through history, but never carried out with such abstract, industrial detachment, such system, such scientific rigor" (231). This event is not set apart from the other horrors of human history by its volume, its motivations, or how close Hitler came to succeeding in his "Final Solution." Although all of these factors contribute to the particular horror of the Shoah, ultimately it is a "cold" efficiency which renders the Holocaust most shocking. Hannah Arendt describes the callous methodology behind the Nazi brutalities:

The point is that Hitler was not like Jenghiz Khan and not worse than some other criminal but entirely different. The unprecedented is neither the murder itself nor the number of victims and not even 'the number of persons who united to perpetrate them.' It is much rather the ideological nonsense which caused them, the mechanization of their execution, and the careful and calculated establishment of a world of dying in which nothing any longer made sense. (374-75)

What made the Nazi death machine so efficient was its bureaucracy, and it is such a bureaucratic societal structure that remains shockingly unchanged to the present day. While it is tempting to think the Holocaust as essentially separate from history – as a monstrosity, an aberration, and an incarnation of pure evil – it is precisely the *closeness* of this event which should incite the most terror. Not only chronologically, but also existentially, psychologically, philosophically, sociologically, and politically, this event remains disturbingly near to hand. The tendency to set the Shoah apart from history, to posit this cataclysm as alien, is a dangerous temptation. Rather than closing the Holocaust off against the greater structures of human history which conceived and executed it, one

must think through the proximity of this event in order to guard against its recurrence. As Adorno makes perfectly clear, and as this thesis seeks to reaffirm in a new light, the society which gave birth to this pinnacle of human destruction remains largely unchanged long after Auschwitz has turned from a death factory into a tourist attraction.

While it is important to study the Holocaust in light of its historical predecessors and forebears, it is also crucial to examine it on its own terms, as a horizon of our times. Of all the horrific catastrophes of the twentieth century, the Shoah applies most directly to this study insofar as it touched closest to home for both Adorno and Beckett's biographies and thinking. Whether or not one holds the Holocaust as the peak of mankind's capacity for destruction, for Adorno the Shoah certainly stands as a culmination of sorts. This event becomes a touchstone in Adorno's thinking, representing the greatest depth heretofore in the downward spiral of human civilization. Yet, of course, this is not to say that the Holocaust is an end for Adorno. Rather, humanity is certainly capable of producing more events like this one and worse. Thus it becomes mankind's imperative to purge itself of latent fascist tendencies, to pursue an immanent critique of its own civilization, and to seek, against all odds, to transcend the unprecedented capacity for destruction which was demonstrated in the Shoah. This is where Beckett comes in. While speculation on Beckett's biography lends itself to the conjecture that his thought was deeply influenced by the Holocaust, there is no straightforward evidence to support this hypothesis. However, for Adorno, Beckett's work becomes the best possible artistic answer to the Holocaust, and Beckett becomes the closest thing to a redemptive presence, a Godot, for humanity. In Beckett, Adorno chooses a seemingly reluctant saviour. Beckett's works exude scepticism, despair,

masochism, hopelessness, and pathological angst. Yet, for Adorno, this utterly unrelenting negation of transcendent meaning and beauty becomes the most beautiful and meaningful residue of post-Auschwitz culture. Only art, and indeed, only an art of human abnegation can provide the way forward for humanity after the Holocaust.

Now, whether or not this project has been justified, a gesture towards justification has been made. Thus, these pages will turn here to an attempt to follow Adorno and Beckett through their engagements with the situation of post-Holocaust human existence. Reading Endgame and Krapp's Last Tape in light of Adorno's thinking, this study will seek to illuminate how Adorno and Beckett struggle to come to terms with mankind's catastrophic history, and how they then attempt to locate a way forward, however bleak, for the post-Holocaust human species. For, indeed, it is doubtlessly a new species, and one which must furnish new homes, new pasts, and new futures.

Chapter One

Painful Pasts and Fearful Futures: Hopelessness and the Holocaust in Adorno's Reading of Endgame

It is essential to realize that we live in an era in which Holocausts are possible, though not inevitable. The Holocaust was produced by factors that still exist in the world, factors such as deep hatreds, bureaucracies capable and willing to do the bidding of their superiors, modern technology devoid of moral directions, brutal dictatorships, and wars. If this is so, who can say which peoples could be the future victims, who the perpetrators? Who might be the Jews the next time? (Bauer 369)

This chapter will explore the new parameters, implications, and responsibilities of art for Adorno, taking Endgame as a paradigmatic example of the legitimate post-Auschwitz artistic endeavour. Endgame is a play about the last four humans on Earth. Here, life consists of sorting through the rubbish heap of a decomposing existence wherein the only thing to hope for is the cessation of suffering. However, the long desired end of existence remains unattainable. Endgame presents a world in which there are no more bicycle wheels (8), sugar plums (55), Turkish Delights (56), tides (62), navigators (65), rugs (67), pain-killers (71), coffins (77), or burials (42). The past becomes a site of irrevocable loss. Every marker of human existence fades away, yet the torturous conditions of a life of psychological and physical agony remain. In this play there is no hope for the future, and only a deeply ambivalent depiction of the past. While Nell and Nagg reminisce about a rowing trip on Lake Como, and Hamm recalls a time when love was possible, Clov thinks of yesterday as “that bloody awful day, long ago, before this

bloody awful day” (Endgame 21, 6, 43-44). Clov, who has never known an existence outside of the inescapable room where the characters live, describes the world as it appears on the stage of Endgame: each day holds the same unrelenting agony as the days before and the days to come. The possibilities of the past are lost forever, and there is no hope for the future.

Endgame's central motifs are loss and hopelessness. In this work the past reflects only lost possibilities and fateful wrong turns; Beckett depicts pleasures and hopes which could – at one time – exist but which are now forever unattainable. Likewise, the future appears here only as a site of the perpetuation and proliferation of suffering. In the world of Endgame, where past and future reflect the absence of hope and meaning, pragmatic politico-philosophical solutions seem to evaporate. While Endgame, as Adorno's analysis in “Trying to Understand Endgame”¹¹ demonstrates, entails political and philosophical elements insofar as it provides a scathing critique of the Western rational tradition, this play withholds tangible suggestions for the future of philosophy and politics. Endgame engages politics only sceptically, and it therefore becomes necessary to consider the extent to which a critical project can improve the current situation. This chapter will examine the two main functions of Endgame for Adorno: its critiques of the autonomous rational subject and unjust power structures. It will proceed through an analysis of Endgame's presentation of stagnancy, embodied in the themes of nostalgia and immobility, in order to advance the following thesis: Endgame allegorically depicts the wasteland of the post-Holocaust political situation, where to look to the past is to turn to the decisions which led to Auschwitz, and to move towards the future is to do so with the

¹¹ This chapter will focus on the essay “Trying to Understand Endgame.” However, other sections of Can One Live After Auschwitz? have been and will continue to be cited throughout this thesis. Therefore, the work will be cited as a whole as COL?.

burden of the horrific atrocities of the Shoah weighing heavily on each step. Ultimately, it will examine the ethical implications of Endgame as a response to the Holocaust, asking where a play which offers only critique, hopelessness, and the proliferation of meaningless suffering can lead us politically for Adorno.

Adorno prizes Beckett's work as the embodiment of "authentic" art *par excellence* (AT 153). After Endgame premiered in 1957, Adorno's major writings persistently invoke Beckett's work, particularly Endgame. Adorno argues that "Beckett's Endgame," in "prototypical fashion," achieves the "moment of reconciliation" which art requires (AT 194). Endgame becomes a symbolic manifestation of the legitimate post-Auschwitz artistic endeavour. For Adorno, Beckett's play embodies the essential tasks and gestures of post-Holocaust philosophy and politics. Adorno argues that the task of contemporary thinking is to catch up with Beckett: "interpretation inevitably lags behind Beckett. His dramatic work . . . calls for interpretation. One could almost say that the criterion of a philosophy whose hour has struck is that it prove equal to this challenge" (COL? 262). Adorno understands Beckett as philosophically groundbreaking insofar as he provides the only adequate path for a thinking which, after the Shoah, "declares itself to be dead inventory" (COL? 261). It therefore becomes necessary to interrogate Endgame; as the exemplar of post-Holocaust art, how does this play function politically, philosophically, and aesthetically?

For Adorno, Endgame is not an autonomous work of art. Or, more specifically, Adorno understands this play as simultaneously an autonomous artwork and an inherently political one. He allows no fundamental distinction between the aesthetic and the politico-philosophical implications of artworks. Endgame does not invite

interpretation as an overtly political play. It denies any references to particular time and place, and avoids all indication of political specificities. However, for Adorno, the apparently apolitical structure of the play is precisely what gives it its political potency. Adorno suggests that the role of contemporary art is not to present political views, but to approach politics indirectly: “This is not the time for political works of art; rather, politics has migrated into the autonomous work of art, and it has penetrated most deeply into works that present themselves as politically dead” (COL? 258). Art does not provide a derivative version of political thought; on the contrary, art becomes primary, as politics struggles to reach the standpoint it has access to. Furthermore, the more a work of art presents itself as autonomous and apolitical, the more potential for political potency this artwork holds. By presenting itself apolitically, the artwork circumvents the confines and the snares of the contemporary political situation:

The current deformation of politics, the rigidification of circumstances that are not starting to thaw anywhere, forces spirit to move to places where it does not need to become part of the rabble. At present everything cultural, even autonomous works, is in danger of suffocating in cultural twaddle; at the same time, the work of art is charged with wordlessly maintaining what politics has no access to.

(COL? 258)

Adorno diagnoses a historical climate in which political and philosophical thought exists within a prison which it cannot escape by its own means. Thus, paradoxically, autonomous art must tacitly perform the work of the political without betraying any specific political agenda.

Adorno identifies such an autonomous yet political artistic gesture in Beckett's work. Beckett, in the absence of an appropriate path for politics, can perform the work of the political. The primary critical strategy Adorno identifies in Endgame is Beckett's critique of the autonomous subject: "Those childlike but bloody clowns' faces in Beckett are the historical truth about the subject: it has disintegrated" (AT 354). Throughout his life's work, Adorno's mission is to deconstruct the philosophical notion of cohesive subjectivity. Referring to himself in the third person, he writes that "to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity—this is what the author felt to be his task ever since he came to trust his mental impulses" (ND xx). In Endgame, Adorno finds an artistic manifestation of the dissolution of the subject. In this play, he locates "the dissociation of the unity of consciousness into disparate elements, into nonidentity" (COL? 270). Indeed, Endgame invites such an interpretation. In this work, Beckett explodes the possibility of autonomous subjectivity. Each character relies desperately on the assistance of someone else. Nell and Nagg literally exist within rubbish bins, and they depend on Clov to bring them their food and to change the sand which absorbs their excrement. The most mobile character in the play, Clov, depends on Hamm for access to their stores:

Hamm: Why don't you kill me?

Clov: I don't know the combination of the cupboard. (Endgame 8)

Clov cannot live without his blind, invalid counterpart. As Adorno notes, Hamm also relies on Clov for his livelihood, because "Only Clov can still do the things necessary to keep them both alive" (COL? 288). Hamm needs Clov to feed him, move him, and help him urinate. Nell, Nagg, Hamm, and Clov live together in a space of mutual dependence. No character in this play functions independently; each is only partially human and

halfway capable of maintaining their own existence. Thus the very possibility of self-determination metaphorically dissolves in the physical structure of the play.

While all of Endgame's dramatis personae embody the dissolution of notions of autonomous identity, Hamm most clearly shatters the concept of cohesive subjectivity. Hamm is the sovereign, the tyrant, and the philosopher of the play, and he most directly represents the Western rational being. As Adorno suggests, "Hamm recapitulates what men once wanted to be" (COL? 290). Hamm's helplessness therefore reflects the ineptitude of the Western understanding of subjectivity itself. Endgame exposes the fragile underpinnings of the ideal of the autonomous rational being. Through Hamm, Beckett reveals the self-determining subject in its "nagging and impotent pedantry" (COL? 291). Hamm is "keeper of the keys and impotent at the same time" and this "duplicity points to the lie involved in saying 'I'" (COL? 287). In Adorno's illuminating analysis, Hamm becomes emblematic of the larger deconstruction of subjectivity in Endgame. Wolfgang Iser supports Adorno's interpretation, arguing that "The traceable response pattern of Endgame permits an experience of the decentered self" (226). Adorno and Iser correctly understand Endgame as a work which precludes the possibility of self-determining individuality. In this play Beckett presents autonomous subjectivity only as a subject for ridicule and derision. Cohesive identity becomes fodder for its own satirization, as Beckett, in Hamm, reduces the autonomous rational being to a state of pathetic ineptitude.

Adorno's interpretation of Endgame as "the epilogue to subjectivity" directly relates to the other politico-philosophical critique he locates in this play (COL? 278). This second critique involves a resistance to capitalist inequities. Adorno suggests that,

by shattering the Western construction of identity and subjectivity, Beckett also confronts a capitalist form of oppression: “The catastrophes that inspire Endgame have shattered the individual . . . The individual himself is revealed to be a historical category, both the outcome of the capitalist process of alienation, and a defiant protest against it, something transient himself” (COL? 267). The deconstruction of the subject merges with a disavowal of the alienation and exploitation of human labour in pre and post war capitalist society. While Beckett deconstructs the subject he simultaneously exposes his characters’ deep-seated dependence on unmerited power structures. Hamm is a tyrant; he has no legitimate claim to his power aside from the fact that he is already in a position of leadership. Clov, in contrast, despite his physical superiority, unquestioningly accepts his position of subservience. Like many powerless people in a society which neither explains nor justifies the unjust distribution of power, Clov simply bears his position of subservience as a concession to the status quo. Apparently, he has been taking orders from Hamm for so long that he is unable to conceive of an independent existence:

Clov: Do this, do that, and I do it. I never refuse. Why?

Hamm: You’re not able to.

Clov: Soon I won’t do it any more.

Hamm: You won’t be able to any more. (*Exit Clov*). Ah the creatures, the creatures, everything has to be explained to them. (Endgame 43)

The only way Clov could disobey Hamm would be if he was no longer able to obey.

Clov’s repeated assertion that “Something is taking its course” frames the play insofar as choice gives way to inevitability here (Endgame 13, 32). As Adorno notes, here one can do only what one is able to: “according to the historic-philosophical sundial of the play, it

is too late for spontaneous action” (COL? 288). In Adorno’s commentary on the above dialogue, he identifies Hamm as “the master” and Clov as “the *soi-distant* servant” (COL? 282). Indeed, Clov is largely complicit in his own subordinate role in the master-slave dynamic. He occasionally challenges Hamm by refusing to forgive him or by confronting him about Mother Pegg’s death. However, he always reverts to the routine of “the same inanities” (Endgame 45), dutifully returning to his position of subordination. Clov often serves Hamm with an attitude of bitterness and contempt, but the hierarchical relationship between them is never legitimately threatened or subverted.

Steven Connor explains the “self-enclosure” of the power structure in this play, wherein “Hamm and Clov are locked together in a nightmare of mutual subjugation, in which each is exploiter and victim of the other” (179). Indeed, Hamm and Clov are disturbingly dependent on one another. Adorno articulates their mutual interdependence thus: “The outlines of Hamm and Clov are also drawn with a single line; the process of individuation into properly autonomous monads is denied them. They cannot live without one another” (COL? 288). Hamm and Clov, in their perverse and unbreakable mutual dependence, thus exemplify the crisis Adorno diagnoses in Western thought. Like the post-Auschwitz politico-philosophical situation, Hamm and Clov occupy an unbreakable predicament which neither is capable of escaping by his own means.

Adorno explains that Clov no longer knows how to reclaim power in his relationship with Hamm: “The servant is no longer capable of taking charge and doing away with domination” (COL 288). Likewise, Hamm depends on Clov to provide a receptacle for his malicious behaviour.

Hamm: I’ve made you suffer too much. (*Pause.*) Haven’t I?

Clov: It's not that.

Hamm (*shocked*): I haven't made you suffer too much?

Clov: Yes!

Hamm: (*relieved*): Ah you gave me a fright! (Endgame 7)

Hamm and Clov require each other to continue their routine of mutual reception and infliction of pain. Thus they embody both the dissolution of individuality and a perverse dependence on a twisted and unjust power structure. Clov's acknowledgment of his own misery is crucial for Hamm. Hamm's pleasure comes, not only from abusing Clov, but also from Clov's affirmation of the abuse. Geoff Hamilton suggests that "What seems to bind Hamm and Clov together is the need to be heard in lamentation" (621). Clov not only enables Hamm's sadistic needs, he also bears witness to his displays of agony, furthering the sense of their mutual dependence. Notably, Clov is not a passive participant in this economy of pain; he also exhibits a need for rebuke and punishment. Hamm and Clov's final dialogue confirms their common dependence on their pseudo-sadomasochistic relationship:

Clov: This is what we call making an exit.

Hamm: I'm obliged to you, Clov. For your services.

Clov (*turning, sharply*): Ah pardon, it's I am obliged to you.

Hamm: It's we are obliged to each other. (Endgame 81)

Clov's last line confirms the audience's suspicion that he gains satisfaction from his role of subservience. Just as Hamm enjoys providing abuse, so Clov enjoys receiving it. The fact that their relationship never ends further demonstrates their total inability to exist without one another. Although Clov tries to leave, he remains unable to do so; he stands

on stage until the curtain. If Clov were to overthrow Hamm, or abandon him, this would end the game. Instead of an end, however, Beckett presents an indeterminate continuation. As the curtain closes, the world of always-escalating suffering remains intact. It is impossible to say how long Hamm can lie there with his crippled toy dog and his bloody handkerchief, and how long Clov can stand by the door with his raincoat over his arm. However, in a play where endings are always deferred, this standoff could last indefinitely. Like the unjust hierarchies of contemporary society and the fallacy of the autonomous subject, Hamm and Clov stand at a juncture which threatens never to end. For these two, suffering has done nothing but increase throughout the narrative, and there is no reason to assume that the torturous game will conclude any time soon.

Beckett critiques the injustices of contemporary structures of domination and exploitation through a scathing satire. Adorno explains Beckett's satirical subversion of the hierarchical power structure in Endgame and Waiting for Godot:

Waiting for Godot revolves around the theme of lordship-and-bondage grown senile and demented in an era when exploitation of human labour persists although it could well be abolished. This motif, truly one of the essential characteristics of present-day society, is taken up again in Endgame. In both instances Beckett's technique pushes this Hegelian theme to the periphery: lordship and bondage are reduced to an anecdote in terms of both dramatic function and social criticism. (AT 354)

As Adorno articulates, Beckett both reveals the underpinnings of the master-slave power structure, and then dramatically parodies them. To take this power dynamic completely seriously would be to pay tribute to it, thus the satire becomes a crucial element of

Beckett's critique. Hamm and Clov's mutual abuse appears ludicrous and unnecessary in a place where there is surely enough suffering already. Furthermore, Beckett reveals Hamm's unjustified position of superiority as ridiculous insofar as Hamm holds power for no other reason than because he has always held it.

Like Hamm and Clov, Nell and Nagg satirize unmerited systems of domination. They demonstrate a critique of the notion that a person's only worth is located in their capacity for labour. As Adorno suggests, Hamm's treatment of his parents serves an allegorical function: "Endgame is true gerontology. By the criterion of socially useful labor, which they are no longer capable of, the old people are superfluous and should be tossed aside" (COL? 286). Through Nell and Nagg, Beckett casts a negative light on the industrial-capitalist practise of discarding people when they cease to increase the production and accumulation of capital. Stanley Cavell notes that "The old father and mother with no useful functions any more are among the waste of society" (117). In Endgame, where the only use of the characters lies in their reception of agony, Nagg and Nell still manage to become 'used up.' Adorno ties Hamm's maltreatment of Nell and Nagg to the depravity of post-Holocaust culture. He suggests that Endgame reflects a world wherein "everyone who lifts the lid of the nearest trashcan can expect to find his own parents in it. The natural connection between the living has now become organic garbage. The Nazis have irrevocably overthrown the taboo on old age. Beckett's trashcans are emblems of the culture rebuilt after Auschwitz" (COL? 286). For Adorno, the abuse of Nell and Nagg exemplifies the degeneration of post-Holocaust culture. Significantly, Adorno elsewhere admonishes the National Socialist treatment of the elderly: "One of the Nazis' symbolic outrages is the killing of the very old" (Minima

Moralia 22). For Adorno, the murder of the elderly represents the Nazis' crossing of a line of sanctuary. The old should be protected, and violence against the elderly becomes symbolic of a greater barbarism. Hamm's ruthless treatment of his procreators thus indicates a larger societal dysfunction. For Adorno, the Nazi atrocities have been an essential development in the degeneration of contemporary society. The erosion of values as exemplified by Hamm's treatment of his parents reflects the decaying remnants of morality, as they rot in the wake of the Holocaust.

As Adorno's analysis reveals, Endgame is a political play insofar as it demonstrates both the deconstruction of the autonomous subject and a critique of the injustices of arbitrary power hierarchies. However, the ethical implications of Endgame as an exemplar of art after the Holocaust remain to be seen. In light of Adorno's speculations on the play as a representative example of post-Auschwitz art, the themes of nostalgia and immobility become crucial insofar as they delineate, respectively, what lessons we may (*or may not*) learn from the past and how we can (*or cannot*) cultivate political strategies as we move towards the future. Having established the function of Endgame for Adorno as a form of allegorical political critique, I will move towards my own analysis of these central themes in order to show that this play invites only despair.

Hamilton argues that, in Endgame, "memories of more vital, more pastoral worlds remain" (615). Indeed, this play consistently evokes reminders of a preferable past, even as it repeatedly points towards a more horrific future. While evocations of an idyllic former time pervade Endgame, Beckett always undercuts these pleasant memories. If the dialogue does not directly undermine the characters' mirthful remembrances, then the inevitable reminder of the present state of affairs mars them. The knowledge that,

however pleasant the past may have been, it led to the desolation of the present ultimately posits the past as horrific insofar as it produced a chain of events which led to the contemporary state of brutality.

Nell and Nagg are the primary mouthpieces of nostalgia in this play, fondly remembering a rowing trip on Lake Como and a bicycle trip in the Ardennes. Hamilton writes on Beckett's use of pastoral and elegiac literary conventions, arguing that "Endgame's use of the pastoral tradition is, needless to say, fiercely parodic" (612). He points out that Nell and Nagg's recollection of their trip to the 'idyllic' Ardennes in fact evokes a symbolically violent location: "Ardennes was also, of course, the site of fierce military struggles during the First and Second World Wars . . . suggesting that Nagg and Nell lost their limbs in a rural locale known for carnage" (617). Beckett undermines Nell and Nagg's pleasant reminiscence, not only through the destructive location the memory recalls, but also in the tensions between the words and actions of the characters themselves. Ruby Cohn points out that "Nagg and Nell laugh uproariously at the accident in which they lost their legs" (240). In the humour they find in their own misfortunes, Nell and Nagg exhibit the macabre comedy which Beckett employs throughout this play, and all the plays under discussion in this thesis. Iser explains the function of laughter in Beckett: "laughter at Beckett's plays is always isolated, apparently robbed of its contagious qualities; indeed, in Endgame and Happy Days it is often accompanied by a sort of shock effect, as if the reaction were somehow inappropriate and therefore must be stifled" (221). While Iser writes about the audience here, the characters likewise ascribe to this convention. The function of laughter in Endgame is that of the inappropriate laugh which one immediately regrets. Like life itself in Endgame, laughter consistently

deteriorates, as Nell and Nagg demonstrate in their discussion of the Ardennes accident. First “*They laugh heartily,*” and then “*They laugh less heartily,*” and finally “*They laugh still less heartily*” (Endgame 16). The gradual loss of the force of their laughter reinscribes the general movement of the play, a transition from less to more hopelessness. Humour, like nostalgia, ultimately fizzles out, forcing the characters to confront the bare pain of their deteriorating existences.

In their recollection of their trip to Lake Como, Nell and Nagg’s pleasurable reminiscences again subside to reveal the bleakness of their present situation. Nagg fruitlessly seeks to brighten Nell’s mood by telling his joke about the tailor. Nagg’s reminder of the first time he told the joke indeed incites a nostalgic recollection for Nell. However, Beckett quickly undercuts Nell’s reverie:

Nell: It was on Lake Como. (*Pause.*) One April Afternoon. (*Pause.*) Can you believe it?

Nagg: What?

Nell: That we once went out rowing on Lake Como. (*Pause.*) One April afternoon.

Nagg: We had got engaged the day before.

Nell: Engaged!

Nagg: You were in such fits that we capsized. By rights we should have drowned.

Nell: It was because I felt happy.

Nagg (*indignant*): It was not, it was not, it was my story and nothing else. Happy!

Don’t you laugh at it still? Every time I tell it. Happy! (Endgame 21)

Nell needs Nagg to confirm that she was once happy. However, Nagg denies her former happiness, preferring to believe that his joke caused her laughter. When Nagg actually tells the joke, he answers his own question. As it turns out, Nell does not still laugh each time he tells it. In fact, Nagg's attempt at comedy gives way to a central dramatic breakdown in the plot. As he tells the joke, he becomes more and more desperate to succeed, and failure becomes more and more inevitable. He laments that he tells "this story worse and worse" (Endgame 22). After delivering the punch line, Nagg bursts into a "high forced laugh" (Endgame 23), seeking to incite a reaction in Nell. However, laughter dies when Hamm demands silence and then asks the question of the play: "Will this never finish?" (Endgame 23). Hamm's outburst explodes Nagg's attempt to reestablish former happiness, and confirms the past as a site of only lost possibilities. The past, while it once held the potential of happiness, ultimately produced the present state of squalor and depravity. Rather than being in raptures, Nell seems to be dead after Nagg's joke. Clov notices that "She has no pulse" (Endgame 23), and she does not appear on stage again. Although Nell seems to achieve the coveted finality of death, her fate remains ambiguous. When Hamm asks whether she is dead, Clov looks into her bin and replies: "Looks like it" (Endgame 62). Nevertheless, Nagg's attempt to improve the current state of affairs painfully backfires insofar as he loses his companion. Whether or not Nell dies, she ceases to exist in the world of Endgame, and Nagg is left to face the current situation alone. Memories of former happiness gradually dissolve as Nagg tells his joke, and the process of dramatic disintegration culminates in Nell's departure from the action.

In Endgame, happy memories always exist alongside the brutality of the present. Like Nell and Nagg, Hamm occasionally allows his mind to linger on times when his situation was better. Helen Popovich notes that “Hamm, too, remembers a yesterday and a world outside the room” (35). However, he also exemplifies the fact that such memories serve only to re-inscribe the ultimate hopelessness of existence. Beckett exhibits the play between nostalgia and painful consciousness of present conditions in Hamm’s recollection of the madman:

I once knew a madman who thought the end of the world had come . . . I used to go and see him, in the asylum. I’d take him by the hand and drag him to the window. Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness! (*Pause.*) He’d snatch away his hand and go back into his corner. Appalled. All he had seen was ashes. (*Pause.*) He alone had been spared. (Endgame 44)

Hamm’s assertion that the madman was saved suggests that knowledge of former beauty only reinforces the ugliness of the current situation. The madman, who saw only ash where Hamm saw beautiful images, was rescued. Hamm, in contrast, knows how glorious the world once was, and thus the world as it is appears all the more desolate to him. Hamm’s memory thus reinforces the final verdict on the past in Endgame: it is a site of pain. While fond memories might provide a momentary escape from the horrors of the present, they ultimately provide only an increase in suffering. In Endgame, Beckett continually undercuts and satirizes nostalgia, as the healing balm of memory becomes simply an infected wound in the present.

The past is not only a *locus* of agony insofar as pleasurable memories fade away to reveal the desolation of the present; it is also a site of an unnameable former catastrophe. A mysterious apocalyptic event, which apparently destroyed all of humanity except for the four quasi-humans in this room, forms the backdrop of the play. Endgame abounds with subtle hints of Hamm's complicity in this incommunicable past horror.

When Clov leaves the stage to kill a rat, Hamm voices a guilt-ridden lamentation:

You weep, and weep, for nothing, so as not to laugh, and little by little . . . you begin to grieve. (*He folds the handkerchief, puts it back in his pocket, raises his head.*) All those I might have helped. (*Pause.*) Helped! (*Pause.*) Saved. (*Pause.*) Saved! (*Pause.*) The place was crawling with them! Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that! (Endgame 68)

For Hamm it is not only fond recollections which form the painful structure of the past, it is also a pronounced sense of guilt. Furthermore, as Cavell suggests, "Whatever God's idea in destroying men, to have saved one family for himself puts them in the position of denying life to all other men. To be chosen, to be special, singled out, for suffering *or* salvation, is an inescapable curse" (143). Hamm's guilt thus extends to all four of the characters of Endgame. The characters live in the classic psychological situation of Holocaust survivors, which Primo Levi articulates: "I might be alive in the place of another, at the expense of another; I might have usurped, that is, in fact, killed" (82). The four characters in Endgame all manifest this syndrome, a similar concept to what is now commonly referred to as "survivor's guilt complex" and what Adorno calls "the drastic guilt of him who is spared" (Natkiewicz 13, ND 363), in one form or another. While the entire human race has perished, these four people have been singled out for life. Although

all of the characters in Endgame embody the curse of life which Cavell articulates, there are also varying degrees of complicity in the catastrophe itself. Hamm seems to be most directly guilty of being alive “in the place of another.” While Hamm’s soliloquy entails ambiguity insofar as it remains unclear whether he could have actually saved anyone, it is clear that he could have tried to – and did not.

While Hamm seems to be in a unique position of complicity with respect to the ambiguous catastrophe of the past, Nagg is responsible insofar as he engendered Hamm. Nagg voices his own sense of guilt for having fathered this demon: “After all I’m your father. It’s true if it hadn’t been me it would have been someone else. But that’s no excuse” (Endgame 56). Just as Hamm appears to be vaguely responsible for innumerable deaths, so Nagg is guilty of creating Hamm. Hamm himself blames Nagg for fathering him, and Nagg’s only defense is ignorance:

Hamm: Scoundrel! Why did you engender me?

Nagg: I didn’t know.

Hamm: What? What didn’t you know?

Nagg: That it’d be you. (Endgame 49)

Here Nagg reiterates the sense of fatality which permeates Endgame. Although he is innocent insofar as he didn’t know who he was creating, he is nonetheless to blame for his actions. Endgame allows no consolations for good intentions, just as it laces the thought of ‘what could have been’ with pain. In Endgame, what is is, and what is is desolation. Hamm highlights this sense of fatality: “The end is in the beginning and yet you go on” (Endgame 69). This play denies the notion that things could have happened differently. There is no altering the inevitable course of events; whatever hope once

belonged to the past has ultimately served only to create the bleak destitution of the present situation. Endgame thus highlights the inevitability of a course of events leading to a catastrophe. Allegorically, the play therefore suggests that whatever possibilities Western society once held were destroyed with the massive-scale destruction of the Holocaust. It suggests that the entire history of Western civilization is, more or less directly, responsible for the historical movements which ultimately led to Auschwitz.

Just as Endgame reduces the past to a *locus* of meaningless pain, so this play evacuates all hopeful potentialities from the future. Adorno writes that, in Endgame, “Hope skulks out of the world” (COL? 294). Adorno’s interpretation is correct; life, in Endgame, is utterly devoid of hope. The theme of immobility most clearly demonstrates the play’s hopelessness. Connor argues that “in Endgame only one character can move around freely, thus turning the large empty space around the characters from a functional, habitable space into a space of ironic unavailability” (141). While Connor correctly observes the confining physicality of the stage in Endgame, his argument need not stop with Clov. Clov, the one character who can walk in the play, suffers from physical limitations much as the others do. First and most obviously, he is unable to sit down (Endgame 37). His ability to “move around freely” thus becomes its own form of confinement. Rather than a liberating motion, Clov’s movement strikes the audience as a panic-stricken pacing. Restless and unable to sit, Clov moves frantically, like a madman in an asylum. Second, Clov’s movement is also a form of bondage insofar as Hamm, in the absence of his own physical powers, freely manipulates his body:

Hamm: How are your legs?

Clov: Bad.

Hamm: But you can move?

Clov: Yes.

Hamm (*violently*): Then move! (*Clov goes to back wall, leans against it with his forehead and hands.*) (Endgame 7-8)

Rather than reacting to his own desires and consciousness, Clov's body most efficiently responds to Hamm's orders. He rarely, if ever, uses his body to assert his own freedom. The master-slave relationship thus extends into the space of Clov's body, and Clov's mobility becomes little more than a vehicle for Hamm's needs. Finally, as Popovich illustrates, Clov's initial mobility deteriorates throughout the play: "As the play progresses, Clov's movements are gradually restricted until he stands at last 'impassive and motionless, his eyes fixed on Hamm, till the end'" (35). Clov's gradual transition from more to less capable of movement reverberates with the characteristic rhythm of Endgame, where possibilities slowly but consistently dissipate. The symbolic function of the ending of the play reflects the greater import of the motif of immobility: the suggestion of an impotent and useless movement towards the future. Rather than presenting the future as a site of potential redemption, Endgame depicts it as a *locus* of the proliferation of meaningless suffering. This understanding of the future allegorically extends to a reading of the play as a response to the Holocaust. In light of the unprecedented capacity for atrocity which the human race demonstrated in Auschwitz and the other death camps, the way forward becomes hopelessly marred by the weight of the past.

In Endgame, immobility represents inability; the restriction on physical movement suggests the characters' larger incapability to act and change things for the

better. Beckett's characters move through space haltingly and painfully, and the limitation of physical movement stands in for the greater stunting of human potential and for the vast burden of catastrophic history. Hamm's immobility receives the most attention in the action of Endgame. While Nell and Nagg don't question their physical confinement, and Clov only speaks about his legs when Hamm inquires about them, the play repeatedly draws attention to Hamm's bodily limitations. In his verbal reminders of his inability to walk, the audience experiences a moment when, against their better wishes, they feel sorry for Hamm:

Hamm: I can't leave you.

Clov: I know. And you can't follow me. (Endgame 45)

While Hamm's physical disability invites a reluctant feeling approaching pity, it simultaneously demonstrates his pathetic impotence. Endgame most perversely highlights Hamm's immobility when Clov wheels him around the room: "Hamm: Take me for a little turn. (*Clov goes behind the chair and pushes it forward.*) Not too fast! (*Clov pushes chair.*) Right round the world! (*Clov pushes chair.*) Hugg the walls, then back to the center again. (*Clov pushes chair.*) I was right in the center, wasn't I?" (Endgame 25). Here Beckett exposes Hamm, the sovereign, in all his insecurities and incapacities. In this grotesque restaging of the king surveying his kingdom, Beckett contrasts the power of the tyrant with his physical inability. While Hamm remains in complete control of Clov's body as they travel around Hamm's "kingdom" (Endgame 23), Clov has the last laugh when Hamm demonstrates his urgent need to be in the center of his universe. Hamm can never know precisely where the center is, and Clov is happy to keep him guessing. Here Beckett gives us Hamm as the hopelessly inept leader; able neither to

walk nor to see, Hamm eschews the possibility of progress as he wheels blindly towards the future. Only a madman would follow such a leader, just as only a sick society would continue to ascribe to the dictates of a poisoned Western consciousness and allow arbitrary and unjust power structures to stand in place.

The motif of immobility microcosmically reflects the larger theme of hopelessness in this work. The impotence of the physical body suggests the general stagnancy of human consciousness, and the potentially endless entrapment within the destructive circles of politics and philosophy which led to the Holocaust. None of the characters are capable of changing their situations for the better. While the play ends on the suggestion of movement – Clov sees a small boy and determines to venture into the desert to follow him – it is a suggestion which remains deferred. Clov’s final movement is, like Hamm’s, motionlessness itself. Therefore, in the context of the Holocaust, this play shows that the great weight of the past bears heavily on the present and threatens to evacuate the future of all hopeful possibilities. After this catastrophe, it seems that Western society, like the characters of Endgame, faces the threat of entering an endless downward spiral of suffering and horror.

The play ends without motion, and without hope. The characters linger in the enclosure of their psychological and physical prison. While Endgame constantly looks towards the future, the only hope is the end of life itself. The action of the play suggests that even this desolate consolation is unattainable. Clov desperately seeks the end of existence, asking “Will it not soon be the end?” and asserting that he will “weep for happiness” when he finds that “the earth is extinguished” (Endgame 61, 81). However, throughout the play, the end gradually becomes a less realistic possibility. Clov’s first

line embodies this movement away from realizable endings: “Finished, it’s finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished” (Endgame 1). Clov’s repeated addition of qualifiers to his initial assertion suggests the invasion of hesitancy into a world of finalities. In the world of Endgame, the *telos* is no longer reachable, even if that *telos* is simply the long awaited end of existence. In the stagnant yet ceaseless movement of the plot, Endgame moves towards a hopeless yet inevitable future. The future is simply “the . . . other hell” (Endgame 26), where new levels of suffering await. The final judgement on the future in Endgame is that it is a site of deeper agony than the past. While the past causes suffering insofar as every past moment led to the brutality of the present, the future holds the possibility of an increase in agony. In a plot characterized by consistently escalating suffering, there is good reason to believe that the future will hold greater pain than the present. It seems that the only hope for these cadaverous characters is a further numbing of the pain.

This chapter has shown that Endgame both denies the possibility of productive and meaningful reflection on the past and evacuates all possibility of hope from the future. Thus, the question remains: what are the ethical implications of such a play as an exemplar of post-Holocaust art? It seems that Endgame leaves room neither to learn lessons from the past nor to hope for a more desirable future. The characters in Endgame are stuck with what they have: squalor, suffering and helpless immobility in the confines of a time that threatens never to end and a space that threatens never to expand. The hopelessness of Endgame ultimately becomes its crucial function as Adorno’s exemplar of post-Holocaust art. For Adorno, Endgame is an example of post-Auschwitz art *par excellence* only insofar as it approaches the catastrophe indirectly. Endgame becomes *the*

example of legitimate art after the Holocaust not because it aesthetically ‘does justice to’ the Holocaust, but because it critiques the more general politico-philosophical climate which once created, and threatens to create again, such horror.

For Adorno, Endgame does not directly respond to, address, or represent the Holocaust itself; rather, it reflects the “impossibility of continuing to represent things in works of art” (COL? 261). Endgame, as an artistic rendering of the Holocaust, represents the very unrepresentability of this event. Friedrich Nietzsche writes that “Man, the bravest of animals and the one most accustomed to suffering, does *not* repudiate suffering as such; he *desires* it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a *meaning* for it, a *purpose* of suffering” (On the Genealogy of Morals 162).¹² The mission Nietzsche identifies, mankind’s search for a meaning for his suffering, reaches its limitation with the Holocaust for many thinkers. Levi, who survived Auschwitz’s immediate brutality but not its long term psychological repercussions, apparently committed suicide in 1987 (Angier 719). On the question of whether the Nazi atrocities had meaning, Levi writes: “I believe that the twelve Hitlerian years . . . were characterized by widespread useless violence, as an end in itself, with the sole purpose of inflicting pain” (106). Levi refuses to give meaning to the Nazis’ horrendous actions. Like Levi, Adorno denies overarching meaning to the Nazi brutalities: “After Auschwitz, our feelings resist any claim of the positivity of existence as sanctimonious, as wronging the victims; they balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims’ fate” (ND 361). Rather than seeking for an ultimate *ethos* underlying this event, Adorno prefers to accept that, in the Holocaust, death and suffering were arbitrary. For Adorno, the evacuation of the significance of death was perhaps the most brutal atrocity perpetrated by the Nazis;

¹² Here forward cited as Genealogy.

nevertheless, faced with a choice between meaninglessness and the meaning the Nazis ascribed to the extermination of the Jews – a necessary eradication for the advancement of the Third Reich – Adorno chooses the former.

Adorno and Levi refuse to find a single, coherent, and definitive meaning in the Holocaust. To posit an ultimate meaning or historical ‘lesson’ to be learned from the Holocaust is to place the deaths of those who died in the realm of necessary sacrifice, and thus to reinforce the Nazi agenda. The Holocaust explodes every *telos* insofar as no end can be justified by these means. However, to relegate the Holocaust to the realm of the utterly incomprehensible and unspeakable is to go too far. Giorgio Agamben writes against “the opinion of those who would like Auschwitz to remain forever incomprehensible” (11). For Agamben, to “transform Auschwitz into a reality absolutely separated from language” is to “unconsciously repeat the Nazis’ gesture” (157). To posit the Holocaust as an unthinkable and incommunicable event denies whatever we might learn from “the decisive lesson of the century” (Agamben 14). Naomi Mandel succinctly summarizes the list of thinkers who suggest that the Holocaust is incommensurable with language:

‘The world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason’ says George Steiner. ‘Auschwitz negates all systems, destroys all doctrines’ says Elie Wiesel. More recently, and most significantly, Jean-François Lyotard posits Auschwitz as a *differend* – the space that cannot (yet) be filled by any single discourse of history, politics, or philosophy. ‘Auschwitz,’ then, stands for the unspeakable: A complex challenge to communication, comprehension, and

thought, the word refers to the limit of words, pointing to a realm inaccessible to knowledge. (204-05)

Like Agamben, Mandel opposes such a discourse of the Holocaust: “The unspeakable, I urge, must be spoken” (228). While the ethical implications of positing a meaning to the death and suffering in the Holocaust are questionable, the attempt to relegate these atrocities to the realm of the incommunicable is more dubious still.

Adorno, like Agamben and Mandel, suggests that the Holocaust must be spoken about: “Not even silence gets us out of the circle” (367). In light of Adorno’s refusal of silence as a solution, a pertinent question emerges: what is the function of Endgame as an example of post-Auschwitz art if not a testimony to the unspeakability of the Holocaust? The suffering of the characters in Endgame is completely meaningless:

Hamm: We’re not beginning to . . . to . . . mean something?

Clov: Mean something! You and I, mean something! (*Brief Laugh.*) Ah that’s a good one! (Endgame 33)

Furthermore, the Holocaust is neither mentioned nor referenced in Endgame. Adorno himself notes that, in this play, “The name of the catastrophe is to be spoken only in silence” (COL? 267). Does Endgame, as a play which is itself silent about the Holocaust, therefore demand only silence as a response to Auschwitz? What can a play which provides no possibility for future hope, and denies the past as a site of instruction, possibly teach us about the world we occupy in the wake of the Holocaust? Adorno’s purposes in positing Endgame as an exemplar of post-Holocaust art appear suspect. Rather than using the play to examine the Holocaust as a specific historical event, Adorno seems to use it to further his own philosophical agenda. In Endgame, he locates the

deconstruction of the subject, and a critique of capitalist society, two of his own primary conceptual goals. Adorno's appropriation of the most legitimate example of post-Auschwitz art for his own philosophical purposes at first seems markedly unsettling. However, it is crucial to realize that, while Adorno indeed posits Endgame as an exemplar of post-Auschwitz art, this is not to say that it 'does justice to,' describes, renders, or represents the Holocaust. Rather, Endgame is Adorno's example of post-Auschwitz art *par excellence*, because it is the exemplar of *all art*. For Adorno, the importance of post-Auschwitz art does not lie in its ability to adequately represent the Holocaust as a specific historical event, but in its capacity to deal with the most important historical, political, and philosophical horizon of the contemporary world. While Endgame can only evoke "the name of the catastrophe" silently, the name of the catastrophe is of little import for Adorno. What *is* crucial is the political and philosophical systems of consciousness which allowed the Holocaust to happen, and which remains largely unchanged after World War II. Thus, Endgame does the most important work of the political for Adorno, by providing an immanent and relentless critique of Western consciousness itself.

Adorno's concern with the Holocaust does not begin in 1933 and end in 1945. Rothberg explains Adorno's greater consideration of the larger philosophical, political, and historical situation surrounding the Holocaust:

Adorno's focus on Auschwitz is not just turned towards the past; rather, it creates a constellation between the past and a series of postwar developments in Germany and to a lesser extent in the United States and the Soviet Union. These

developments include the persistence of the very modes of thinking and social categorization that made the Holocaust possible. (49)

As Rothberg cogently articulates, Adorno does not myopically look past the greater backdrop of the Holocaust. Rather, he interrogates the larger philosophical and political mechanisms which allowed these atrocities to take place and which remain largely unchanged even after the overthrow of the Third Reich. Therefore, Endgame, as the paradigmatic example of post-Holocaust art bears a greater responsibility than that of simply portraying the horror of the Holocaust. Rather than a representation of the Shoah, Adorno finds in Endgame the crucial critique of the totalitarian forms of thinking which led to the Holocaust and to the other atrocities of the twentieth century, and which threaten to lead to similar – or greater – brutalities in the future.

For Adorno, the Holocaust is precisely *not* an unspeakable, unthinkable, or ahistorical event. Adorno does not consider Auschwitz as an isolated phenomenon, but as an occurrence which belongs implicitly to the systems of philosophy and politics which allowed it to happen, and which have not been overcome. The task then becomes the immanent critique of the historical, political, and philosophical mechanisms which enabled Auschwitz. While it might be impossible to fully understand or comprehend the injustices which took place in the camps themselves, it is also not necessarily important to do so. What is important, and what can be done, is to cultivate understanding about *how it happened*. This is the challenge Adorno puts to philosophy:

Every debate about education is trivialized and inconsequential compared to this single ideal: never again Auschwitz. It was the barbarism all education strives against . . . and barbarism continues as long as the fundamental conditions that

favoured that relapse continue largely unchanged. That is the whole horror.

(COL? 19)

For Adorno, the brutality of Auschwitz belongs to the present rather than the past. The infrastructures and systems of thought which allowed the Holocaust to happen remain in place, and, as long as this is the case, philosophy must still struggle against the forces of totalitarianism – even as they remain *intact*, insidious, and all-pervasive in Western society.

In light of a discussion of Adorno's understanding of the role of politics, philosophy, art, and indeed all thinking in the aftermath of the Holocaust, it is crucial to realize that, for Adorno, human civilization as a whole is accountable for this event. Mandel writes on "Adorno's broader concerns about the position of cultural criticism in the wake of the Holocaust," suggesting that Adorno diagnoses "a radical *complicity*" (220), extending far beyond the perpetrators of the atrocities. Adorno is not concerned with finger pointing, but with the acknowledgment of the universal guilt of humanity. Of course, historically, this event was caused primarily by Western forces. Yet these forces were human and thus belong as a remnant of universal humanity. More importantly, as a warning, the Holocaust shows what the human species is capable of, and thus should serve to warn the species as a whole. For Adorno, responsibility does not stop with the Nazis; rather, it reaches through the entire history of Western politics and philosophy and beyond. Thus, as we move towards the future which appears so destitute in the shadow of this horrific event, it is crucial to break the shackles of those structures of thinking which created totalitarianism and the Holocaust, and which remain largely the same today. Thus the most urgent task of thinking becomes the immanent critique of the insidious

infrastructures of Western politics and philosophy: “Adorno’s proposition in the face of this seemingly inevitable complicity is to posit an ‘immanent criticism’” (Mandel 220).

While Endgame does not suggest constructive political solutions, it takes a step which, for Adorno, must come first. It provides a scathing, relentless, and immanent critique of the poisonous structures of thought and philosophy which characterize Western society.

Adorno has no time for debates about the aesthetic standing of the Holocaust as an autonomous identity. Likewise, he does not seek a direct artistic representation of the horrors or the lessons of Auschwitz. What Adorno seeks to understand is not the Holocaust itself, but its political and philosophical underpinnings: “One must come to know the mechanisms that render people capable of such deeds, must reveal these mechanisms to them, and strive, by awakening a general awareness of those mechanisms, to prevent people from becoming so again” (COL? 21). Adorno does not seek a fetishization of the brutalities of Auschwitz such as he might find today in popular attempts to represent this catastrophe. Instead, he seeks the form of immanent cultural critique which he believes is the most urgent task of philosophy, politics, and art after Auschwitz. As Joel Whitebook points out, Adorno finds such an immanent critique *par excellence*, in Endgame: “And Adorno de facto says as much when he does not see Beckett’s Endgame – which is, for him, and exemplary work of advanced art – as an apolitical piece of existentialist or absurdist theatre. Instead, he sees it as negating, but not *denying* sociohistorical reality – that is, he sees it as a work of critique” (58). Thus Beckett’s art, for Adorno, becomes the most potent form of political thought. Through art, Beckett shows us the world as it is. Endgame becomes the purest form of representation, insofar as watching the play allows us to look into a mirror which reflects

the malaise of our own society. In the crippled and deformed characters we see ourselves, in the hypocritical and nonsensical philosophy we see our own thoughts, and in the unjust hierarchies of domination we see our own societal structures of oppression and exploitation. Endgame's presentation of the past as a reminder of the meaningless suffering of the present recalls the fact that our civilization's past is a history of mistakes, and that every former decision has led towards the unprecedented heights of violence and brutality which humanity achieved in the twentieth century. Endgame's evacuation of all hope from the future serves to highlight the daunting task of the current political situation. In Endgame, there are no easy solutions; here there is no simple path to a happy ending. Beckett leaves his characters where post-Holocaust Western society remains: locked in a room where suffering hopelessly repeats itself, and threatens never to end. To escape from the iron cage of the contemporary politico-philosophical situation, we must do what Clov cannot. We must leave the dying sovereign behind, and venture outside of the cell of our consciousness, despite the possible dangers of the outside world. While Hamm might be right when he tells Clov that "Outside of here its death" (Endgame 9), this might also be a deception, a means to keep Clov in his position of subservience. Clov helplessly believes Hamm, because Hamm provides the substance for everything he has ever known. The task Adorno posits for thinking is to turn away from the dictates of the Western politico-philosophical tradition, and towards the unknown. He locates the possibility of the beyond precisely in Beckett's critical rejection of the here and now: "To Beckett, as to the Gnostics, the created world is radically evil, and *its negation is the chance of another world that is not yet*" (ND 381, emphasis added). There is no longer any choice for thought, except to reject the path which it has followed for so long, and

which has led towards the unheralded evils of the Holocaust and beyond. We must venture into the desert, but where will we find the courage? If Endgame offers us any source of hope it is this: at least the situation is unlikely to be any worse in “the other hell.”

This chapter has demonstrated that Adorno correctly understands Endgame as a political play. Endgame reinforces two of Adorno’s primary critical stances; it both implodes the notion of an autonomous rational subject and satirizes arbitrary structures of exploitation and domination. An analysis of Beckett’s undermined nostalgia reveals that the past appears as a site of pain in Endgame, insofar as every past event ultimately led to catastrophe and to the hopeless situation of the present. Furthermore, through an examination of immobility, the horrific bleakness of every possible future in Endgame comes to the fore. In this play, things only get worse, and the inability of the characters to alter their current situation speaks to a future devoid of all hope. The question of the ethical implications of Endgame as an archetypal representative of post-Auschwitz art remains. How can a play which evacuates all hope from the future and depicts the past only as a site of lost possibilities adequately render the Holocaust? How can a work which allows for neither hope nor moral lessons ethically represent the horrific atrocities of Auschwitz? It cannot. The vast question of whether the Holocaust is representable is peripheral to this study. What is clear here is that Endgame does not seek to represent the Holocaust; rather, it seeks to reflect on and critique the forms of thought which led to Auschwitz, and which, for Adorno, remain largely unchanged after the fall of the Third Reich. Ultimately, what Adorno seeks is not an art form which would represent the Holocaust, but one which would reveal its underpinnings. For Adorno, the Shoah is not

an isolated event; rather, it is crucially inscribed in the historical, political, and philosophical situation which allowed its very possibility. Therefore, an adequate post-Auschwitz art form is not one which would render the Holocaust, but one which would seek to assert the mantra “*never again.*” Endgame neither relegates the Holocaust to the past nor pretends that it remains only as a memory. This play acknowledges the brutality of the current political situation, in which the Holocaust remains, not only inscribed heavily onto history, but also as a future potentiality. Thus, Endgame does the most important political work for Adorno: it provides and encourages a form of immanent cultural critique. It does not posit the monstrosities of Auschwitz as horrors which once occurred on a different conceptual planet; rather, it makes us aware of the monstrosity of our own political world. It reminds us that all of humanity is complicit in the horrendous atrocities of the Holocaust, and that it is our current responsibility, above all, to make sure that this event never repeats itself.

Chapter Two

“The Tape Runs On . . .”

Staging Silence and the Question of Progress in Krapp’s Last Tape

If we pursue the proposition that some stains on the soul of history—and the Holocaust is such a stain—are indelible, where will it lead us? It will lead us certainly to an unfamiliar version of survival, to the conclusion that after Auschwitz the idea of human dignity could never be the same again. (Lawrence L. Langer, “The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps” 119)

The previous chapter provided an examination of Endgame in order to determine its function as an exemplar of post-Auschwitz art for Adorno. The two primary conclusions presented with respect to Endgame were: 1) that art after the Holocaust should represent the catastrophe only indirectly for Adorno and 2) that Endgame provides such an indirect response by advancing an implicit and immanent critique of the larger epistemological, ontological, and political structures which led to the Holocaust and which threaten to repeat it. Adorno finds the primary responsibility of art in its critical function: “Aesthetic experience is the experience of something which spirit *per se* does not provide, either in the world or in itself. It is the possible, as promised by its impossibility. Art is the promise of happiness, a promise that is constantly being broken” (AT 196). For Adorno, art becomes a lure; it points towards an unattainable beyond. Despite the fact that art can never lead us to the place it reveals, the act of pointing, in and of itself, becomes art’s crucial gesture, and Adorno finds such a gesture in Beckett’s work. Significantly, Beckett himself locates a similar role for the artist. Toole describes Beckett’s own understanding of the function of art, “an impossible world, a world of dead ends and interminable waiting. And yet, says Beckett, it may be that ‘the artist can find a

possible way out” (135). In this thesis, Krapp’s Last Tape will provide the closest thing to such a “way out.”

Beckett’s plays point towards the most fundamental question for humanity after the Holocaust: how can we go on from here? Both Beckett and Adorno, while acknowledging the destitution of the human condition after Auschwitz, leave a space for forward movement and hope, no matter how narrow this passage might be. Although, as already established, art should be primarily critical for Adorno, in its very critical function it can also posit the way forward. This chapter will peer through the openings which Beckett and Adorno puncture in the cloud of nihilism which looms threateningly after the Holocaust. Through a reading of Krapp’s Last Tape, this chapter will seek to ascertain precisely how Beckett provides the “only fitting reaction” to the Holocaust for Adorno. It will begin with a Nietzschean reading of this play, in order to show how this play exemplifies the painful passage of time, refutes notions of human progress, and resists Nietzsche’s intrinsically linked notions of the eternal recurrence and *amor fati*. My argument will proceed through a discussion of how the implications of the Shoah question both the possibility of human progress and a Nietzschean affirmation of the ‘it was.’ Adorno and Beckett both follow Nietzsche’s thinking to a point, and then push beyond it, providing the reformulations of Nietzsche’s thinking which have become necessary after the Holocaust. While Nietzsche responds to the impossibility of progress with an affirmation of *amor fati* and a resignation to the immutability of the past, such acquiescence demands a critical re-examination after Auschwitz. Writing in the conceptual aftermath of the Shoah, both Adorno and Beckett posit something other than acceptance of the ‘it was.’ Krapp’s Last Tape presents the value of ‘what could (or could

not) have been' even in its material impossibility. Furthermore, an analysis of Adorno's thinking reveals that Beckett's staging of silence in this play gestures towards the expression of the inexpressible and the material existence underlying the blanket of the *nihil*. While the Holocaust confirms the impossibility of both metaphysics and human progress, it also demands new responses to these conceptual impasses. Adorno finds in Beckett, as my analysis of Krapp's Last Tape will show, a response to the Holocaust which can neither affirm the 'it was' of the past nor allow mankind's catastrophic past to remain unspoken. Rather, this play embodies the most important task for thinking after the Holocaust: it allows the inexpressible to emerge in the space between the spoken and the unspeakable, by presenting the onstage materiality of the being of silence itself. Ultimately, such a work of art becomes the most appropriate aesthetic response to the Shoah for Adorno, by allowing the unspeakable to remain unspoken, yet not out of sight. Here the incommunicable maintains its integrity as such; it enters into the space of thinking while remaining crucially unnamed and unspoken. Beckett provides a gesture towards the inexpressible while also maintaining the crucial concession that the inexpressible can never be expressed.

Krapp's Last Tape is fundamentally a play about aging; here Beckett vividly stages the agony of attempting to reconcile oneself to the painful passage of time and remaining unable to do so. Krapp experiences vivid psychological pain on stage; he suffers from the agony of time's forward motion and from the knowledge that he cannot retrieve the past. Paul Kintzele argues that Krapp embodies a "fantasy of living backwards, of retrogressing toward the earliest stages of life and privileging the past over the present" (215). Krapp perpetually struggles against the forward motion of time,

seeking to return to the unreachable past. Throughout the play he listens to a tape he recorded 30 years earlier, temporarily reliving his former existence through fragmentary aural reminiscences. Following his fleeting re-entries into the past he is always forced to return to the present. At the end of the play, the recorded voice of the 39 year-old Krapp ostensibly comes to terms with the forward movement of time: “Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn’t want them back. Not with the fire in me now” (KLT 28). Of course, the audience doesn’t believe Krapp. His alleged reconciliation with time’s inevitable passage self-destructs as it meets the sceptical ears of the audience. Krapp wants those years back; he simply realizes that they are unattainable. While the seemingly optimistic and “*rather pompous*” voice on the tape recorder claims to come to terms with his past (KLT 14), only the 69 year-old Krapp knows the full impact of his own former choices. The miserable old man on stage diagnoses his own condition aptly. He is, indubitably, “drowned in dreams and burning to be gone” (KLT 25). The older Krapp retains only a resentful flame which cannot be extinguished: his emotional retaliation against the agony of time’s irreversible movement. For Krapp, there is no viable response to the pain of time’s motion except for reluctant resignation to the sorrowful present. Krapp simply waits and hates, fearful of the future and contemptuous towards a no longer available past.

The tension between time’s movement and the current moment creates a painful disjunction between Krapp’s past and present existences. Past moments resurface through the technological reproduction of Krapp’s voice, but they return only within the painful confines of the present. As in Endgame, here fond memories ultimately reinforce the pain of the present. However, through the tape recorder, Krapp experiences the agonizing

recurrence of the past physically and immediately, magnifying the anguish of his recollections. While listening to the tape entitled “Farewell to . . . love,” Krapp vocalizes a pronounced loathing of his former self: “Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that” (KLT 13, 24). Once-available possibilities have abandoned Krapp, and he has only the voice from the tape recorder to blame. A temporal tension emerges here: Krapp both loathes his former self and envies his previous position in time; he hates who he once was, but he wants to return to the lost moments of the past. Significantly, Krapp’s retrospective self-loathing has been a recurring ritual throughout his life. The young Krapp describes a parallel experience: “These old P.M.s are gruesome, but I often find them . . . a help before embarking on a new . . . (*hesitates*) . . . retrospect. Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp. The voice! Jesus! And the aspirations!” (KLT 16). Like the old man on stage, 39 year-old Krapp despises the person he once was. Mary Junker argues that “Habit connects the three phases in Krapp’s life, marking points of identification between the young man in his twenties, K-39, and K-69” (108). Junker is correct; things like bowel conditions, alcoholism, and a weakness for bananas build a somewhat cohesive identity out of the three fragmentary stages of Krapp’s life. More importantly, the bond between Krapp’s temporal avatars foregrounds his perpetual struggle against time. He continually despises his former self, marking his all-too-human inability to reconcile himself to the flow of time.

In Krapp’s affirmation of nostalgia, Beckett introduces a new *pathos* into his drama. Krapp legitimately values ‘what could have been’ over ‘what was’ and ‘what is.’ Thus, in Krapp’s Last Tape, fictional time gains priority over actual temporal existence.

As Weller suggests in A Taste for the Negative,¹³ “Krapp represents something new in Beckett’s work: . . . the dreaming of an un-lived life” (148). In this play, as in Endgame, nostalgic recollection highlights the hopelessness of the present situation by juxtaposing the beauty and joy that was with the pain and hopelessness that is. However, here the lost possibilities of the past take center stage as Beckett invites the minds of both Krapp and his audience to linger on ‘what could have been.’ The more the voice of the young Krapp asserts his acceptance of the passage of time the less the audience believes him. The 39 year-old Krapp’s choice of writing over love vividly stings the man on stage. Krapp’s resentment of his former self issues from his wish that he had taken a different road towards the now: “Everything there, everything on this old muckball, all the light and dark and famine and feasting of . . . (*hesitates*) . . . the ages! (*In a shout.*) Yes! (*Pause.*) Let that go! Jesus! Take his mind off his homework!” (KLT 24). Here Krapp affirms that, at 39, he had possibilities which he surrendered to the pursuit of intellectual success, which ultimately eluded him. However avidly he may try to justify his actions and convince himself that he is at peace with the past, these convictions implode throughout the action of the play. Although he struggles against his own compulsion to alter the errors of the past, Krapp nevertheless privileges ‘what could have been’ over the actual present and past.

From a Nietzschean perspective, Krapp’s desire to retrieve the lost possibilities of the past renders him inadequate. In Zarathustra’s terminology, Krapp is “Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past” (Thus Spoke Zarathustra¹⁴ 139). He exemplifies a psychological inability to cope with time’s forward

¹³ Here forward cited as Negative.

¹⁴ Here forward cited as TSZ.

motion, preferring hypothetical time to temporal realities. He neither acknowledges that “All joy wants the eternity of all things” nor affirms his own existence in the present (TSZ 323). He wills neither the past as it was nor the present as it is, but only ‘what could have been.’ A desire to embrace the ‘fire’ caused by the sufferings of the past ostensibly facilitates Nietzsche’s project insofar as, for Nietzsche, suffering should serve to strengthen the will: “*I assess the power of a will by how much resistance, pain, torture it endures and knows how to turn to its advantage*” (The Will to Power 206). However, Krapp’s claim in fact opposes Nietzsche’s temporal structure. For to *not* desire to have the past back – to not wish to relive each pain and joy eternally – is, for Nietzsche, as problematic as the preference of hypothetical time. The difference simply lies between a rejection of time as it was and time as it is. Krapp’s nostalgic desires reject time as it is, and his apparent embrace of the fire of *ressentiment* dispenses with time as it was altogether. For Nietzsche, we should embrace both the ‘it was’ and the ‘it is’ in a single gesture. We should “lust after eternity” (TSZ 229) – past, present, and future.

Rather than such an affirmative relation to the past, Krapp simply succumbs to his own overpowering *ressentiment*. Knowing that his choices have resulted in failure, he wastes away in solitude, drunkenness, and the painful chambers of his memory. The true import of his choice comes to the fore when Krapp laments the fate of his “opus . . . magnum”: “Seventeen copies sold, of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas” (KLT 17, 25). As Weller points out, “The sacrifice of love for art leaves Krapp with neither” (Negative 146), and the embittered old man on stage embodies the psychological results of the decision which left him with only loss. The unprecedented disappointment of Krapp’s writing career lingers as a painful memory,

with the added sting of the fact that he gave up his amorous possibility to pursue his own failure as a writer. Krapp hates his 39 year-old self for making the wrong decision, yet he is also unable to believe in self-progression. When one hates who one once was, the notion of personal improvement often comforts one. The thought that one is progressing justifies one's former inadequacies. Krapp has access to no such consolation. While he hates his former self, he was certainly better off at 39 than he is at 69. His life at 69 consists of drinking alone, soliciting sex from a "Bony old ghost of a whore" (KLT 25), and brooding over lost possibilities. The consolation of progress has evacuated Krapp's life and left him with only decay. Krapp embodies a refutation of notions of progress on two levels: first, he repudiates the conception of individual human progress and by implication he shows that the existence of the human species is not a development. The latter aspect leads Irit Degani-Raz to argue that "Krapp becomes a representation of a modern human being" (193). Krapp, like Beckett's characters in Endgame, is representative of the universal human condition. Just as Krapp struggles to come to terms with his own past, so the human race is unable to justify its former actions. Instead, as humans, we bear the burden of what Adorno describes as "The guilt of a life which purely as a fact will strangle another life," a guilt which is "irreconcilable with living" (ND 364). Both particularly and universally, Krapp's Last Tape reveals the pain of time's passage, the inability to undo what has been done. In light of a discussion of the Holocaust, Krapp thus embodies a critical condition of post-Auschwitz human self-reflection. Like Krapp, we, as heirs to the legacy of the Holocaust, must ask ourselves how we can come to terms with what we have done and how we can face the immutability of past deeds which can never be undone.

For Nietzsche, Krapp should will the past exactly as it was. He should wish to say “Was *that* life? . . . Well then! Once more!” (TSZ 318). Krapp should seek to relive all the suffering of the past eternally. He should affirm every pain and every woe again *ad infinitum*. Only when Krapp seeks to relive every agonizing burden will he laugh joyfully alongside Nietzsche through the thought of the eternal recurrence. While Krapp is certainly not an adequate Nietzschean life-affirming individual, he echoes one of the crucial questions of Nietzsche’s thinking: what does it mean to occupy an existence which does not progress? What are the consequences of not being able to excuse our shortcomings – both as a species and as individuals – under an overarching teleology? For Nietzsche, to dwell within time is to exist within a painful friction. Nietzsche asserts that “Time moves forward,” yet beings within time do not progress: “mankind does not advance” (Writings from the Late Notebooks 268). In light of this chapter’s argument, Krapp’s most important function is as an exemplar of the impossibility of human progress. The question of how to come to terms with a non-progressive existence also becomes one of the urgent inquiries for thinking after the Holocaust. We, as a species, face the knowledge that what we have done cannot be undone and this painful burden becomes intensified by the lack of an overall progression which would redeem the atrocities of the past.

While Nietzsche and Beckett agree insofar as they both present a human existence devoid of progress, Beckett departs from Nietzsche in his response to the repudiation of human advancement. In answer to the fact that each torment and each contemptible moment is neither changeable nor excusable under an overarching teleology, Nietzsche demands affirmation of every past moment, no matter how brutal or bleak. He seeks to

“redeem what is past in man and to re-create all ‘it was’ until the will says, ‘Thus I willed it!’” (TSZ 198). While Nietzsche’s reaction to a non-developmental existence is to affirm the ‘it was,’ Beckett instead invites serious reflection on ‘what could (or could not) have been.’ Significantly, the discrepancy between these two understandings of history is largely a matter of historical context; where Adorno, Beckett, and many other modern thinkers leave Nietzsche behind is the Holocaust, an event which the mind is reluctant to affirm. In light of this particular past moment, the embrace of ‘what could have been’ appears indisputably preferable to the eternal recurrence of Auschwitz. Nietzsche did not live through the catastrophes of the twentieth century and there is therefore a vast conceptual rift separating him from those who did. He witnessed neither the Holocaust nor the World Wars, and his writings therefore accommodate neither the pinnacle of human barbarity reached in Auschwitz nor the destruction which surrounded and paved the way for the Shoah.¹⁵ Thus, Nietzsche’s thinking meets new challenges with the Holocaust. Having not witnessed this historical cataclysm, Nietzsche responds to his own rejection of progress with his concept of *amor fati*. He asserts that, no matter how painful, unpleasant, or even monstrous the events of the past were, one must affirm them as a necessary element of eternity:

¹⁵ As is well known, Nietzsche’s philosophy, in distorted form, was used as propaganda for the Third Reich. Thus Spoke Zarathustra became “the bible of the Hitler youth” (Peters 221), and Nietzsche’s notion of the *übermensch* as well as many of his other concepts were twisted and misrepresented to suit Nazi ideology. Nietzsche’s sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, who married a notorious anti-Semite and revered Hitler, reportedly had a hand in propagating what Walter Kaufmann calls “The Nietzsche Legend” (7): the notion that Nietzsche’s thinking was a predecessor of Nazism. Kaufmann and others have gone to great lengths to defend Nietzsche against this accusation. For more on this subject see Walter Kaufmann, H.F. Peters, Carol Diethe’s Nietzsche’s Sister and the Will to Power (Chicago, U of Illinois P, 2003), and Thomas Brobjer’s “Nietzsche’s *Magnum Opus*” (History of European Ideas 32.3 (2006): 278-94). Setting aside the complex issue of whether Nietzsche was a “proto-Nazi” (Kaufmann 7), the question of how he would have reacted to National Socialism requires a largely speculative investigation. However, it is clear that Nietzsche abhorred anti-Semitism and authoritarianism. Thus, the obvious conclusion would be that he would have been opposed to Hitler and the Nazis.

Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? Oh my friends, then you said Yes to *all* woe. All things are entangled, ensnared, enamored; if ever you wanted one thing twice, if ever you said, ‘You please me, happiness! Abide, moment!’ then you wanted *all* back. All new, all eternally, all entangled, ensnared, enamored—oh then you *loved* the world. Eternal ones, love it eternally and evermore; and to woe too, you say: go, but return! *For all joy wants—eternity.* (TSZ 323)

After the Holocaust, however, such affirmation of the past and future in its entirety, including all atrocities, demands reconsideration. As Agamben points out, Nietzsche’s thought of the eternal recurrence seeks to overcome a bitterness towards the past with a love of all past events: “The eternal return is above all victory over resentment, the possibility of willing what has taken place, transforming every ‘it was’ into ‘thus I wanted it to be’ – *amor fati*” (99). Thus Nietzsche’s philosophy demands both that Krapp should affirm his own past failures and that humanity should affirm the Holocaust. Yet, with respect to the latter affirmation, the notion of *amor fati* becomes particularly problematic. Agamben turns to Jean Améry to exemplify this quandary: “Améry was thus led to formulate a genuine anti-Nietzschean ethics of resentment that simply refuses to accept that ‘what happened, happened’” (100). Améry, who, like Levi, survived Auschwitz only to take his life years later (Rosenfeld 104), could not bear the notion of the eternal return of the Holocaust. Rather, Améry argues that human morality in the wake of the Shoah should resist the immutability of the past:

Man has the right and privilege to be in moral disagreement with every natural occurrence, including the biological healing that time brings about. What happened, happened. This sentence is just as true as it is hostile to morals and

intellect. The moral power to resist contains the protest, the revolt against reality, which is rational only as long as it is moral. *The moral person demands annulment of time.* (72, emphasis added)

After the Holocaust, Améry resists the necessity of the past. Although he acknowledges that “Time did its work, very quietly” (Améry 75), he refuses to accept or affirm this particular past event. Améry posits a morality which transcends the shackles of time’s irreversibility in order to, like Krapp, wish for ‘what could have been.’ In this case, ‘what could have been’ manifests itself more specifically as ‘what could *not* have been.’ Améry seeks to affirm the moral stance that the Holocaust should not have happened, rather than affirming the event which, as he acknowledges, necessarily and irretrievably lies in the past.

Significantly, Améry suggests that Nietzsche, having not witnessed the Holocaust, could not be expected to understand this particular challenge to his own philosophy. Améry argues that Nietzsche’s notion of *ressentiment* was born out of a form of thinking which cannot withstand the conceptual implications of Auschwitz. Referring to Nietzsche as “the man who dreamed of the synthesis of the brute with the superman,” Améry proceeds to posit the Holocaust as a spectacle which undermines this dream: “He must be answered by those who witnessed the union of the brute with the subhuman; they were present as victims when a certain humankind joyously celebrated a festival of cruelty, as Nietzsche himself has expressed it” (68). For Améry, the Holocaust stands as a testament against Nietzsche’s philosophy. Highlighting the macabre connections between Nietzsche’s ferocious rhetoric and the barbaric realities of the Holocaust, Améry

confirms the more fundamental notion that the Shoah stands as a past event which the mind recoils against.

Nietzsche might well charge a thinker who refuses to acknowledge each moment of the past with weakness, *ressentiment*, or the inability to bear the burden required by affirmative thinking. But who would not rather face this charge than affirm the eternal recurrence of Auschwitz? In retrospect, one might even speculate that the destructions of the first half of the twentieth century, culminating in the Shoah, may have led Nietzsche to reconsider or reformulate his own notions of the eternal recurrence and *amor fati*. For, after this event, who could possibly say ‘yes’ to “The question in each and every thing, ‘Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?’” (The Gay Science¹⁶ 274). The Holocaust has cast a shadow on much of the philosophy which came before it. The Shoah problematizes not only Enlightenment notions of progress and idealism, but also more radical philosophies such as Nietzsche’s. Many thinkers have been forced to reformulate their own thinking after cognizance of this event came to the fore; the Holocaust has challenged and undermined many conceptions and opened countless new difficulties, tasks, and voids for thinking. Indeed, it has led countless people, including Fackenheim, to question the very foundations of their religious faith: “If the crime of Auschwitz is unique, so is its threat to the faith of its victims” (“The Two Work Permits and the Victims of Faith” 127). The Holocaust provides a monumental challenge to philosophy, art, politics, and all forms of human conception; thinking itself must regroup after Auschwitz, and it is this process of reformulation which both Adorno and Beckett undertake in the first decades after the catastrophe.

¹⁶ Here forward cited as GS.

Adorno argues that “The judgement passed on the ideas, long before, by Nietzsche, was carried out on the victims” of the concentration camps (ND 367). Indeed, Nietzsche’s repudiation of the metaphysical realm, his pronouncement that “God is dead” (GS 167), and his rejection of progress and teleology were brutally confirmed for many thinkers in the atrocities of the Holocaust. Arguably the most definitive rupture in thinking after the Shoah is the refutation of the notion that human existence is a progression. Aronson states that “the Holocaust explodes as myth the popular belief in steady, irreversible progress” (224). For Aronson, the idea that humanity’s movement through time embodies a continual development meets its definitive demise in Auschwitz. If one thinks through the implications of the Holocaust, the notion of an untainted vision of human progress becomes immensely difficult to maintain. If anything, reflection on history after the Holocaust must cast it as a process of descent, as humanity fulfills its potential of achieving greater and greater atrocities. Yet, in popular consciousness, the narrative of human progression persists: “Progress remains the dominant public mood, in spite of everything. Catastrophes that have already happened, like the Holocaust, do not puncture the mood, although perhaps more daily problems, such as recession and inflation, or catastrophes in the offing, such as nuclear war, do” (Aronson 226). Aronson suggests that the overarching structure of Western consciousness seeks to maintain a notion of progress. This line of thinking requires a conception of the Holocaust as an isolated phenomenon, a momentary misstep. Such logic conceives the rise of Nazism and the ensuing atrocities as either a digression from the onward thrust of progress or what Evelyn Cobley calls “the last eruption of a premodern barbarism” (267). For both Cobley and Aronson, such thinking is inadequate. Aronson suggests that “it is

impossible to see [the Third Reich] as a momentary aberration, a twelve-year regression in a basically positive forward-looking process” (229). Likewise, Cobley maintains that National Socialism “ought to be understood not as the resurgence of an insufficiently repressed pre-modern barbarism but as *one* particularly ominous sign of an otherwise often welcome paradigm shift” (183). As Aronson and Cobley respectively explain, it is crucial that the emergence of National Socialism be thought neither as a “freak” outbreak of “monstrosity” within a more general progression nor as a lingering residue of a former capacity for injustice. Rather, it is necessary to think the Holocaust as an intrinsic result of the movement of Western civilization. A thinking which accepts the full implications of the rise of National Socialism must acknowledge that Nazism and the Holocaust were born out of a society which asserted itself, as much of the contemporary Western world continues to do, under the umbrella of a continuing and all-but-unstoppable narrative of cumulative human progress.

Such reflections lead Bauman to formulate the following claim: “*The Holocaust was born and executed in our modern rational society, at the high stage of our civilization and at the peak of human cultural achievement, and for this reason it is a problem of that society, civilization and culture*” (x). Bauman’s suggestion that 1930’s Western Europe embodied some sort of “pinnacle” of human accomplishment is highly questionable. However, his overarching arguments underscore this claim. Bauman’s general thesis in Modernity and the Holocaust is that the Shoah was not a break from the developments of modern reason, but their consequence: “The Holocaust was not an irrational outflow of the not-yet-fully-eradicated residues of pre-modern barbarity. It was a legitimate resident in the house of modernity” (17). Thus, even if early twentieth

century Europe does reflect a culmination of human progress, the Holocaust would mark a reversal: an inversion of the tides of history from progress towards decline.

Cobley goes so far as to argue that even the avowed opponent of metanarratives – postmodernist thinking – relates intrinsically to the atrocities of its recent heritage: “the Holocaust is not a return to a repressed pre-modern barbarism but remains with us as part of a paradigm shift from modernity to postmodernity” (6-7). For Cobley, the acknowledgment of the latent remnants of fascist thinking and politics within postmodernism becomes a crucial step towards understanding the contemporary world and its inherent relation to its legacy. The notion that poststructuralist and deconstructive thinking has liberated thought from the totalitarian roots of pre-modern politics and philosophy is misleading. Cobley points to the danger lurking behind “postmodern discourses” which “may unwittingly reinforce the violence they associate with the metanarratives bequeathed us by the Enlightenment” (270). The dangers posed by the “unproblematic Nietzschean affirmation of poststructuralist ‘play’” are twofold (Cobley 270). On the one hand, the notion that postmodernism has ‘liberated’ thinking from the hegemonic structures of modern rationalism simply continues to assert a metanarrative of progress. Here, the ‘now’ is unequivocally superior to the ‘then,’ and postmodernity thus recasts history in the very meta-narratological light it ostensibly resists. On the other hand, with respect to the Holocaust, the danger lies in a thinking which posits the Shoah as an isolated past event, caused by structures of thinking which have now been overcome by the liberating forces of plurality, heterogeneity, multiplicity, play, *difference*, etc. This is the danger Cobley cautions against when she states that “Although the logic of postmodernism need not by any stretch of the imagination result in fascist

totalitarianism, it is important to recognize that neither does it exclude this possibility” (183). As Copley maintains, and as this thesis attempts to show throughout, it is crucial to acknowledge the residues of fascist thinking and the potential for totalitarianism embedded within contemporary society. Bauman succinctly articulates this warning: “there are reasons to be worried because we know now that *we live in a type of society that made the Holocaust possible, and that contained nothing which could stop the Holocaust from happening*” (88). The danger Copley points to in the mistaken notion that postmodernism has shaken the shackles of fascist thinking ignores Baumann’s warning; such thinking overlooks the immanent political threat contained within contemporary Western society.

To argue as Copley does that Nazism and the Holocaust were part of a transition from modernism to postmodernism rather than a fracture in continuity is not necessarily to posit history as a process of decline. Rather, as Aronson reluctantly admits, “To be sure, the world has also seen progress” (229). Thus what the Holocaust illuminates with respect to notions of progress is that it is not a question of an ‘either or’ – i.e. either progress or decline. Rather, the lesson the Holocaust confirms is simply the one Nietzsche tried to teach some 50 years prior to it: that progress and decline go hand in hand through the necessary onward movement of time. For Nietzsche, “every major growth is accompanied by a tremendous crumbling and passing away” (WTP 69). Mankind’s history entails simultaneous advancement and decline: “With every increase in greatness and height in man, there is also an increase in depth and terribleness” (WTP 531). History is neither a progression nor a decomposition. Rather, it is simply an accumulation of moments. This is not to say that there is no continuity in history. Both

Bauman and Copley's arguments depend on an acceptance of sequential history and of course there is a succession in the movement of time. If we conceive history merely as a random spattering of moments then the project of seeking to understand the societal structures which allowed the Holocaust to occur collapses. Instead of asserting the totally arbitrary makeup of history, we must search for its meaning, structure, and continuity without assuming linear progression.

Adorno appears to succumb to the tendency Copley warns against by speaking of the Holocaust as a "relapse into barbarism" (COL? 19). In his suggestion that the Shoah was a reversion to a past stage of humanity's development from barbarism towards a future free of it, Adorno seems to presume a notion of human progress. However, he also posits the antithesis to this line of thinking: "The only part of history that is still apparent is its outcome, decline" (COL? 265). Adorno, then, follows Nietzsche in thinking historical movement as both progress and decline simultaneously. However, for Adorno, the Holocaust primarily manifests the regressive side of this equation. Adorno's own voice stands powerfully behind Copley's and Bauman's insofar as he conceives the Shoah as an essential part of the movement of human history: "Millions of innocent people . . . were systematically murdered. That cannot be dismissed by any living person as a superficial phenomenon, as an aberration of the course of history to be disregarded when compared to the great dynamic of progress, of enlightenment, of the supposed growth of humanitarianism" (COL? 20). For Adorno, human history has been irrevocably tainted by the Holocaust, insofar as this event is a crucial aspect of the very continuity which had been cast as a progress. The Shoah disproves such narratives of progression. Furthermore, the Holocaust questions the very validity of human reason itself. As

Aronson explains, German fascism signalled the destruction of rationality for Adorno: “Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno carry this analysis a step further, although writing in 1944 and without specific reference to the gas chambers. For them Nazism was the natural terminus of the progress of reason” (231). For Adorno, the Holocaust not only proves that the Enlightenment and German idealism were misled, but reveals the total destruction of the metaphysical project. The Shoah creates a state of affairs from which “Metaphysics cannot rise again” (ND 404). After the Holocaust, thinking encounters new difficulties for Adorno, as the metaphysical realm meets its definitive demise: “We cannot say anymore that the immutable is truth, and that the mobile, transitory is appearance” (ND 361). The Holocaust forces a paradigm shift onto philosophy as metaphysics gives way to materialism:

The somatic, unmeaningful stratum of life is the stage of suffering, of the suffering which in the camps, without any consolation, burned every soothing feature out of the mind, and out of culture, the mind’s objectification. The point of no return has been reached in the process which irresistibly forced metaphysics to join what it was once conceived against. (ND 365)

The Shoah creates a situation out of which metaphysics can no longer hope to emerge in its original form. Thus the cognitive faculty must adapt itself to its new task and parameters. For Adorno, this is not a capitulation or a relinquishment of metaphysics but its transformation: “The innervation that metaphysics might win only by discarding itself . . . is not the last among the motivations for the passage to materialism” (ND 364-65). Thinking after the Holocaust requires the reformulation of metaphysics into an augmented form: materialism.

Yet how can thinking possibly hope to move forward in the wake of the Holocaust if both the metaphysical idea and the myth of human progress have perished? If one can neither affirm the past as it was, nor excuse it under the overarching “greater good” of human advancement, how can one conceptually respond to this event? Ultimately, the struggle for thinking after the Holocaust becomes a double challenge for Adorno. It becomes the coextensive attempt to think through the philosophical implications of Auschwitz and to approach the question of the inexpressible. Thus, the struggle to articulate life in the wake of the Shoah becomes the most important philosophical problem: the paradox of the incommunicable. For Adorno, the primary imperative of philosophy after the Holocaust is the search for the always-evasive substance of the inexpressible: “Philosophy is neither a science nor a ‘cogitative poetry’ to which positivists would degrade it with a stupid oxymoron . . . its suspended state is nothing but the expression of its inexpressibility” (ND 109). Adorno locates a gesture towards the “suspended state” of philosophy, the articulation of the incommunicable, in Beckett’s art.

While, as the last two chapters revealed, Endgame reverberates with the echoes of an unnamed past catastrophe, Krapp’s Last Tape does not have such a cataclysmic setting.¹⁷ Here the event becomes even more unspeakable, even more removed, as catastrophe vacates the stage altogether. So how can this play possibly exemplify post-Holocaust art if catastrophe and apocalypse recede into the shadows here? Is post

¹⁷ While Krapp’s Last Tape, of course, depicts an individual catastrophe in Krapp’s failure to cultivate the life he desired and in his subsequent sense of abysmal loss, this is a different kind of former calamity than what Beckett presents in Endgame. As opposed to the dead who haunt the text of Endgame, Krapp’s catastrophic past is entirely psychological. This play does not have an apparently post-apocalyptic setting in the vein of Endgame, but rather presents a world which seems to be a relatively unchanged version of contemporary post World War II society. Thus, the world Beckett presents here is post-apocalyptic only insofar as our own world is and the catastrophe becomes both mundane and eerily close to home. Krapp thus most clearly reflects the psychological desolation of the human condition.

Holocaust art for Adorno simply a relinquishment to the incommunicability of an event, the Shoah, which must remain inexpressible? This question embodies its own answer, towards which Fackenheim's words will help to point the way:

To die one's own death has always been a freedom subject to loss by accident. On Planet Auschwitz, however, the loss of it was made essential, and its survival accidental . . . Philosophers are faced with a new *aporia*. It arises from the necessity to listen to the silence of the *Muselmann*. ("The Uniqueness of the Holocaust" 138)

For Fackenheim, the Shoah presents a new void through which thinking must traverse, and he finds the only path through this new abyss in an attunement to silence. Agamben likewise argues for the importance of the unspoken voice of the *Muselmann*: "This is why we leave them – the *Muselmänner* – the last word" (165). The task for thinking after the Holocaust, for Agamben, becomes the necessity to "bear witness" to the "*Muselmann*" who "speaks only on the basis of an impossibility of speaking" (164). Thus, for both Agamben and Fackenheim, post-Holocaust thought requires the gesture of turning one's ear towards the unsaid utterances of the "true witnesses" of the Holocaust (Levi 83): the *Muselmänner*. The "new *aporia*" which the Shoah opens for philosophy according to Fackenheim and Agamben requires a response not so different from what Martin Heidegger sets out as the task for thinking. For Heidegger, rather than imposing reason on existence and seeking to assimilate it through knowledge, one should allow being to emerge. Simply creating a space for stillness will allow the question of being to present itself: "this means the phenomenon itself, in the present case the clearing, sets us the task of learning from it while questioning it, that is, of letting it say something to us"

(Heidegger 442). Thus Heidegger too advocates a thinking which requires silence; a form of contemplation which does not drown itself out with senseless babble but rather attunes itself to “the ringing of stillness” in order to accommodate the emergence of “the unsaid” (408, 409).

Adorno likewise advocates the philosophical pursuit of what has not been – and cannot be – said. In fact, his entire philosophical project in a sense orients itself against Ludwig Wittgenstein’s claim that “of what we cannot speak we must be silent” (Kolak 49). For Adorno, the task of thinking is the search for a solution to the problem of the inexpressible: “The work of philosophical self-reflection consists in unravelling that paradox. . . . Otherwise it must capitulate, and the human mind with it. We could not conceive the simplest operation; there would be no truth; emphatically, everything would be just nothing” (ND 9). The thrust of Adorno’s philosophical project consists in resisting the nihilistic idea that everything is a vacuum. For Adorno, material truth exists and it is essential for thinking to be able to grasp this fact; philosophy must acknowledge that there *is something*. Adorno seeks to exorcize the seductive threat of nihilism which has snuck into the bed of philosophy. In acceptance of the impossibility of reaching the unspeakable, Adorno locates a resignation to nihilism which, for him, is unacceptable. Although the Holocaust proves the impossibility of human progress and metaphysical concepts, Adorno believes that thinking must be able to continue after Auschwitz. Thus, he seeks to “express the inexpressible” (ND 108), because therein lies the only hope for thinking: the defeat of the nothing. It seems that, for Adorno, the task of thinking after the Holocaust runs parallel to both the project Heidegger creates for philosophy in general

and the mission Agamben and Fackenheim identify for conceptualization after the Shoah: the turn towards the silence of the unspoken, the unsaid, and the unsayable.

However, Adorno's search for the unspeakable does not run parallel to Heidegger's. Adorno was never able to accept Heidegger's thinking. Samir Gandesha points out that "Adorno's comportment towards Heidegger was occasionally abrasively polemical, even to the point of jeopardizing his stated intention of providing an immanently critical reading of his philosophical adversary" (103-04). As Gandesha suggests, Adorno takes Heidegger's work as a sort of antithesis to his own philosophical project. In fact, Adorno considers Heidegger's early thinking to be a philosophical justification of Nazism: "While the fascists raged against destructive cultural bolshevism, Heidegger was making destruction respectable as a means to penetrate being" (ND 368). Adorno could not forgive Heidegger's philosophy its legitimation of fascism. It is well known that "Heidegger, at least for a time, viewed National Socialism as offering a solution to the looming crisis of the West" (Gandesha 104). However, the question of Heidegger's Nazism is not the subject of this chapter.¹⁸ What is crucial for this discussion is Adorno's departure from Heidegger's thinking. For Adorno, Heidegger's project fails because it evades the necessity of dialectics.

Adorno suggests that, although he "detours around dialectics" (ND 107), Heidegger comes up short of a legitimate dialectical thinking. Heidegger posits his concept of "Being" which becomes an "absolute concept" and therefore "does not legitimize itself as concept" (ND 107). Thus he undermines his own dialectical project by

¹⁸ For more on Heidegger's political and philosophical affiliation with National Socialism see Jeff Collins' Heidegger and the Nazis (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2000), Victor Farias' Heidegger and Nazism (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1989), and Julian Young's Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997).

positing an idea which is external to thought itself. He turns away from immanence, sacrificing the self-enclosed character of thought-thinking-itself on the altar of transcendence. For Adorno, Heidegger “gets as far as the borderline of dialectical insight into the nonidentity in identity. But he does not carry through the concept of Being. He suppresses it” (ND 104). Heidegger moves through the process of dialectical thinking, but halts at the doorstep of “Being,” preferring to posit the exteriority of his concept instead of thinking it through dialectically. Adorno locates an inexcusable stumbling block in Heidegger’s thinking here:

Being gets its life from forbidden fruit, as if the fruit were Freya’s apples. Being, for its aural absoluteness’ sake, must not be contaminated with any entity; yet nothing but such contamination can give Being the immediacy that furnishes the legal title for the claim of absoluteness: that ‘Being’ always means also as much as ‘entity’ pure and simple. (ND 108)

Ultimately, Heidegger fails for Adorno by positing “Being” as a totality. According to Adorno, Heidegger sidesteps the necessary tension of dialectics, seeking to resolve the conflict of oppositions with a totalizing concept: “Being.” Adorno’s philosophy specifically defines itself against such totalization: “It lies in the very definition of negative dialectics that it will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total” (ND 406). Adorno’s philosophical methodology involves “the very negation of negation that will not become a positing” (ND 406). Adorno’s negative dialectical method explicitly rejects the notion that the opposition of thoughts should result in the production of an entity. Thus, the notion of “Being” undermines Heidegger’s entire system of thought by exempting itself from the dialectical method, and therein refusing its own negation.

Adorno's problem with Heidegger's concept of "Being" relates to the question of the inexpressible. Adorno critiques Heidegger because, in his thought "the inexpressible becomes explicit and compact in the word 'Being'" (ND 110). Adorno seeks a dialectical pursuit of the materiality of the unsaid, in which the inexpressible must never be named or reduced to the confines of a totalizing concept. The search for the incommunicable must always remain a seeking, as the inexpressible can never ultimately be expressed: "It will not be nailed down" (ND 109). Thus, the attempt to render the incommunicable must remain on the level of becoming rather than that of being if it is to truly shake the burden of totality. Hence, Adorno writes that "where the expression [of the inexpressible] carried its great seal was evanescence and transitoriness, and it was attached to the process, not to an indicative 'That's it'" (ND 110). The search for the inexpressible must work through an active procedure of dialectics which acknowledges its own inability to end.

Adorno finds the closest thing to such an active pursuit of the negative dialectic of the unsayable in Beckett's work. Asja Szafraniec explains Beckett's relentless pursuit of endless oppositional thinking: "The paradox is well known to Beckett readers, who are repeatedly reminded that a condition of the possibility of discourse (and of meaning, truth, reference, etc.) is rooted in its impossibility. It is for this reason that Beckett pursues silence without ever falling silent" (176). Beckett's work crosses Adorno's thinking where the tangents of paradox, dialectics, and silence meet. Beckett continually posits thoughts which are dialectically opposed yet which never negate each other to form a conclusion in the fashion of the Hegelian dialectical tradition. Thus the material being of the inexpressible meets a gesture towards the (im)possibility of its expression – as inexpressible – on Beckett's stage.

Beckett's writing, as exemplified here through Krapp's Last Tape, meets Adorno's requirements for thinking after the Holocaust by dramatizing the materiality of the unsayable. In his staging of silence in Krapp's Last Tape, Beckett namelessly expresses the unspeakable – resorting neither to the limitations of the word nor to a fatalistic nihilism. In his insightful essay on Endgame, Cavell asks an urgent question for scholarship on Beckett. Addressing Beckett, Cavell writes: “Other writers claim that words are meaningless, that communication is impossible, etc.; but *you* really *mean* it, so why do you write? Other playwrights claim that there is no audience, but you really mean it, so why do you write plays?” (160). Indeed, Beckett's plays seem to be fundamentally a struggle with this question. Marked by reticence, silence, and the abysses between word, meaning, and action, Beckett's dramas present more than mere representations. Blau associates Beckett with the deconstructionist movement, arguing that “the *activity* of deconstruction requires, like Beckett's fiction, ‘the necessity of [a] *trick of writing*’ . . . which is irreducible, fluent, yet hesitates, backtracks, erases its own thought” (10).¹⁹ As Blau points out, Beckett's fiction follows poststructuralism by resisting the equation of word with meaning, and by pushing at the interstices between signifier and signified. Beckett's attempt to expose the incommensurability between words and their meanings reaches a new pinnacle in the theatre, where he can physically stage silence and linguistic tension. Richard Begam argues that “the move from page to stage that Godot brought

¹⁹ The connection Blau makes here between Beckett and deconstruction draws on a large critical movement which understands Beckett's work as a deconstructionist project of sorts. Many scholars comment on Beckett's deconstructive tendency to push on the interstices between signifiers, resist structural polarities and totalizing concepts, and advocate the ethical responsibility towards the other. Weller describes the “major deconstructive readings of Beckett – by Connor (1988), Hill (1990b), Locatelli (1990), Tresize (1990), and Begam (1996)” in which “the aim is not to deconstruct Beckett, not to expose his logocentric underbelly, but rather to demonstrate that his textual practice is itself thoroughly deconstructive” (Beckett, Literature, and the Ethics of Alterity 27). To this list many more recent figures should be added, including Weller himself in Beckett, Literature, and the Ethics of Alterity, Anthony Uhlmann in Beckett and Poststructuralism, and Asja Szafaraniec in Beckett, Derrida, and the Event of Literature.

about was crucial for Beckett” (140). Begam’s analysis places Beckett’s first play, Godot, in its historical context, noting the chronological congruity between this play, Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations, and J.L Austin’s lecture series How to do Things with Words. Begam suggests that the theatre provides new possibilities for Beckett’s work, where he can dramatically stage “the elaborate interplay of constatives and performatives” (143-44). While Begam locates the importance of Beckett’s move to the stage in his newfound ability to dramatize the performativity of language, my analysis takes a different angle. With respect to the question of the inexpressible, Beckett’s staging of the absence of language takes on a crucial significance. The stage allows Beckett to enter more deeply into his coveted theme of silence; the theatre enables him to dramatize the performance of speechlessness itself.

Krapp’s Last Tape heralds new possibilities for Beckett’s staging of silence. In Krapp’s Last Tape, Beckett underlines the significance of Krapp’s reticent stillness from the beginning of the play. Here Beckett connects physical immobility to speechlessness, as Krapp sits silently and “*remains motionless, staring vacuously before him*” (KLT 11). Krapp’s silence is not simply the lack of speech; rather, silence stands in for a larger absence: a sense of emotional, spiritual, and psychological vacancy. Krapp’s silence becomes the silence of mankind itself in the wake of the Holocaust. Just as Krapp’s inability to come to terms with his own past parallels the human incapacity to accept our own past deeds so his silence reflects mankind’s inability to linguistically articulate the Shoah. This event resists communication and defies utterance; yet, as Adorno acknowledges and as Beckett demonstrates, it is crucial that we probe the depths of silence in order to aesthetically and philosophically respond to it. The being of the

incommunicable lies beneath silence and Beckett points the way towards the substance of the inexpressible.

The question of silence takes center stage when the young Krapp ruminates from the tape recorder:

Extraordinary silence this evening, I strain my ears and do not hear a sound. Old Miss McGlome always sings at this hour. But not tonight. Songs of her girlhood, she says. Hard to think of her as a girl. Wonderful woman though. Connaught, I fancy. (*Pause.*) Shall I sing when I am her age, if I ever am? No. (*Pause.*) Did I ever sing? No. (KLT 15)

These words reflect the general process of the disintegration of sound in this play. The fact that Miss McGlome no longer sings signals the gradual evacuation of sound from Krapp's world. The 39 year-old Krapp remarks on the exceptional silence permeating the world around him, but this aural and verbal emptiness becomes much more pointed for the 69 year-old Krapp. While the old man has an added level of sound in his life because of the tape recorder, words have become far less significant for the 69 year-old Krapp. For him, language has clearly decreased in both value and potency. The young Krapp has a marked affinity with words, a talent which the older Krapp has lost. The voice on the tape recorder uses the words "viduity" and "equinox" expertly (KLT 18, 13), as the old man mouths these words without comprehension. Moreover, the 39 year-old Krapp strings impressive sounding and rather poetic sentences together effortlessly: "the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most . . . unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire" (KLT 21). In contrast, 69 year-old Krapp employs language with childish impotence:

“Revelled in the word spool. (*With relish.*) Spooooo!” (KLT 25). Clearly, former linguistic prowess has vacated the old man, marking the sense in which words slowly dissipate from life in Krapp’s Last Tape. In this movement away from language, Beckett presents a gesture towards the inexpressible, paving a path towards the unattainable goal of the incommunicable.

Ultimately, Krapp evokes the most powerful *pathos* precisely where words fail him. At the close of the play, after giving his longest speech, Krapp remains silent while the tape plays until the end. As he sits and listens to the recorded voice’s rhythmic physical description – “under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side” – for the third time, the old man remains powerfully silent: “*Krapp’s lips move. No sound*” (KLT 27, 28). Here the man on stage physically embodies the expression of silence. He does not speak, yet his immobile body and the very absence of sound convey a meaningful emotion to the audience: an unsettling and pronounced sense of loss. Here, in Beckett’s staging of silence, words would doubtlessly fall short of what the lack of language accomplishes. Thus soundlessness comes to life on stage, as words give way to the material substance of silence.

Through his staging of silence, Beckett presents the materiality of the unuttered. What remains unsaid captures the audience as it dwells potently on Beckett’s stage. Anthony Uhlmann describes Beckett’s portrayal of the substance of silence: “The being of silence, too, is a centreless being. It is no more self-identical than the being of language. There are varying kinds of silence, one could speak of a violent silence, a silence which resides in speech, a silence of speaking and saying nothing as words course through a being” (171). As Uhlmann explains, silence appears in Beckett’s work as a

fragmentary and unstable entity, yet it remains a vivid and powerful presence. Beckett's silence is not a nothingness; rather it mimics language in its double nature as both the absence of sound and a separate being which remains definitively *there*. It allows Beckett to wordlessly depict a presence which, despite the absence of its linguistic communicability, remains something other than nothing. The living substance of silence on Beckett's stage is undeniable. It courses through the characters and the audience, evoking a powerful emotive response. Thus Beckett's staging of silence echoes Adorno's thinking which "embodies the very paradox, then, of philosophy, on the side of the universal, and art, on the side of the particular: of 'uttering the unutterable'" (Gandesha 102). Beckett's work embodies the gesture towards the inexpressible which Adorno seeks as the project for thinking after the Holocaust. Gandesha explains the function of the unspeakable in Adorno's writing: "Such a silence, which has an affinity with the silences of art, permits the often senseless prolixity of philosophical discourse to be heard" (103). In Krapp's Last Tape, Beckett aestheticizes Adorno's philosophical thrust towards the inexpressible. For Adorno, Beckett's presentation of silence definitively encapsulates the pertinence of his work: "Aesthetic transcendence and disenchantment achieve unison in the speechlessness that characterizes Beckett's work" (AT 117). Beckett provides the most legitimate exemplar of the challenge to post-Auschwitz aesthetics precisely in the absence of utterance which he so effectively communicates on stage. Beckett does not "utter the unutterable"; instead he presents the inexpressible as such, reaching towards it, but never grasping it, letting the audience know it is *there*, but never positing an assertion – which would betray the very nature of the inexpressible itself – of where or what it is.

Martin Puchner observes that “we must read Beckett’s dramatic oeuvre through his stage directions” (164). In Beckett’s drama, the stage directions, words never spoken yet always underlying the action, often take precedence over the utterances of the characters themselves. Ultimately this chapter, indeed this entire thesis, hinges on a stage direction. Krapp’s Last Tape ends not with a word but with the evacuation of speech: “*Krapp remains motionless staring before him. The tape runs on in silence*” (28). As Krapp sits on stage, without sound and without motion, the true *pathos* of his situation reaches its climactic expression. In the end, Krapp remains incapable of speech. Significantly, the 69 year-old Krapp never speaks directly about his fateful choice of art over love. Rather, awareness of this choice emerges for the audience through the interstices of the dialogue. Krapp is unable to articulate his own personal catastrophe, yet it reverberates in each word, and in every silent moment, in this play. Just as Krapp cannot change the past, so humanity cannot undo what has been done. While we can dream of ‘what could have been,’ we must ultimately face the fact that “what happened, happened.” So we are left, like Krapp, speechless – able to fully articulate neither our own current situation nor what we have done in the past. Yet, what Beckett reveals here is that there is something beneath the silence. The tape “runs on,” and, as it does so, it provides a *locus* of hope. Thus, what Adorno demands as an aesthetic response to the Holocaust is precisely this moment; not quite silence, not quite speech, but something between the two – a “running on” in the interval between expression and inexpressibility. This silent “running on” epitomizes a gesture which characterizes Beckett’s theatrical project. Adorno describes this moment in Beckett, when “Drama becomes mute gesture, freezes in the middle of dialogue” (COL? 265). In a sense, the tape’s “running on,” this

archetypal moment of verbal vacuity, reflects the *gestalt* of Beckett's entire dramatic project; here we have the corpse of sound, the cadaver of the voice, the residue of a failed attempt to depict reality with a word. Here the paradox of the inexpressible meets its own mute expression on the stage.

Thus Krapp's Last Tape exempts thinking from the necessity of linguistic articulation, gesturing towards the materiality of the inexpressible instead. Reaching for a word, Beckett grasps only silence, and thus the inexpressible catastrophe of the past meets the stage without being reduced to a name, a reproduction, or a representation. This is how Krapp's Last Tape provides the most appropriate artistic response to the Holocaust for Adorno: here the paradox of the inexpressible, the task for thinking after the death of metaphysics and the demise of human progress, takes center stage. Thus Krapp's Last Tape undertakes the crucial work of resisting the threat of nihilism which looms so dangerously after Auschwitz.

The fact that Krapp's Last Tape more fully withdraws from the catastrophe than Endgame renders it more capable of doing justice to the philosophical implications of the cataclysm, "For there is simply no conceivable standpoint from which the disaster might be named or articulated" (AT 354). Adorno's thought suggests that, just as Beckett's work gives voice to the materiality of silence through a dramatic expression of the inexpressible, so he bespeaks catastrophe in the very refusal to name it as such: "Returning to Beckett, there is here a parodistic unity of time, place and action, interrupted by delicately balanced episodes and terminating in a catastrophe which consists in the fact that no catastrophe occurs" (AT 221). Ultimately, the indirect approach to the catastrophic history of mankind becomes the most direct approach, and

the most legitimate response, to catastrophe. This is the case because, for Adorno, “The direct expression of the inexpressible is void” (ND 110). Acceptance of the void is not an adequate solution and, in Beckett, Adorno finds a confrontation with the abyss and the subsequent rejection of it: “What is, [Beckett] says, is like a concentration camp. At one time he speaks of a lifelong death penalty. The only dawning hope is that there will be nothing any more. This too, he rejects” (ND 380-81). Beckett confronts the philosophical implications of the Holocaust not by staging Auschwitz but by presenting the human condition in its wake. Krapp’s silence is the silence of humanity and his inability to come to terms with his past is the human struggle to reconcile ourselves to our history – neither forgiving, nor forgetting, but acknowledging what we have done. Beckett does not appease the fetishistic desire to see the dramatization of the atrocities of Auschwitz but rather asks the question which pervades human life in the wake of the Holocaust: what now? As Ganesha points out, Beckett’s art becomes crucial for Adorno because it faces the death of metaphysics, as confirmed by the Holocaust, and it does not back down: “Indeed, as in Adorno’s reading of Beckett, art plays a crucial role in making the collapse of metaphysical meaning *mean* not just nothing” (114). Beckett confronts the major philosophical implications of the Holocaust – the death of transcendent metaphysical concepts and the impossibility of progress – yet he does not succumb to the lure of nihilism. Beckett’s art does not accept nihilism because it *accepts* nothing. It does not accept nothing in the sense of succumbing to the void; rather, it does not accept anything – it rejects all totality and finality, seeking instead the perpetual conflict of negation, the process which always seeks the being of inexpressibility that can never *be* as such.

However, for Adorno, art can never completely break through the barrier against which thinking struggles, because “Art is semblance even at its highest peaks” (ND 404). So Beckett’s work, although it is undoubtedly the most legitimate form of post-Auschwitz art for Adorno, does not ‘fill’ the aporias which remain for thinking in the wake of the Holocaust. Rather, Beckett’s art simply points the way to the material which philosophy must prove itself capable of grasping. For Adorno, there is hope for the future, but it is a painfully slight glimmer beneath the lurking cloud which threatens to engulf it: “The slightest difference between nothingness and coming to rest would be the haven of hope, the no man’s land between the border posts of being and nothingness” (ND 381). Beckett’s artwork manages to gain access to this minute “haven” insofar as it “pursues the logic of aporias, the insolubility of the task itself” (COL? 160). For Adorno, art provides an aspirational step in the pathway of philosophy. It embodies a transitional stage, leading the way for thinking: “Art is promissory despite its negativity, indeed total negation . . . there is always the expectation of hearing the unheard-of and seeing the unseen, no matter if it turns out to be fearsome” (AT 196). While art can never provide the answer for philosophy, it can enable thinking itself to come to fruition. Art can lead the way towards the inexpressible.

Certainly, such an artistic breaking-of-the-ground appears vividly for Adorno in Beckett’s work. Here we have a form of art which opens an avenue for thinking after the Holocaust. While the Shoah marks the death of metaphysics and the impossibility of progress, Beckett’s works provide the possibility of something more than resignation. For Adorno, art entails a crucial critical function and thus “Art will live on only as long as it has the power to resist society” (AT 321). Art’s importance lies in its capacity to provide

an immanent critique of the political situation surrounding it. Adorno undoubtedly locates such resistance in Beckett's work. Ultimately, for Adorno, the very pertinence of Beckett's work lies in the indirectness of his negotiation with the conceptual implications of the Holocaust. Beckett's roundabout approach to catastrophe – his refusal to deal with the subject directly – ultimately becomes the most legitimate, if not the most *direct* form of aesthetic response to the catastrophe itself. Adorno, who was “never able to speak directly” about the Holocaust (Tiedemann xv), clearly views an indirect engagement as the most appropriate response to the Shoah. Krapp's Last Tape certainly provides such an indirect negotiation with mankind's catastrophic history. Here, rather than an unnamed catastrophe, Beckett presents the “perpetual catastrophe” of the post-Auschwitz human condition (AT 196). Human existence has become its own cataclysm in the wake of the Shoah, and Krapp's Last Tape gestures towards the inexpressibilities of the past while not attempting, like Heidegger, to turn the inexpressible into “the monstrosity of a flatly abstract object” (ND 110). In Beckett, whose work “inclines indirectly to the inexpressible” (ND 110), Adorno locates a legitimate engagement with the *aporias* of incommunicability with which philosophy must grapple in the wake of the Holocaust. Beckett approaches the death of metaphysics, the implosion of narratives of progress, and the question of the inexpressible through the indirect staging of the incommunicable, thus gesturing towards inexpressibility without reducing it to the level of the *expressed*.

This chapter has demonstrated that the purpose of post-Auschwitz art for Adorno is not a direct engagement with the catastrophe itself, but an attempt to grapple with the new difficulties for thinking imposed by Auschwitz. The Holocaust, for many thinkers, stands as a firm repudiation of narratives of human progress. While it is crucial to think

this event within its politico-historical context, to view it as a “necessary sacrifice” or a detour from an overarching movement of human progress is to dangerously undervalue the possibility of its recurrence. Such thinking ignores Adorno’s repeated warnings concerning the inherent link between the Holocaust and the societal conditions permeating the contemporary Western world. Adorno unequivocally posits the danger of the latent roots of fascism in post World War II democratic society: “I consider the survival of National Socialism *within* democracy to be potentially more menacing than the survival of fascist tendencies *against* democracy” (COL? 4). We overlook this crucial lesson by sensationalizing the Holocaust, by turning the Shoah into an aberration, and by positing it as exceptional rather than what it truly is: an intrinsic development of our own society. The Shoah is an event which has not been ‘overcome,’ but which rather lingers as a dangerous potentiality within the structures of contemporary Western democratic society.

Krapp’s Last Tape clearly presents an individual’s regression. Whether or not this compels us to view the entirety of human history as a process of decay, it certainly invites the notion that movement through time is not exclusively a development. Rather, as Auschwitz implies, humanity’s temporal march forward might confirm little more than mankind’s growing ability to destroy everything around it, including itself. Adorno and Beckett emulate Nietzsche by turning away from metaphysical ideas. While thinking in Beckett and Adorno’s time followed Nietzsche’s radical ethics and indeed still does to this day, some of Nietzsche’s ideas lose potency in the aftermath of an event which he surely did not anticipate. In the wake of the Holocaust, Nietzsche’s correlate notions of the eternal return and *amor fati* require serious reconsideration. Amery morally rejects

Nietzsche's notion that the past is necessary and that one must affirm the 'it was.' Beckett dramatically parallels this sentiment in Krapp's Last Tape. For who could possibly watch this play and still wish for Krapp to suffer exactly as he has suffered again and again eternally, "all in the same succession and sequence" (GS 273)? Krapp's Last Tape, like the Holocaust, posits a past which is all but impossible to affirm. Yet, while one cannot affirm the Shoah, neither can one allow it to remain unspeakable. Rather this event, which questions the very limits of linguistic articulation and cognitive capacity, must emerge in the space between communication and the inexpressible. Adorno's response to the death of metaphysics and the impossibility of human advancement takes a radically different form than Nietzsche's. Adorno confronts the demise of metaphysics and progress not with an affirmation of the 'it was,' but with a bitter struggle against the question of the inexpressible, the most important task for post-Holocaust philosophy. The gesture towards the inexpressible reaches a sort of pinnacle in Krapp's Last Tape, where Beckett gestures towards the incommunicable in his staging of silence. In this play, the catastrophe recedes even further from the stage than in Endgame. Ultimately, such an indirect articulation becomes the only valid aesthetic response to catastrophe for Adorno. Art remains incapable of presenting the Holocaust as such because "Art's expression is the antithesis of 'expressing something'" (AT 164). Thus, art cannot represent the 'something' that is Auschwitz, yet it also must not concede to the nothing. Art must seek to embody the imperative of post-Auschwitz thinking; it must confront the paradox of the incommunicable. Adorno finds a form of art which undertakes the task remaining for thinking after the Holocaust in Beckett's work. Beckett manages to navigate the unfathomably narrow space available to post-Auschwitz art by negotiating the interval

between “not just nothing” and “the antithesis of ‘expressing something.’” The elusive task of post-Holocaust art then for Adorno is the articulation of the paradox of inexpressibility. To create art in the wake of the Holocaust is to inhabit the borderland between anti-metaphysics and nihilism; Adorno resists all totalizing and reifying tendencies, and the only way the Holocaust can remain unreified, untotalized, and unfetishized is if it remains hidden in the offstage realm of the unspeakable which can only be pointed towards, never named. Thus Beckett provides, rather than a word for the catastrophe, a “running on” towards its articulation.

Conclusion

Not Overcoming Remnants; Acknowledging the Need for Radical Change

We must cease to look toward . . . historical processes as if they had an apocalyptic or profane telos in which the living being and the speaking being, the inhuman and the human – or any terms of a historical process – are joined in an established, completed humanity and reconciled in a realized identity. This does not mean that, in lacking an end, they are condemned to meaninglessness or the vanity of an infinite, disenchanting drifting. They have not an *end*, but a *remnant*. (Agamben 159)

The last two chapters have pursued the central thesis that Beckett's plays serve as archetypal examples of post-Auschwitz art for Adorno by portraying the Holocaust only indirectly. These plays do not seek to depict the Shoah as such, because an attempt to represent this event is always already a failure. Rather, Beckett renders the human condition in the wake of the Holocaust, addresses the crucial political and philosophical questions of post-Auschwitz society, and asks how it might be possible for humanity to continue to live with the burden of its catastrophic history pulling persistently against all efforts to move forward.

Chapter One worked through Adorno's reading of Endgame – an ostensibly politically abstract play – as an essentially political work of art. Endgame plays well into Adorno's thinking, by both critiquing unjust and arbitrary structures of power such as we find in contemporary capitalist society and imploding the notion of the autonomous rational subject. Chapter One concluded that Endgame, *the* legitimate example of post-Auschwitz art as championed by Adorno, becomes such an exemplar precisely in its

refusal to name or present the Shoah. Examining the themes of nostalgia and immobility in Endgame, I asked how a play which depicts only scarring pasts and hopeless futures could possibly be the most legitimate example of post-Auschwitz art. How can a play that refuses to derive moral lessons from the past and resists the possibility of future hope do justice to the Shoah? The answer is simple: it can't. The very presumption that art, or anything, could 'do justice' to the Holocaust is wrongheaded. For Adorno, no art can adequately render this event and even the attempt to do so is relatively pointless.

Representations of the Holocaust itself are superfluous and inconsequential compared to the more urgent task of post-Holocaust art: that of implicitly critiquing the forms of thought and politics which led to the Shoah, and which threaten to cause similar or worse events in the near future. In his 1967 essay "Education after Auschwitz," Adorno writes that "the fundamental structure of society, and thereby its members, who have made it so, are the same today as twenty-five years ago" (COL? 20). Adorno notes a shocking congruency between Nazi Germany and 1960s Western civilization. Because the structure of post World War II late-capitalist society remains disturbingly similar to the political situation in Nazi Germany, Adorno believes that there is good reason to fear the recurrence or transformed return of Auschwitz. Thus, Endgame does crucial political work not by seeking to *represent* the Holocaust, but by seeking to *resist* its return. This act of resistance becomes, for Adorno, the imperative for all post-Auschwitz art, and indeed all post-Holocaust thinking, politics, and life itself.

Beckett portrays the universal calamity which has come to characterize human existence in the wake of the Holocaust. Through such a presentation of tainted human life, he posits the radical complicity of the species in our shared catastrophic past. As

Yvonne Kyriakides points out, Adorno acknowledges this notion of radical culpability: “Adorno works through the premise that recognized that all culture, art and its critique, is barbaric, a premise that the critic must recognize his complicity and guilt in a barbaric culture. Adorno’s act is one of self-implication: both he and art are part of barbarism” (443). For Adorno, nothing escapes the all-pervasive barbarity which characterizes modern capitalist society. While Adorno maintains that art after the Holocaust must be barbaric, this line of thinking is not meant to deter the artist from his task. Rather, the artistic project becomes all the more urgent in light of the brutality which marks the contemporary political state of affairs. For Adorno, the recognition of the universal human responsibility for our past becomes essential for both a proper acknowledgment of mankind’s legacy of catastrophe and the attempt to find a way forward. This thesis takes Krapp’s Last Tape as the closest gesture towards such a way forward.

Chapter Two fleshed out Adorno’s notions of post-Holocaust art as necessarily embodying an indirect remembrance and evocation of the catastrophe itself. Situating Krapp’s Last Tape within its greater theoretical context, I moved through a Nietzschean reading of the play in order to reveal Beckett’s rejection of notions of human progress. While Nietzsche himself repudiates an understanding of human history as necessarily a development, his philosophical response to such a rejection demands reconsideration after the Holocaust. Nietzsche reacts to humanity’s non-progressive existence with his conjoined notions of the eternal recurrence and *amor fati*. These concepts, which demand an affirmation of each moment, become problematic in the wake of the Shoah. Many thinkers, quite reasonably, refuse to affirm the eternal return of Auschwitz. While the Holocaust itself stands as a testament against an understanding of human existence as a

progression from more to less civilized, cultured, or enlightened, it is vital to think this event in its essential relation to its historical and political ‘before’ and ‘after.’ To conceive the Shoah as a departure from the greater movement of human history is to overlook the radical *nearness* of this event. While it might be tempting to understand the Nazi atrocities as a horrific manifestation of pure and unthinkable evil, such thinking is markedly counterproductive. Rather than a monstrosity, we must think the Holocaust as our own child and ancestor, as an event humanity produced, and an event in the shadow of which humanity must now move on. For Adorno, Auschwitz marks many new challenges for philosophy, including the confirmation of the death of metaphysics. Adorno’s response to the “new aporias” presented by the Shoah is a turn to materialism, and an attempt to think through the paradox of the inexpressible. The inexpressible, as Adorno understands it, can never be communicated, but must always be sought. The task Adorno locates for art is neither to represent the Holocaust, nor to speak the inexpressible, but to aesthetically render the human situation in the wake of the Holocaust and to gesture towards the expressibility of the inexpressible.²⁰ I locate such a gesture towards the inexpressible in the final moments of Krapp’s Last Tape, when the tape “runs on in silence.” One danger wrought by the death of metaphysics is that of nihilism and, for Adorno, the defence against this threat becomes one of the crucial tasks for philosophy. In Krapp’s Last Tape, Beckett presents the “not just” – yet little more than – nothing. He treads the narrow path between nihilism and the corpse of metaphysics, and

²⁰ In case this was not clear by now, I will remind my readers that the Holocaust *is not the inexpressible*. These thoughts have essentially different, if tangential, functions in Adorno’s thinking. It is certain both that the inexpressible existed prior to the Holocaust and that the Holocaust is, at least on some level, expressible. Even using the word “Auschwitz” to refer to what happened in the Nazi concentration camps suggests that, for Adorno, the Shoah is communicable to some extent. The Holocaust is simply what need not be represented directly, while the inexpressible is what can never be expressed.

walks the borderline between the incommunicable and its communicability, as the tape furnishes the void where Krapp's voice had been with a silent "running on."

Having examined these two plays through Adorno's understanding of the parameters and possibilities for post Auschwitz art, and having repeatedly encountered the notion that art must depict the universal human condition and present the Holocaust only indirectly, a series of pressing questions comes to light. If the Holocaust cannot be aesthetically rendered, must it not eventually recede from the spotlight of history? Does an attempt to encourage societal remembrance demand reminders of the specifics of Auschwitz? In other words: is an indirect aesthetic response to the Holocaust enough? By way of conclusion, I will offer some reflections on the possibility of a more direct aesthetic engagement with the Shoah. Ultimately, for Adorno, the indirect response is the most direct response – direct in the sense of its urgency. An attempt to aesthetically represent the Holocaust must of necessity be both a failure and a superfluous undertaking. In contrast, attempts to deal with the theoretical and political manifestations of post-Auschwitz culture and to immanently critique that culture in order to gesture towards the necessity of a fundamental alteration of the structure of contemporary society characterize the most pertinent works of art after the Holocaust. Adorno finds such an artistic undertaking in Beckett's plays; Beckett's work becomes the most crucial form of post-Auschwitz art not by representing the Holocaust but by acknowledging its remnants and by seeking to change society in such a way that these remnants should not grow and reproduce themselves. Beckett's art performs the most urgent work for thinking after Auschwitz by first recognizing the roots of mankind's catastrophic heritage and then pointing towards the necessity for radical societal transformation.

Nearly half a century has passed since Adorno published his “fat child” (Clausen 7), his last great work, Negative Dialectics, in 1966. Yet Adorno’s reflections on the Holocaust remain pressing, pertinent, and markedly influential in contemporary thinking. Today, long after Adorno’s death in 1969, the notion that the Holocaust can only be aesthetically responded to indirectly continues to be an oft-invoked framework for attempts to respond to this abysmal and cognition-challenging event. As in Adorno’s time, attempts to represent, discuss, and think through the Holocaust remain deeply problematic today. Discussions of the Shoah, and attempts to aesthetically represent it, face numerous volatile threats. To name a few, there are the pressing risks of fetishization, commodification, reification, trivialization, essentialization, sensationalization, even glorification, and, most dangerously, the mythology of sacrifice – the notion that the victims of the Shoah suffered and died as a necessary digression from an overarching ‘greater good.’ These dangers are often triggered unwittingly, and they have the potential to tarnish even the most well-intentioned attempts to negotiate the conceptual minefield which surrounds engagements with the Holocaust.

Representations of the Holocaust often slip into dangerous territory in two primary ways. First, there is the idea that people consume this aspect of history purely for entertainment, seeking pleasure in this historical event. This is a dubious tendency, a habit which exploits the suffering of the victims of the Nazi atrocities. The second primary danger is the common presentation of a redemptory narrative, a “happy ending” in representations of the Shoah. Tim Cole, in his discussion of popular representations of the Holocaust from The Diary of Anne Frank to Schindler’s List, suggests that “the tendency has been to opt for meanings that discern some sort of redemption in the

Holocaust” (172). For Cole, this contributes to “The sugar-coating of the Holocaust” (xviii), and, ultimately, the total misrepresentation of this event. Cole discusses three recent “filmic ‘Holocausts’” (98), Schindler’s List, Train of Life, and Life is Beautiful, which all suggest that “We can, through cunning, goodness and ingenuity, defeat the Holocaust and bring about salvation” (xvii). Cole opposes such understandings of the Shoah, arguing that they run directly contrary to the historical reality itself. Rather than a representation of the Holocaust, these redemptory works of art contribute to what Cole describes as the “myth of the Holocaust,” a “celluloid rendition of the event” (xi). The primary concern here is twofold. First, there is the danger of the absolute misrepresentation of the Shoah and thus the fear that the true historical event will disappear altogether, as the Holocaust itself is overwritten by its mythological counterpart in the history books. Second, there is the danger of the commodification of the Holocaust. Implicit in such a commodification is the exploitation of the sufferings of the victims of the Shoah, the use of their pain for the viewers’ pleasure. Susan Gubar expresses this worry when she writes that “A Holocaust industry desecrates the dead” (6). Likewise, Tiedemann laments the fact that “The Holocaust and the Shoah have been converted by the culture industry into aspects of the everyday television experience to which life itself has been reduced” (xi). Tiedemann goes on to speak of “the empty and cold act of remembrance,” the “routine of memorialization” of the Shoah in contemporary society (xii). Tiedemann’s point is valid. In the modern era, Holocaust memorials and representations are abundant, proliferated to the point of verging on the superficial. As Cole points out, “At the end of the twentieth century, the ‘Holocaust’ is being bought and sold” (1). Adorno, who opposed capitalism with the full capacity of his philosophical

capabilities, would certainly find the commodification of the Holocaust horrific, as, indeed, any responsible thinker should. Yet we must pause and ask where to draw the line. How much is too much memorialization, and how can we construct the most meaningful remembrance possible?

In the 1990s debates about how Germany should create a national memorial for the victims of the Shoah, this question was ubiquitous. The notion of the impossibility of representing this event directly drove the majority of the proposals for the memorialization of the Holocaust. Attempt to memorialize the victims of the Shoah are problematic because, as Cole points out, “There is a sense, perhaps, in which the immortalisation of memory in stone leads toward a process of distancing and forgetting. Rather than memory being alive and fluid, it becomes dead, fixed, and forgotten” (5). Such an “empty and cold forgetting” is precisely the danger Adorno warns against in the process of developing a cultural memory of the Holocaust (COL? 13). James E. Young, who was the spokesman for the committee in charge of deciding what form the German “Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe” should take, testifies to the near-impossibility of paying tribute to the victims of the Holocaust. For Young, the quandary of how to memorialize the victims of the Nazi mass murders is best answered by the “antiredemptory” message of “countermonuments” (6, 7), monuments which rather than seeking to directly represent or convey what they memorialize speak to the very impossibility of this task. Countermonuments problematize the notion of monumentalization itself, and, for Young, this becomes the most adequate form of memorialization after the Holocaust: “In the end, the countermonument reminds us that the best German memorial to the fascist era and its victims may not be a single memorial

at all—but simply the never-to-be-resolved debate over which kind of memory to preserve, how to do it, in whose name, and to what end” (119). Young suggests that memory work itself is the best form of monument, because it is a never-ending process, a movement which never closes the door on this memory, never allows a thinking of the Holocaust as a completed or past event. Much like the inexpressible which must be sought but can never be expressed, “postmodern memory-work seems to feed perpetually on the impossibility of its own task” (Young 6). For Young, the question of the memorialization of the victims of the Shoah must remain an open question; the very difficulty of the debate over how to pay tribute to the victims is the closest thing to an adequate memorial: “How better to remember forever a vanished people than by the perpetually unfinished, ever-vanishing monument?” (131). The endless search for a memorial which must always remain absent, which can never truly do the work of memorialization alone, becomes the memorial itself.

Returning to where this thesis began, Adorno’s ‘injunction’ against poetry, considered in light of the greater structure of his thinking, takes on a similar form of response to the Holocaust as the countermemorial. Typically, Adorno posits a dialectic here, suggesting both that it is impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz and that the need for poetry to be written is more urgent than ever after the Holocaust. In a sense, the dialectic behind Adorno’s ‘injunction’ paves the way for the countermonument, clearing the ground for the postmodernist response to the Holocaust. In his one simple sentence, Adorno creates the very formula of post-Holocaust art; it is an art which is impossible yet necessary, barbaric in its search for beauty, and beautiful in its presentation of barbarity. It is in this sense that post-Holocaust culture has no space for art, yet requires it urgently:

“While the present situation no longer has room for art—that was the meaning of the statement about the impossibility of poems after Auschwitz—it nevertheless has need of it” (COL? 387). As Adorno reveals here, his claim about the barbarism of post-Auschwitz poetry is *not an injunction against writing poetry*. Indeed, Adorno contends that “Everything, including war, has its own poetry” (The Culture Industry²¹ 62). As Gubar points out, in the post-Holocaust age Adorno’s affirmation of the impossibility of poetry becomes the very definition of poetry: “Authors of Holocaust poetry create a unique tradition not by disproving Adorno’s injunction against the barbarism of poetry after Auschwitz but by dramatizing its pertinence again and again” (27). Post-Holocaust poets necessarily write with the impossibility of writing in mind, as the futility of art becomes its very nature. While Adorno contends that poetry after the Holocaust must be barbaric, the implication is that art must be pursued in its very barbarity. Ryland clearly expresses this aspect of Adorno’s refutation of post-Auschwitz poetry: “In an essay that contains one of the most-quoted phrases in German literary history . . . Adorno argued that barbarity and culture had become intertwined to such an extent in modern society that even a poem could not be written without being implicated in that barbaric reality” (140). Adorno’s statement is largely rhetorical. His point is not that one should not write a poem but that every action in post-Holocaust society – including that action which entails the nearest approximation of beauty, the writing of a poem – must be barbaric. Adorno’s statement does not mean that poetry should not be written after Auschwitz but that after Auschwitz even the most beautiful things in life have become irrevocably tainted.

The barbarity Adorno speaks of is neither an aberration nor a monstrosity. It is not even a novel result of Holocaust. Rather, barbarism dwells intrinsically within Western

²¹ Here forward cited as Culture.

democratic society, both pre and post Holocaust. Ryland explains that “‘Barbarism’, in Adorno’s terminology, refers to the state of modern late capitalist society, within which all aspects of reality submit to market forces” (142). This barbarism is neither intrinsic to the Shoah nor caused by it. The Holocaust is simply a brutal – thus far the most brutal – manifestation of the barbarism inherent in late capitalist society. Thus, for Adorno, the imperative for art after the Holocaust must be less focussed on representing the event itself and more determined on combating its recurrence. The struggle against the formation of new Holocausts must take the form of a struggle against late-capitalist democratic society, in which the roots of fascism dwell in ominous nearness. For Adorno, it should be the goal of the artist not to represent the Holocaust but to defend society against the return of Auschwitz, to fight the barbarism which exists in our society much as it existed in 1930s and 1940s Germany. Art must respond to the Holocaust only indirectly, but it must directly address the pressing political needs of today: the purgation of the threatening barbarism inherent in our very political structure.

Yet, one must wonder, is there also a danger in treading too lightly here? Can one be too careful, not wanting to distort or misrepresent the fragile and volatile memory of this event? Will the indirect aesthetic approach to the Holocaust ultimately cause the event itself to fade into the shadows? And, if so, would not the trivialization of the Shoah be worth whatever costs may be required to keep it alive in history and cultural memory, even if its afterlife thus took on a reductive or inappropriate form? These are the pressing questions surrounding attempts to represent, discuss, and write on the Holocaust today, and they are likely to remain unanswered for a long time. It is a question of extremes – silence on the one hand and trivialization, commodification etc. on the other.

The course of action lies in the space between these poles, and the discourse surrounding the Holocaust must negotiate this narrow middle ground. Agamben describes this difficult act of mediation: “Some want to understand too much and too quickly; they have explanations for everything. Others refuse to understand; they offer only cheap mystifications. The only way forward lies in investigating a way between these two options” (13). Agamben is correct to suggest that responses to the Holocaust – artistic, historical, political, and philosophical – must tread the path between cryptic silence and careless expression. However, this middle ground has rarely been located in contemporary attempts to come to terms with or express the Holocaust. Rather, artistic responses to and representations of the Holocaust have most often landed on one side or the other – either instrumentalizing the Shoah or positing its incomprehensibility.

Maeve Cooke, in her analysis of the ethical implications of post-Holocaust art, reduces artistic responses to catastrophe to just such a polarization. Drawing on Adorno and Young, Cooke suggests that art is either “redemptory” or “anti-redemptory” (267), and either “representational” or “anti-representational” (279). While Cooke opposes “hypostasising counter-art or anti-representational art as the only appropriate aesthetic response to catastrophe” (267), she never escapes a polarized understanding of art. Cooke concludes that “anti-representational art and representational art have complementary strengths and weaknesses” (279), and argues that the contrast between these two polarities produce a harmonious result. Her understanding of post-Holocaust art draws on the model of a system of checks and balances. She suggests that popular representational works of art, such as Schindler’s List, are crucial because they create public debate about catastrophes such as the Holocaust. Anti-representational artworks, on the other hand,

regulate the inherent dangers of representational art, namely its tendency towards “instrumentalisation and authoritarianism” (279). While Cooke rightly rejects the notion that only one specific form of art provides a legitimate response to catastrophe, she fails to locate an appropriate in-between space in which art can work. Rather, she suggests that, in the contrast between extremes, a process of mediation will allow for a productive cultural memory. However, it is my contention that art should seek to find the middle ground on its own, rather than relying on confused audiences to negotiate between the two extremes – the silent/anti-representational and the representational/commodified – on their own.

Certainly such a middle ground is precisely the space in which post-Auschwitz art should function for Adorno. In his essay “Is Art Lighthearted?” Adorno sheds a reconsidered light on his claim about the impossibility of poetry after the Holocaust: “The statement that it is not possible to write poetry after Auschwitz does not hold absolutely, but it is certain that after Auschwitz, because Auschwitz was possible and remains forever possible in the foreseeable future, lighthearted art is no longer conceivable” (Notes, 2: 251). While Adorno revokes an unequivocal claim that art can no longer be created after Auschwitz,²² he maintains that art can never be what it was before the Holocaust. Ryland describes Adorno’s underlying thinking of post-Holocaust poetics: “Adorno’s oft-misquoted phrase functions therefore not as an assertion of the impossibility of writing poetry per se, but of the impossibility of writing poetry that fits into the traditional image of this medium” (142). For Adorno, post-Holocaust art must take on a new form, specifically, a form which resists the very structures which characterized art before the Holocaust. This is not only because beauty is no longer

²² As this thesis demonstrates, this claim, in fact, was never meant to be unequivocal.

possible in the same way but also because art must, like all thinking, remove itself from the forms of thinking which led to the Shoah. Even the most beautiful and sublime works of art from the pre-Holocaust era are not exempt from their complicity in the event to which they were the precursors. The new art Adorno seeks must acknowledge its complicity in its barbaric past and thus cannot be carelessly high-spirited. However, just as art can no longer be cheerful, so it must not be completely somber. Rather, it must walk the middle ground between these poles. For Adorno “The art that moves ahead into the unknown, the only art now possible, is neither lighthearted nor serious” (Notes, 2: 253). Art after the Holocaust must of necessity take place in the space of the interval:

A withering away of the alternative between lightheartedness and seriousness, between the tragic and the comic, almost between life and death, is becoming evident in contemporary art. With this, art negates its whole past, doubtless because the familiar alternative expresses a situation divided between the happiness of survival and the catastrophe that forms the medium for that survival.

(Notes, 2: 253)

After the Holocaust, art must free itself from its anticipatory forms – it must abandon the jurisdictions of the tragic, the comic, etc. and enter a new space, an interstice. The function of post-Auschwitz art is entirely characterized by in-betweens for Adorno; it takes place in the space between the comic and the tragic, representation and anti-representation, expressibility and the inexpressible. Art takes this new form out of necessity, yet the artist can – and must – twist necessity in a certain direction: towards the opposition of the return of the Holocaust. Thus the artist must conceive the way forward, he must determine how to “move ahead into the unknown,” how to “run on in silence.”

Yet, before this onward movement, the artist must face the catastrophic legacy of humanity; he must acknowledge the vestiges of the Holocaust.

As this thesis has made clear, a central concern for both Beckett and Adorno is the question: what now? Humanity, as a species, after the definitive cataclysmic event of the twentieth century, after the culmination of mankind's capacity to perform its own rigorous and meticulous self-destruction, must find a way to go on living. For Adorno, the political gesture required for such a continuance of existence cannot be that of 'turning over a new leaf.' Such thinking would allow for a forgetting of the Holocaust, or at least for an attempt to construct a new politics without facing the general human complicity in this event. For Adorno, such a response to the Shoah is inadequate; rather than turning away from the Holocaust, humanity must accept its own responsibility in this event.

Mankind must face the Holocaust by working through the past and, indeed, by working through the present, towards the future. Adorno does not conceive the Shoah as a 'finished' event, confined to the annals of history. Rather, the "remnants of Auschwitz" linger in post World War II democratic society (Agamben 164). For Adorno, the structure of post-Auschwitz Western democracy is all but identical with the societal formation which created the Holocaust: "That fascism lives on, that the oft-invoked working through of the past has to this day been unsuccessful and has degenerated into its own caricature . . . is due to the fact that the objective conditions of society that engendered fascism continue to exist" (COL? 13). While much has changed since Adorno wrote these words, much has also remained unchanged. Baumann, Agamben, Copley, and many others express a similar concern with respect to the latent fascism inherent in

contemporary philosophy and politics. Even today our political climate remains strikingly similar to the one that created the Holocaust. The more we overlook this fact and relegate Auschwitz to a different and long-overcome epoch, paradigm, time, space, or planet, the more susceptible we become to the threat of the recurrence of the Holocaust.

While for Adorno the greatest danger of human existence, and that which all civilization should be built around preventing, is the recurrence of the Holocaust, today it may well be argued that Auschwitz, or at least similar events, have already recurred.

Writing in the late 1980s, Levi takes this stance:

We [Holocaust survivors] are often asked, as if our past conferred a prophetic ability on us, whether Auschwitz will return: whether, that is, other slaughters will take place, unilateral, systematic, mechanized, willed, at a government level, perpetrated upon innocent and defenceless populations . . . Prophets, to our good fortune, we are not, but something can be said. That a similar tragedy, almost ignored in the West, did take place, in Cambodia, in about 1975 . . . These factors can occur again and are already recurring in various parts of the world. (86-87)

As Levi explains, catastrophes akin to the Holocaust not only can occur but *have occurred*. Thus the “new categorical imperative imposed by Hitler” has proven itself to be an unprecedented failure. Societies worldwide have not learned a lesson from the Holocaust in the sense of organizing themselves around the prevention of similar atrocities. If anything, the lesson that much of human civilization has taken from the Shoah is precisely the opposite: how to repeat Holocaust-like murders with the same brutality, the same precision, the same bureaucratic callousness. It would seem from post-Holocaust history that the Nazis, rather than frightening the world into peace, have

inaugurated new possibilities for human barbarism, for mankind's capacity for self-annihilation. Since the Nazi era, modern warfare has taken on a new form, a Holocaustic methodology. Daniel K. Cho speaks to the near-reincarnations of Auschwitz in the contemporary world: "the validity of Adorno's idea of an education against Auschwitz is not confined to his immediate historical context. To the contrary, it still has resonance today as the contemporary moment has seen the return of Auschwitz in such places as Darfur, East Timor, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, the former Yugoslavia, and now Iraq" (75). As Cho points out, humanity in the wake of the Holocaust has remained blind to Adorno's warnings. Far from organizing all education against the return of Auschwitz, mankind has enabled the historical repetition of similar catastrophes again and again. Of course, the number of dead of any of these individual events does not equate with that of the Shoah, but the process of killing and the arbitrariness of death certainly found its predecessor in Auschwitz. Thus the Nazi genocide was not a warning to humanity, but a precursor to future human barbarity. This is precisely why the point made by Bauman, Copley, and Adorno himself – that we must not think the Holocaust as an aberration belonging to an 'overcome' past – is so crucial for our contemporary cultural self-understanding. Not only has the Shoah tainted humanity as a remnant, its remnants have also reproduced and recreated numerous other Auschwitz-like situations.

David Hirsch describes the fearful dilemma of life after the Holocaust: "the post-Auschwitz age is one of total war, mass murder, and genocide; an age of the death of God and the eclipse of Western culture and Judeo-Christian values; an age that has witnessed the end of illusions about human potential and about the indomitable goodness of the human spirit" (245). Thus, life after the Shoah becomes not only marked by the universal

guilt of the species that caused this event but also riddled by perpetual paranoia – a deep-seated fear of new Holocausts. And such paranoia is not unwarranted; rather, it is necessary, even essential. Not only has the Holocaust created “serious questions as to the credibility of both religion and humanism” (Bauer 365), depriving mankind of possible claims to any sort of elevated level of being, it has also created the always-imminent threat of its own recurrence. This is the sentiment Bauer voices in the epigram of Chapter One, and the warning voiced by Adorno repeatedly throughout this study. The fear that the Holocaust should repeat itself lingers gnawingly, persistently, in the post-Holocaust world. We, the citizens of a political situation characterized by and composed of the very remnants of Auschwitz, have been charged by our collective past with the responsibility of facing our fearful future. It is our duty to think the radical nearness of this event, to fear its recurrence, and to acknowledge the similarity between the Holocaust and events which have happened since World War II. In the Western world in particular, it is our imperative to realize how closely our own political systems and infrastructures resemble those that produced Auschwitz. It is our task to acknowledge that the Shoah was deeply implicated in late-capitalist democratic society and vice versa, and thus to realize that the threat of new Holocausts dwells inherently within the very structure of our political systems of governance and control.

Yet this thesis also demonstrates that, for both Beckett and Adorno, there is some hope for humanity, however deeply this hope may be buried. The “haven of hope” Adorno envisions is neither merely philosophical nor inherently abstract. In Chapter Two, I identified the final moment of Krapp’s Last Tape as an embodiment of Adorno’s vision of the task for post-Holocaust thinking. The silent “running on” of Krapp’s tape becomes

a gesture towards the space between the inexpressible and the possibility of its communication. However, this is not to say that the ultimate goal for thinking is the expression of the Holocaust for Adorno: far from it. Rather, the question of how and if the Holocaust should be represented takes on a derivative significance for him. This is why he never directly addresses the question of Holocaust aesthetics, despite having inadvertently become the anti-hero of the entire art-after-Auschwitz debate with his famous comment in “Cultural Criticism and Society.” Yet art does hold a crucial function within society for Adorno. Art provides a much-needed cultural critique of the inner workings of society. So the question of art *after* the Holocaust becomes, for Adorno, a much more important and all-pervasive question than the question of art *of the Holocaust*. Of course, as Gubar points out, “there is no patrolled fence between poetry about Auschwitz and poetry after Auschwitz” (262). In a sense, all post-Holocaust art becomes an aestheticization of Auschwitz insofar as the Shoah dwells as a definitive backdrop of post World War II culture – not only as a past event but also as both a remnant in the present and a threatening future possibility. Ultimately, Beckett’s presentation of the universal human condition is in a sense a representation of Auschwitz, insofar as the Holocaust has become part of the very definition of what it means to be human. Certainly, a representation of the fate and the fundamental questions of post-Holocaust human existence – such as we find in Beckett – cannot be thought to exclude the Shoah. However, art must do more than *represent* the Holocaust – it must prevent it. Thus, just as the primary demand on education and the “new categorical imperative” of today must be the prevention of the recurrence of the Shoah, so the fundamental motive of art must be to guard against the return of Auschwitz, to struggle against the imminent threat of new

Holocausts. Undoubtedly, Adorno would see many modern attempts to artistically represent the Shoah as phony, trivial misrepresentations of the severity of the event itself. However, he would also surely argue that there are more important considerations than the current debate over the ethics of post-Auschwitz art, namely, the urgent need to fundamentally alter the conditions of contemporary society.

The fact that humanity has not taken up Adorno's warning, that we have not organized all education, all thinking, all art, and all politics against the return of Holocaust-like events, should not be cause for despair. More importantly, it should not be cause for passivity, for the acknowledgment of Adorno's failure and the very failure of humanity. Rather, it should be a call to action. For Adorno, mankind has the power to change the current state of affairs, to alter the conditions of society for the better:

the neon signs which hang over our cities and outshine the natural light of the night with their own are comets presaging the natural disaster of society, its frozen death. Yet they do not come from the sky. They are controlled from the earth. It depends upon human beings themselves whether they will extinguish these lights and awake from a nightmare which only threatens to become actual as long as men believe in it. (Culture 96)

For Adorno, it is in humanity's power to control its own fate. Here Adorno describes, both literally and metaphorically, the malaise of contemporary capitalist society. Furthermore, he suggests that just as humanity created the capitalist way of life, so we have the power to overcome it. This is *the* crucial move towards purging the danger of new Holocausts. As Cho explains, capitalism is at the root of the danger of the return of Holocaustic events for Adorno: "Adorno seems to suggest in these passages that the

possibility of an Auschwitz-like event owes itself, ultimately, to the persistence of late capitalism itself . . . The transformation of society will only become total when capitalism itself has been brought to an end” (95). For Adorno, the threat of the recurrence of Auschwitz is inextricably linked with the insidious enemy within contemporary culture – capitalist society. The neon signs and the commodifications of our culture which embody our “frozen death,” represent a cataclysm in themselves, and a system of governance which will inevitably lead to new catastrophes resembling Auschwitz.

Yet the capitalist structure of domination, like the Holocaust, is neither an aberration nor a monster. Although it is the most dangerous enemy, it is not a unique or inexplicable structure. Rather, it is an essentially human creation. Just as remnants of Auschwitz dwell within the human species, so remnants of humanity linger in the very structure of the society in which we live. The Holocaust lives with capitalist society and capitalist society lives with the Holocaust – humanity lives in both. Thus, again, here it is not a matter of accusation, revenge, or redemption, but of acknowledging responsibility and recognizing the need for change. The Shoah happened; each human being has been tainted by it and each human being is charged with the obligation of preventing future Holocausts. While we naturally and viscerally resist the Nietzschean suggestion that we should will the eternal recurrence of Auschwitz, we must go further. We must take the necessary precautions to prevent the return of Auschwitz and its cousins, however non-eternal these recurrences might be. We must radically alter the very conditions of our society and of our individual selves, to shake the shackles of late-capitalist democratic society and shed the burden of our world – a world which imminently threatens to create new Holocausts. For Adorno, art takes a crucial step in the direction of such societal

transformation insofar as it provides the urgently needed cultural critique of society. Beckett's plays epitomize such critique, offering a scathing refutation of unnecessary suffering, unjust power structures and systems of domination, and notions of autonomous subjectivity. Furthermore, Beckett's plays go beyond immanent critique insofar as they seek to locate a way forward. Probing the interstices between the cheerful and the somber, the representational and the anti-representational, Beckett's plays search for a *locus* of possibility in the interval between the inexpressible and the possibility of its expression, they seek to delineate a space through which humanity would be able, against all odds, to "run on in silence."

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