Encounter with Beckett – a phenomenological essay

We are in the world through our body

Merleau-Ponty

I am the first of us to walk the square. I'm responsible for setting the tempo, thereby starting the whole performance. The projector that we had trouble installing finally came into place and now projects in real time the empty square on a screen behind my back. The empty square that in just a few seconds I will enter, just me, just my body. I stand in the dark in my designated position, exactly two dragged steps from the corner I need to count from as I follow the first side of the quadrangle; six dragging steps along each side and ten across the diagonal. Now the square spreads out before me, warmly lit. There is an almost tangible anticipation in the large darkened hallway. I focus on feeling the right tempo. Even though I'm completely focused on the tempo, I'm not sure my body will obey the moment I start walking. My forward-leaning posture makes it difficult to predict the tactile feedback and balance of the steps. The weight shift in the step itself in this position is not as distinct as when I walk upright, and the fabric of the robe gets easily tangled in my legs. The dark stone floor has a slippery surface and I am afraid of losing my balance, the weight shift of each step is unnaturally smooth and slightly stiff. I can feel my heartbeats and under the warm robe I hold my arms tightly together on my belly. I have to walk a round of my own. I do my best to feel the weight in my body and concentrate on my tempo. Keeping my upper body slightly bent forward, making the dragging steps sound, listening, keeping my balance as I turn into the diagonal, constantly counting the steps – all this requires my full concentration. I am fully present in the moment, in my body and in the room. My lonely walk around the quadrangle feels like an eternity in the dark universe of Liljevalchs. It's such a relief when Louise, Player 2, enters at the right point and I can hear her dragging steps tally with my own. The sound of our synchronised movements fills me with confidence. The hood of my robe droops so I can only see a tiny area ahead of me. The audience are seated just outside the square and sometimes I can see their feet. The synchronised steps along the sides and diagonals of the square mark the playing field. Our minimalist walk in a changing pattern of eternity leads nowhere. Our bodies move in time and space.

This essay is based on my first-person perspective of ensemble Lipparella's performance *What is the word* and the artistic process that led to the performances we gave in autumn 2019. In addition to performing *Quad* – a work that Beckett himself refers to as a "mime" –we also recited Beckett's poem in Swedish translation as a separate piece in the performance, as a prelude to the musical work that ended the first half of the performance. Through Beckett's two works, the ensemble's communication and expression were challenged in new ways; an encounter with ourselves without instruments. It was a transformative project which I shared with my colleagues in the ensemble

and which was different from most of what we had done before. Although the very essence of a musician's life is to constantly create something that is as ephemeral as a breeze, with this text I want to capture some of what was there at the moment, through reflection on this experience. Capturing the experience of the performance could not be done simply by documenting it on film and recording the music on CD.[1] I needed more tools to go deeper; here I explore the written essay as a method to describe and reflect further on the project. I seek both to "bring it down to a level of doing", but also to articulate what the interdisciplinary perspective added, in the moment and as an experience.

The body has been central throughout my artistic research project: in the musician–instrument relationship, as a communicative and artistic means of expression in musical and choreographic works, and as a recipient and interpreter of texts. In my research practice, I have taken inspiration from phenomenology in describing the processes of the artistic projects carried out as part of my thesis work. In this essay, I mainly draw inspiration from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, which is based on lived experience. The essay reaches out towards a number of quotes taken from various texts by Merleau-Ponty on how we understand the world around us through our perception.[2] I have used these quotes freely in relation to the different parts of the project and written them into the text as individual sentences with italics and dashes.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the subject is in the world through the lived body and that our perception is inseparable from our senses. There is no "interior"; it is through the world and our activity in it that we know ourselves. – *I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body* – With a phenomenological approach as a basis, I aim here to address the lived experience of a specific performance and the creative work process that preceded it. In both the essay and the film, I refer not only to my own subjective experience, but also, to some extent, to the perspectives, thoughts and experiences of the other participating artists. The "performance-now", which I and the other participants mention in these reflections, refers to the performance we made at Liljevalchs art gallery on 15 November 2019.

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A quintet is a group large enough to create a sense of a collective body of sound, yet small enough to emphasise each individual's character and voice. – *The body is our general medium for having a world* – It is above all to chamber music that I have turned in recent years, a form of music-making in which I so clearly feel that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Gorton and Östersjö (2019) argue that the individual "musician's 'voice' is continually defined through interaction with technological and psychological tools, such as scores and musical instruments or compositional

[1] Lindwall's *What is the word* is recorded by Lipparella on the CD *Hidden voices* (2021), Blue Music Group.

[2] The Merleau-Ponty quotations in the essay are taken from *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962); "Eye and Mind", *The Primacy of Perception* (1964), chapter "Eye and Mind", and *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), chapter "The Intertwining – The Chiasm", see further the Appendix.

and notational systems" (p. 38). In the chamber music ensemble, each individual voice is distinct, but over time and through shared experiences of interactions, the group also develops a shared voice (see p. 68). During the more than fifteen years that Lipparella has been active as an ensemble, we have developed an interest in the semi-staged performance as a form which, as we use the concept, lies somewhere between a traditional concert and a more scenic work and where the relationship between text, music and space is central. We have explored the semi-staged performance primarily through various collaborations with composers, directors and others. These experiences have left a clear impression and have resonated in the ensemble's common DNA.

In 2014, Lipparella worked on *Klätterbaronens sångbok*, a musical drama based on Italo Calvino's novel *The Baron in the Trees* (1959) in collaboration with Alice kollektiv.[3] The novel is set in 18th century Italy, where the boy Cosimo rebels against the customs of his aristocratic family and decides to live the rest of his life in the trees. Cosimo is true to his word and subsequently lives a rich life in harmony with nature, separated from yet united with the people he often helps in various ways. With our singer Mikael Bellini (Cosimo) perched in the treetops (on a tall ladder) throughout the performance, one of the things we learnt from the project was how to deal with the physical distance between us. It took some time to get used to it, but through the experience of the distance, the conditions of the interaction, how auditory and visual information interact, emerged more clearly than usual. When I return to Calvino's text, an oft-quoted passage from the book comes to mind: "that anyone who wants to see the earth properly must keep himself at a necessary distance from it" (Calvino, 1959, p. 144). I think of the outside view; to write, to create a work, is to have access to both an external and an internal perspective and to be able to switch between them.

In 2016, the ensemble realised the semi-staged performance *Ska alla tecken låta?* (Should all signs be sounded? 2016), which was Lipparella's first collaboration with Karl Dunér. Among the three newly written works we performed at these concerts was Lisa Streich's *Fikonträdet* (The Fig Tree, 2016) based on Inger Christensen's poem *Alfabet* (1981). In Streich's work, a series of movements for arms and hands is composed for the singer; not a single word of Christensen's text is pronounced, instead the singer expresses a linguistic inability throughout the work as he repeatedly covers his own mouth. Only occasional syllables, air sounds emerge through this consistently semaphore-like notated choreographic instruction, a soundscape that was also reflected in the instrumental parts. Streich's approach of composing physical gestures into the score thus has a double function: the expression is visual and choreographic, but the movements also influence the sonic result.[4] The intertwining of choreographed movement and musical expression made a strong impression on me. *Ska alla tecken låta*? was performed on four occasions in widely different

[3] Participating from the Alice collective in this production were, among others, Ivo Nilsson, composer; Johan Petri, director; Wolfgang Lehman, film projections. The performance took place at Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm.
[4] Since the lack of language in Streich's work *Fikonträdet* had clear implications for the theme of Beckett's *What is the Word*, we performed *Fikonträdet* in the second half of the performance.

locations around Stockholm (a mansion, a modernist stair hall, an antiquarian bookshop, and an art gallery) provided important insights into the function and meaning of space. The four spaces enclosed and created the very conditions for the encounter between the music, us musicians, our instruments and the audience. The differences between these places were of course something that only those of us who had experienced all the rooms would recognise. But it was obvious on every occasion that it was not only the ensemble and the audience that were active, but that there was also an interaction with the spaces. The spaces emerged and contributed to the performance through their own agency beyond the obvious, such as acoustics, visibility, choice of tempi and placement of musicians and audience.

These previous experiences formed a common ground for the ensemble when we started the working process with *What is the word*. The process stretched like a long arc, from learning the individual parts in Christer Lindwall's work, via the ensemble's joint work with the music, text and choreography, to our performances in the autumn of 2019. Soon after, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out and as a direct consequence, the idea of making a film about the project arose, partly because we were prevented from playing in front of an audience and partly because I was attracted to the idea of filmmaking as a reflective research method. During this long period, I have, in a kind of organic growth process, moved towards an increasingly expanded area with my own musical practice at the core. The starting point for both the film and the essay has been to pick fragments from this process and to describe them as accurately as possible. – *The real has to be described, not constructed or formed* – at the same time, both the writing and the work on the film revealed an inevitable interpretation, a selection filtered through preconditions, interests, intentions and memories.

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In Torsten Ekbom's book *Samuel Beckett* (1991), Beckett's artistic development is likened to Beethoven's three stylistic phases: the independent but promising youthful production, the mature, daring and pioneering phase of middle age, and finally the laboured, spiritual production of the later years, an inward-looking, serious – sometimes almost sacred – atmosphere. Ekbom writes "In the late Beckett, everything is stripped down and minimised. The format is generally short, a few pages of text, a few lines or just silence, not because new large-scale projects have failed as in the earlier fragments, but because concentration has now acquired its own aesthetic" (pp. 223–224, my translation). "Less is more", Beckett noted in the margin of one of his manuscripts, a condensate of the simplicity, sparseness, purity and concentration he sought in his later work.

The play *Quad* (1981) is one of the few works Beckett wrote for television. The subtitle of the first printed edition of *Quad* – "a piece for four actors, lights and percussion" – makes it clear that Beckett was focusing on parameters other than text (Beckett, 1984). The four players, dressed in hooded robes, move with a certain time lag around the sides and diagonals of a square, but always

avoid its centre. In this canonical structure, Beckett also applies a permutation technique in which all possibilities for the paths between the four corners of the square are exploited, first by a single actor and then successively by all four, who then one by one drop out of the defined playing ground. This rotating pattern can then be repeated endlessly.

Robes of the kind used in *Quad* can be found in several of Beckett's works. The original inspiration for this came after a trip to Algeria where he saw a woman in a djellaba squatting at a bus stop (Ekbom, 1991). But Dante's characters in *Divina Commedia* sitting in robes and waiting are also echoed in Beckett's plays. He was drawn to the idea of the anonymous, to the reduction of the body. When I interviewed the project's stage director Karl Dunér, he described how Beckett experienced a gap between voice, words and thought. As the words take shape in the throat, they are distorted and transformed, and coloured by different things. Beckett also distanced himself from language itself, and therefore increasingly sought to portray "pure" consciousness, beyond linguistic form. *Quad* represents perhaps Beckett's most radical break with language as the text is replaced by the sounds of percussion instruments.

The original version of *Quad*, which was written, produced and broadcast by a German TV channel as *Quad I* and *Quad II*, was staged by Beckett himself. The two successive versions were performed by students at a ballet school in Stuttgart. In *Quad I*, the players, each accompanied by a percussion instrument, move at a fast pace. Their robes are coloured in white, red, blue and yellow, like pieces in a dice game. During the recording, Beckett accidentally saw a black and white TV screen playing the work at a slower pace and exclaimed "My God, it's a hundred thousand years later!", which is the background to the creation of *Quad II* (Esslin, 1987, p. 44). In this future dystopian *Quad*, the players walk at a much slower pace and in silence except for the sound of the shuffling steps, and their robes are grey. In both versions, like Dante's characters, the players are trapped in their own movements, unable to break this pattern (Butler & Davis, 1990, p. 12). Karl explains that the same type of impossible perpetual patterns is found in several of Beckett's works such as *Act Without Words* and many of his plays have this type of mime sequence or routine. The most famous is the hat-swapping scene in *Waiting for Godot*. These repeated patterns have been interpreted as a depiction of humanity's relentless search for meaning.

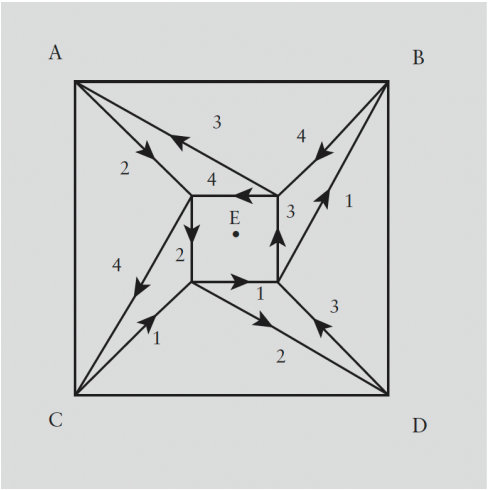

Figure 3. Players' walking pattern in Beckett's *Quad* (Murphet, 2022, p. 171).

According to Beckett himself, *Quad* was never intended to be performed on stage but has nevertheless been staged several times. It was Karl who introduced the idea that we should perform *Quad*. He realised even before we started rehearsing that we as musicians would do it well, but also that, unlike a version performed by a group of professional dancers, there would be a tangible and perceptible struggle and tension in the room. Nothing would be self-evident in the realisation – it could simply go wrong. Karl, who has worked with Beckett's plays for decades, believes *Quad* would be difficult to perform in the theatre. "Most actors find it painful not to act out, to just portray a body, which is required in Beckett's plays. It would take a lot of work to get actors to refrain from doing different things along the way". In retrospect, he stated that we actually achieved the quality he was looking for: a combination of simplicity and vulnerability. At the same time, there is a clear element of absurdity and comedy in the work.

In our performance, the sides of the square were marked with light only. We also used a film projector that projected our walk in real time from an oblique top view onto a large screen behind us. In this way, the audience, which was positioned close to three sides of the square, had simultaneous access to a more distant image, a perspective from which the pattern of movement could be more easily perceived and from which our bodies appeared more like pieces on a game table. – *my body is at once phenomenal body and objective body* – Our version, played in silence, is closest to *Quad II*, in which Beckett thus distances himself even further from language, the shuffling steps being all that remains. The shuffling itself, we discovered, was crucial to synchronising our steps. In all its simplicity, *Quad* requires a great deal of focus and interaction. – *It is through my body that I understand other people* – With the body as the only instrument, our interaction depended on the sound of the dragging steps, the counting of the steps, maintaining the same feeling in the body weight and the slight forward bend, keeping the balance of the turns within the strict limits of the square.

There was a particular tension every time we approached the inner centre of the square that appeared as a kind of forbidden area, which was most evident when all four players were inside the

square at the same time. But, as Karl pointed out, "It must have been created out of sheer necessity, otherwise the players would practically crash into each other" – *space is the evidence of "where"* – But nevertheless, this charged centre has been seen by various Beckett interpreters as carrying strong symbolism: as representing the "self" that Beckett so often shunned. When choreographer Cecilia Roos dropped by during a rehearsal, it was precisely in this sudden shift away from the square's charged centre that she helped us gain precision in. I eventually found a sense of mechanical shift in the body. Like rotating gears, we were guided by something bigger, beyond ourselves.

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In parallel with our work with *Quad*, we rehearsed Christer Lindwall's music, a composition based on the English translation of *What is the word*. In Christer's piece, it is not only the singer, but also the instrumentalists who convey the text, which through the piece appears sometimes as individual syllables, sometimes as rhythmic recitative. Through the preparatory work we did with the text together with Karl and Christer, we gained a closeness to and a common understanding of the text. The text in a composed form often risks being overshadowed by the music, and we felt there and then that we also wanted to give the audience an opportunity to absorb the text in its pure form. In the performance we therefore included a reading of the Swedish translation, dividing the fifty-three stanzas between us. Our reading served as a prologue to Christer's piece, which followed immediately. Dividing the reading between different voices representing one and the same subject corresponds to a characteristic of many of Beckett's texts; that one and the same person splits into different personalities.

What is the word (1989) was Samuel Beckett's last published work. Originally written in French, it poetically depicts the absence of language and the inability to express oneself. The English translation was dedicated to the American director and playwright Joseph Chaikin (1935–2003) who had worked on Beckett's plays for many years and who suffered from aphasia after heart surgery in 1984. Samuel Beckett himself had a great deal of knowledge and interest in different types of brain-related diseases and conditions. He also had his own experience of temporary aphasia after a fall in his own home in 1988. It was while Beckett was still in the Pasteur Hospital in Paris, slowly regaining his ability to speak and write, that he began writing *Comment dire*.

folie –
folie que de –
que de
comment dire –
(Beckett, 2002, cited in Salisbury, 2008)

Filled with stuttering and compulsive repetition, the text balances between the voluntary and the

involuntary. In her article "What Is the Word: Beckett's Aphasic Modernism" (2008), Laura Salisbury, British professor of modern literature, argues that the poem can be seen as both a representation and an exploration of Beckett's own aphasia. However, despite the obvious connection between the creation of *Comment dire* and aphasia, critics, then and now, have not described the text as an expression of a disabled writer. The explanation for this, according to Salisbury, is that in terms of language and style it does not represent a break with Beckett's aesthetic. The apathetic search for words is a recurring feature of Beckett's work and therefore, Salisbury continues, the poem is experienced as a kind of culmination and end point. Even earlier, Beckett himself had expressed a feeling that the limitations of age and illness also open up wider possibilities for expression. Salisbury's article includes a quote from a letter Beckett wrote to his friend Lawrence Shainberg, a writer who has researched and written extensively on neurosurgery:

> It's a paradox, but with old age, the more the possibilities diminish, the better chance you have. With diminished concentration, loss of memory, obscured intelligence – what you, for example, might call 'brain-damage' – the more chance there is for saying something closest to what one really is. Even though everything seems inexpressible, there remains the need to express. A child needs to make a sand castle even though it makes no sense. In old age, with few grains of sand, one has the greatest possibility. (Salisbury, 2008, p. 84)

In her article, Salisbury describes how Beckett avoids clearly linking the fruitless search for words to a speaking subject. She points both to the text's rhythmic repetition of a few words and to a consistent lack of personal pronouns, where we are led away from both the possibility of a clearly perceived subject and a definable object. In the first lines of the poem we read "folly / folly for to / for to" and not "folly for [me,] to", "folly for [him] to" or "folly for [us] to" (Salisbury, 2008, p. 81). Nevertheless, there remains some form of presence from which the object gradually distances itself. – *Is not to see always to see from somewhere?* –For Beckett's biographer, James Knowlson, *What is the word* is moving, not only because the text is the result of a writer's struggle to work with limited tools; ironically, he also argues, the poem embodies a way of being that was present in Beckett's writing almost from the very beginning. Both the French original *Comment dire* and the English translation *What is the word* are included in *The Collected Poems of Samuel Beckett* (Lawlor & Pilling, eds., 2014). The publishers were able to tell us that Beckett wrote "Keep! for end", as if to ensure that *What is the word* would be his last words (Craig et al. 2016, p. 709).

During a rehearsal at Mäster Olofsgården in the Stockholm Old Town, we discuss the text and compare the English version and Magnus Hedlund's Swedish translation. In *What is the word*, Beckett uses the word "folly" repeatedly ("folie" in French) which Hedlund translates as "vanvett". We taste the alternatives "galenskap" and "dårskap"... The word "vanvett" feels right Karl says, but can risk being a bit heavy depending on the emphasis.

Karl: — Without being an Englishman, I have the feeling that "folly" is a little lighter; "jolly and folly" there is a kinship there.

Christer: — Yes, it is not pathologising as a stronger expression could be. It is an acceptable folly, a folly that everyone can still understand.

Karl: — Exactly, and then I mean that it leads one to not interpret "vanvett" too heavily.

Anna: — Maybe it's a bit closer to the Norwegian "fra vettet" which is said all the time without being so dramatic.

What is the word is not based on an emotional mood but more on a practical premise. Despite the inherent darkness of the text, Karl made sure that the words were pronounced with ease.

Karl: —The text has a kind of lightness in its form that also corresponds to the music. The lighter the worse it gets. There is the ambition to try to formulate what doesn't really exist, which ultimately makes it comical. Lightness and humor are at the heart of almost everything Beckett writes.

vanvett –
vanvett att från –
att från –
vad heter det –
vanvett från detta –
allt detta –
vanvett från allt detta –
givet –
vanvett givet allt detta –
att se –
vanvett att se allt detta –
detta –
vad heter det –
(Beckett, 2001, pp. 115–116)

One way to reach the lightness was to approach the text by a searching, rather mundane, reasoning – *Forgetfulness is therefore an act. I keep the memory at arm's length* – To keep the line of thought and not doubt for a second what we were doing.

Karl: —There is a place, a state that one seeks but cannot articulate. What is it called? What is the name of that point, that place, that state?

vanvett att behöva tro sig skymta vad var –
var –
vad heter det –

där –
där borta –
långt där borta –
i fjärran –
långt där borta i fjärran –
knappt –
långt där borta i fjärran knappt vad –
vad –
vad heter det –
(Beckett, 2001, pp. 115–116)

> *Already as we go in and out of the stage to set up chairs and music stands, the text finds its way into my consciousness; without settling down, I fast-wind my own lines in my mind. And so we are ready at our positions, without instruments: instead of our usual playing positions facing each other, we now face straight out into the spacious sculpture hall. The strong contrast between our position in the light and the dark room, where the presence of the audience is tangible, reinforces the silence. Peter, standing diagonally behind me, begins, Anna and Mikael continue. Through the shifts, a sense of interplay quickly emerges. The short lines and the gaps in between evoke inner images of movement like musical phrases. My first line is after Louise's. She has a somewhat inquiring tone, the words resonate in the room a while before I hear my own voice, in a tone that appears more urging, reasoning further in Beckett's logic. I'm concentrating on listening. I forget my body, yet I'm fully present. Our different voices reveal additional layers to the text; a rhythmic variation, micro-dynamics and tonal shifts; it's a solo, moving through different bodies.*

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Beckett's experiments at the intersection of music and literature have been described as among the most unique and interesting of their kind. In his book *Samuel Beckett, Repetition and Modern Music* (2018), Irish guitarist and author John McGrath describes how the relationship between literary and musical expression has changed throughout history. The development process he describes as starting in ancient Greece, a time when different performing practices such as literature, poetry, music (and dance) were closely linked and referred to by the common term "mousike". During the Enlightenment, McGrath argues, the forms slowly began to evolve into the separate disciplines they are today. Although words and music continued to interact in songs, opera, musical theatre, one was often subordinate to the other. In the creation of such works, the roles became more specialised and separated into librettist and composer (and choreographer). In the nineteenth century, movements such as Romanticism and, later, Symbolism began to recognise the expressiveness and potential of music. Influenced by, among others, the philosopher Arthur

Schopenhauer, art circles began to view music as the highest of artforms "believing it expressed what could not be articulated in words; that it enabled a higher, and purer, form of engagement with the intangible" (McGrath, 2018, p. 1). Many writers, poets and visual artists drew inspiration from musical forms and means of expression in their works. Throughout the twentieth century, the boundaries between the artforms were further challenged, as ideas developed in certain disciplines were applied to other artforms. In this type of intermedia work, the artforms could no longer be separated; removing any part would reduce the whole to an incomplete fragment.

Beckett wrote to his friend Lawrence Shainberg that he saw music as "the highest artform"because he believed "it's never condemned to explicitness" (Bryden, 1998, p. 31). According to McGrath, Beckett arguably went further than any other writer in incorporating his musical ideas into his work. Frustrated by the inability of words to adequately express depth and inevitability, Beckett created a language that was strongly rooted in music both in its creation and in its finished form. Beckett's favourite composers, Franz Schubert and Ludwig van Beethoven, whose music is represented in several of his plays, made a strong impression on him. Although Beckett lived most of his life in France, he remained part of the Irish tradition, a tradition in which music has always had a strong influence on the written word (McGrath, 2018). Moreover, Beckett had been close to music from an early age; his cousin John Beckett was a professional pianist and composer and Beckett himself played the piano as a young man.

At a structural level, text can approach music in several ways through the use of techniques associated with music, such as the repetition of words and phrases, the intertwining of themes, the use of subjects – voices as recurring motifs in certain guises – and the use of silence. *What is the word* also contains other musical means of expression, such as diminuendo, where the word or the specific state of being is perceived as more and more distant. At the same time, Beckett creates a parallel crescendo in the structure of the text by successively adding words.

there –
over there –
away over there –
afar –
afar away over there –
afaint –
afaint afar away over there what
(Beckett, 2012, pp. 228–229)

The most striking aspect of *What is the word* is how Beckett varies the text and perspectives by repeating a few words. Repetition, McGrath argues, is always coloured by our previous encounter with the material and activates our capacities of memory both consciously and unconsciously. – *I have my actual present seen as the future of that past* – Although repetition is common in literature as well, Beckett's use of repetition is more closely linked to musical forms; music allows more

repetition before it becomes absurd. McGrath exemplifies this with George Bernard Shaw's observation that Wagner could musically repeat the word "Tristan" many times without difficulty while Shakespeare could not similarly repeat "Romeo". In the absence of music, an audience requires a more varied language. He further introduces the concept of "semantic fluidity" as a way to describe Beckett's use of extreme repetition to create texts that function and feel more like music.

Beckett not only reached out to music as a tool for his literary creation, he also engaged with music as a philosophical idea. In particular, like the earlier symbolists, he took inspiration from Schopenhauer's philosophy of music: "The inexpressible depth of all music, by virtue of which it floats past us a paradise quite familiar and yet eternally remote, and is so easy to understand and yet so inexplicable, is due to the fact that it reproduces all the emotions of our innermost being, but entirely without reality and remote from its pain" (Pilling, 1998, p. 177). McGrath argues that what he refers to as "semantic fluidity" creates an artform that does not allow for a definitive interpretation. In this way, Beckett was able to create a language that was both intelligible and inexplicable, enabling a universal world open to individual interpretation.

Our work on the text with Karl and Christer opened up to reading not only with the eyes but also with the body, a tactile reading around silence, rhythm and presence. Steven Connor writes "As many have observed, Beckett's theatre displays a deep and continuous concentration on the physical in all its senses. In its rigorous attention to spacing, movement and position, Beckett's theatre seems to emphasise the irreducible physicality of human bodies in the spaces that actually inhabit" (Connor, 1990, p. 8). – *this primary here from which all the there's will come* – The deep affinity between text and music in Beckett's work has inspired many musicians and composers to create music based on his texts, ranging from free jazz to notated art music.

In contemporary art music, composers such as Philip Glass and Luciano Berio have engaged with Beckett's work, but one of the few composers who collaborated directly with Beckett was Morton Feldman, who composed several works directly based on Beckett's philosophy and texts. But the strong presence, movement and spatiality exemplified by Beckett's texts can actually be transferred to all music; what is the violinist looking for in the winding passages of the Bach sonata? – *A second visibility* – It is something that can only be sensed, somewhere far away, but which can never be fully grasped.

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When Karl Dunér suggested Beckett as a starting point for a new collaboration, it was immediately clear to us which composer we should work with. Christer Lindwall has a long-standing, deep interest in Beckett's work as well as a genuine commitment to interdisciplinary work. When writing this essay, several years after our project, I e-mailed Christer to find out what interdisciplinary and text-based works preceded *What is the word* and followed our collaboration.

Christer wanted to clarify his understanding of the concept "interdisciplinary", which he described as "a work with 'auditory events' that is not defined by a purely musical reality and materiality. In other words, an art that can be structured according to completely different principles than what can be considered its paradigmatic definition" (my translation). He lists a series of works, which he composed between 2012 and 2023, that he sees as interdisciplinary. These works are based on texts and theories by writers and philosophers such as Johan Jönson, Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Catherine Malabou, Yuk Hui and Mehdi Belhaj Kacem. *What is the word* (2018–19) is part of a series of pieces composed around Samuel Beckett's texts along with *Sometimes standing in the void*, *sometimes shivering in the open.* (septet; 2020–21) and *Ombres sur ombres* (octet; 2021–22).

In *What is the word*, Christer has created a work in which musical events – or as he writes "auditory events" – are juxtaposed with material based on philosophy, phenomenology and aphasia. The music does not interpret the text, nor is it semantic or symbolic; instead, the music creates an openness to the ability and inability of consciousness (or language itself) to express itself – here, as in Beckett's text, silence becomes central. – *It is this ek-stase of experience which causes all perception to be perception of something* – The silence in Christer's *What is the word* is time placed completely outside of a musical reality, not rests as we know them in musical contexts, but rather holes through which the subject's perception of a distanced object is undressed. – *the visible in the tangible and the tangible in the visible* –The poem's contrasts between stuttering utterances and holes are visually reflected in the handwritten score. It conveys something beyond the musical. Brief gestures and attempted formulations in black calligraphy appear as lonely islands in a vast space. On closer inspection, I realise that this visual contrast allows the space to emerge as original and eternal. From here, Christer says, anything is possible, anything can happen regardless of cause and effect. The fragility that permeates Beckett's text is also reflected in the more fragile sound world of the baroque instruments, designed to mimic and support the multifaceted colour palette of the human voice.

A few months after the commission for the new work was accepted, the entire work *What is the word* was completed and printed on paper in Christer's beautiful hand. Then the work of the ensemble began, first individually, then collectively. Studying a new piece is a work that begins with the body, through "the embodied mind" and in the interaction between body and instrument (Östersjö, 2016, p. 478). Like many other professionals, musicians develop a knowledge that is to a great extent embodied, taking the form of "tacit knowledge" (Polanyi, 1966). "Tacit" because it is a type of knowledge that cannot be immediately described in words. The body owns the knowledge. A musician's embodied knowledge is based on years of practice and is constantly evolving through interaction with the instrument and with other musicians and performers during rehearsals and performances. – *Every technique is a "technique of the body"* – Precisely because this kind of knowledge is based on years of practice, the musician can perform complex combinations of movements while remaining open to influences from what is happening in the moment, in the room, an inner image, metaphor or other impulse. – *The body is to be compared, not to a physical*

object, but rather to a work of art; it is a nexus of living meanings – Consciousness is always directed towards something, towards what phenomenology refers to as intentionality, be it a person, a musical phrase, an image, a memory or something else.

When I play, I am both inside and outside; at the same time as I play my instrument with physical gestures, I sing the note within me, I also listen, adapting to the room's response to my playing. In the best moments, I experience the flute as an extension of my body, like Merleau-Ponty's often quoted comparison of the relationship between a blind person and his cane. In contact with the instrument, I direct my awareness beyond the technique, beyond the compromises of the instrument. – *I detach myself from my experience and pass to the idea* –The recorder is then only a means by which I express myself, but it could just as well be another instrument. But as in a multi-stable image, my consciousness sometimes shifts and the focus ends up on something else, outside the musical ecosystem. Here it happens that the body intrudes when I least want it to, makes itself known, not as a force but as a silent obstacle. It is an acrobatic balancing act to simultaneously pay attention to my body, my instrument and the environment, the other musicians and what we create together. My body – the instrument – the ensemble body – the room – the audience – all these parameters interact to form an intertwined whole.

> *The phrases fall softly into each other. It's virtuosic and complex yet the flute is there, clear and distinct, the leaps reside in my fingers. The recorder sound is so close to the voice that I sometimes hear them as one and the same. Everything in the spacious dark hall focuses on us. We are positioned as we usually are. I sit at the far end on one side and have contact with the entire ensemble. Anna, sitting opposite, launches into a stream of glittering notes, a glittering based on a gentle rocking. I see Louise's bow in the corner of my eye, feel her breathing before she starts. The energy of the movement reverberates through the meeting of the thin bow with the string and spreads throughout the ensemble. The gamba together with the low vibrating notes of the theorbo that soon follow are the foundation on which we temporarily rest. Here other laws prevail, a stuttering gesture passes into silence and then again, the stuttering. Step by step, we have worked to give body to what began as a score hard to read but which divulged a marvellous work. The work is now ours, each opening of the 50-odd-page score fills me with joy. Despite its being so close to the text, the music is of a different nature; an extension of time, an augmented now. The text sometimes appears, plain to see, even in the holes of the score, which are established immediately at the very beginning of the work: a single soft "t" followed by silence. The holes soon appear in my part as well, they are difficult to hold, difficult to sustain. Is it the body or the music that pushes forward? Yet the gaps, those spaces between the black-inked notes, constitute something of their own, offering a different relationship between sound and silence.*

Musical performance activates different layers of bodily activity, body schema, body image, a "thinking and doing" mode (Maharaj, 2005, p. 1). While the body schema operates largely on an unconscious level, the body image is instead something we constantly form. Slowly I have worked

out a movement pattern where airflow, body and instrument interact. The score, which in the end only serves as a support, has been my silent guide through this thicket of expressive possibilities. In the moment of playing, the body activates a generated memory of a repeated gesture like a choreography where my consciousness is directed towards a limited focus. While holding on to my own intention, in the moment of playing I have to be constantly open to re-evaluate everything, depending on what happens in the interaction. Lipparella has always strived for a divided responsibility for impulse-giving in the works we play, and *What is the word* was no exception. In the ever-changing musical structure, we all alternate between giving and following impulses, creating the combination of attentiveness and drive that is at the heart of chamber music. There was also the element new to us, of alternating between playing and speaking. The text passages needed a specific energy and form; we needed to be reminded to phrase, direct and treat the text in the same way as we treat the music – to activate the same presence in shaping the text as in playing the music.

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During the rehearsal process, we felt a connection between Beckett's two works: *Quad*, in which the four players keep moving away from the charged centre of the square, and *What is the word*, a text in which the stuttering subject tirelessly struggles to articulate something very specific, but the words slip away.

Our basic idea of the project was to link Beckett's two works with Christer's new musical work and integrate them into a scenic whole. In our context, performing *Quad* and the poem as individual units would not have worked without Christer's composition; conversely, through Beckett's works, Christer's music was given a context that opened up more perspectives in the performance. The works elevate each other. But the works are realised and bound together by us, by our commitment and our presence. As a contemporary music ensemble, Lipparella operates in a tradition where the roles are normally given: the composer composes, the instrumentalists play, the singer sings, full stop. With just a slight shift, the delicate meshwork that always emerges in such interactions can encompass a larger picture directed towards a more holistic approach where we move more freely in relation to the expected. – *I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it.... I expect to be inwardly submerged, buried. Perhaps I paint to break out* –

The free, broad approach can also ultimately provide something deeper – deepening one's own practice and looking at it from a different perspective. Louise, who plays viola da gamba in the group, says during the interview that "reciting the text was like making music with text ... yet it clarified what music-making is when we did it with text. Maybe, since we're so used to working with music, we tend to switch on the autopilot" (my translation). Her reflection makes me think again of Calvino's paradox that "anyone who wants to see the earth properly must keep himself at

a necessary distance from it" (Calvino, 1959, p. 144). Observing the world from a distance, Calvino's Cosimo sees something the rest of us do not, while Beckett's characters, on the other hand, speak so clearly of experiences embedded in the body and in the present. By working with both of these perspectives, we can open the door slightly to greater freedom. A process of artistic development, individually or as a group, can be likened to a slowly growing tree that is constantly reaching out to the world through new branches –*Intentionality* – In that stream of experience, certain stages will leave particular imprints. –*The world is what we perceive* – Annual rings are more evident in trees growing in temperate regions than in trees growing in the tropics or the desert. It is only in a varying climate that the dark rings in the structure of the tree appear and reveal periods of different experience.

In working on the film, Tomas and I saw the search for an inside perspective as a prerequisite, an approach through which we wanted to dissolve the perception rather than explain it further. The film became a method to see the collaborative work and the perception of it from constantly changing angles, a kind of phenomenological variation. Early on, it was clear that in working on the film we needed to focus on two centres: one that is about the here and now and one that reflects. Although I did not apply a fixed form for my interviews with the project's participants, they revolved around the same question of searching into the memory of a here and now of the performance, but the conversations developed in very different ways. In Beckett's musical poetry, which is also reflected in Christer's music and the gaps in the score, there is the subjective experience of time and movement. – *I live in it from the inside; I am immersed in it* – In the work on the film, the relative nature of time was made visible again and again. My perceived time in preparing to walk in *Quad* and my actual first solitary round reflects in no way the actual time it took to do so, nor can it be reproduced on film. All this also relates to Polanyi's notion of tacit knowledge. A bodily knowledge, a lived experience cannot be fully captured in words.

As an artistic PhD candidate, I am constantly faced with the difficulty that artistic processes and bodily experiences are also expected to be described through text. The formulations slip away. But you can create a relationship with the question itself, you can deepen the understanding that these elements exist. The film, entitled *Vad heter det*, and the project as a whole, push the boundaries and open up questions. What is music? You have to play to get an answer. Or perhaps it is the question that is the answer – and perhaps it is the act of asking the question, of engaging with the question, that is the conclusion. As Beckett shows us in his poem, the answer is unutterable. Where the words end, the music begins.

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