

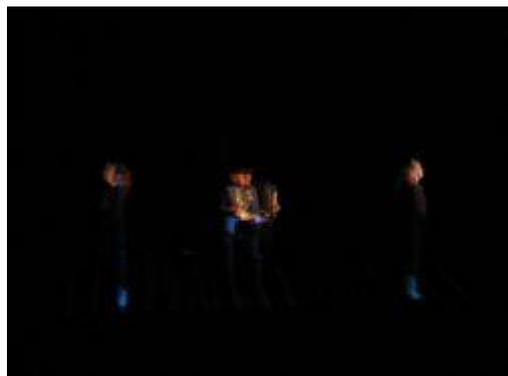
Staging 'Pas si' Part 1

Production by the Centre for Research in Opera and Music Theatre, University of Sussex.

DMCE Colloquium, Paris, November 12 2008

Beckett and Music Symposium, February 27 2009

Nicholas Till



January 7 2008. I receive an email from Giordano Ferrari inviting the Centre for Research in Opera and Music Theatre to present a staging of Stefano Gervasoni's music theatre piece *Pas si*, based on a text by Samuel Beckett, at the *Dramaturgie Musicale Contemporaine en Europe* colloquium in Paris in November 2008. A second company, George Aperghis's *Théâtre et Musique*, have also been asked to stage the work, to be shown alongside our version. A score will follow. A quick email to my Head of Department Björn Heile informing him of the invitation elicits this response: 'I think that sounds very interesting indeed. Gervasoni is a very interesting composer... I am wondering about the wisdom of using Beckett, but that's a different matter.'

I have to say that I share Björn's immediate scepticism about a piece based on Beckett. The idea of a conventional lyrical 'setting' of a Beckett text, illustrating the meaning of a text in a way that Beckett himself would have hated, is unappealing. My starting point for the project, and the question that will guide it, will be 'what (if anything) is "Beckettian"?' about Gervasoni's music theatre piece.

Whilst I am waiting for the score to arrive I start to investigate the whole question of Beckett's relationship to music. The obvious starting point is Mary Bryden's 1998 book *Samuel Beckett and Music*.^[i] This reveals that Beckett himself had a deep fascination with music. Several of his works incorporate canonical musical texts. In two of his radio plays, *Words and Music* and *Cascando*, Beckett engages directly with the problematic of music and language, pitting them against each other as characters in the drama. Beckett was also interested in the philosophical aesthetics of music, in particular the writings of Schopenhauer, and critics have often noted the 'musicality' of his approach to writing and theatrical composition. I have also undertaken some research into Gervasoni, and have obtained a CD of his works. ^[ii] Born in 1960, Gervasoni studied with Luigi Nono. Nono's later works consist of an extreme reduction of musical event, concentrating on minute changes in texture and long, pregnant silences. The masterpiece of his later years, *Prometeo*, is so austere and costive that it leaves one feeling as if a layer of skin has been peeled off. Gervasoni's music similarly explores the sound-making textures and timbres of musical instruments at the extremes of their ranges of both pitch and volume, combining these with shards of melody, skeletal *ostinati* and occasional comic gestures, all of which deliberately negate the emotional or formal continuity of conventional musical expression or structure. He has set poems by Beckett for voice and chamber ensemble in which the texts are often broken down into syllables or phonemes, unmooring words from their contextual meaning. Gervasoni's music clearly relates to the music of composers such as Helmut Lachenmann (another pupil of Nono) and Salvatore Sciarrino whose music is more about timbre, gesture, space and time than conventional notions of aesthetic communication. Lachenmann often refers to the concept of rejection or 'refus' in his music, and both Lachenmann and Gervasoni make one think of one Beckett's own relentless negation of the possibility of representation or expression, and of one of his most often quoted dictums: 'There is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to

express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.'^[iii] The work of these composers is fully in tune with my own dislike of the conventional metaphysics of presence and subjectivity that underpins most opera. I am excited by Gervasoni's music, and anticipate that I will respond positively to Pas si.

February 12. The score arrives. At first glance it is fairly impenetrable. But at least I now have the text:

pas à pas

nulle part

nul seul

ne sait comment

petits pas

nulle part

obstinément.

This is instantly recognisable as Beckett. It recalls one of his most famous passages, the closing lines of his novel *The Unnameable*: 'You must go on, I can't go on. I'll go on.'^[iv] (which may refer either to the existence of the narrator, or to the act of writing itself). But it also recalls the pacing of M in *Footfalls*, shuffling around her diminishing square of light (the French title of *Footfalls* is, of course, *Pas*). Beckett's American director Alan Schneider once said that 'every line of Beckett contains the whole of Beckett. Every piece of Beckett's says what every other piece says in a different way.'^[v] This short text indeed seems like a minute distillation of the Beckettian universe. Gervasoni's instructions for the piece include some valuable instructions for staging. The performers are two singers and an accordion. The accordionist is to be seated upstage of the two singers in the centre, whilst the two singers stand on either side and a little downstage of the accordionist, with their backs turned to each other. They have movements that are carefully notated: bending forward and back; one step forward and one step back, sometimes right and sometimes left foot; combined forward and backward steps with alternating feet; and two 180 degree turns that bring them eventually facing each other. Unlike M in *Footfalls*, they never actually travel but remain on one spot. Many of Beckett's critics have noted the 'uneasy balance in his work between movement and stasis, fragility and tenacity'^[vi], 'the idea of simultaneous motion and immobility'^[vii], which Gervasoni's setting of this text seems to represent perfectly. Beckett himself once described his late play *Quad*, in which four cowed figures trace a series of silent patterns across a square, as 'a static fugue'^[viii], and Ruby Cohn suggests that in the late plays 'Beckett comes close to painting still lives in music'.^[ix] The production must meet the challenge of conveying this simultaneity of movement and stasis, the paradox contained in the term 'still life'.

Also typical of Beckett is the use of negation: there is a clear play on the double meaning of *pas* as both 'step' and 'not'. On being asked what his work was about Beckett himself once responded 'If I were in the unenviable position of having to study my work my point of departure would be "Naught is more real".'^[x] As one critic writes: 'Samuel Beckett's writing seems to be predicated on a series of negations: not only do his fictional and dramatic works relentlessly undermine literary conventions of narrative, plot, character, action, identity, sequence and closure, but this process of negation extends even to the signifying possibilities of language.'^[xi] Beckett seems to have worked his way towards theatre after having reduced himself to virtual silence in his prose works. As he himself said, drama offered him 'a habitable space' beyond 'the wasteland of prose'.^[xii] It was as if the stage provided the possibility of starting again, even if he would then embark on a no less radical programme of theatrical erasures: of action, subjectivity, body, voice, time, eventually even space itself. David Pattie has written that Beckett's plays 'are studies in absence'.^[xiii] One thinks of the absence of Godot, the offstage presence/absence of V in *Footfalls*, or the more complex spatio-temporal deferrals that run throughout Beckett's oeuvre (most evident, perhaps, in the temporal loops of the taped voices in *Krapp and Rockaby*). As Pattie points out, there is a tension, particularly in Beckett's later works, between the 'immediately, engrossingly present and troublingly absent'.^[xiv] Again, I am certain a key to the staging will lie in capturing this balance of simultaneous presence and absence. How can music convey absence? With regard to musical settings of Beckett's work, the most substantial is Morton Feldman's *Neither* (1977), a fifty-minute monologue based on twelve lines of text supplied by Beckett. Although Beckett averred that he disliked opera,^[xv] he found the unassertive sparseness of Feldman's music to his taste, and conceded to Feldman's request. The text, like that for *Pas si*, outlines a series of negations that suspend the singer between neither and nor, so that both

her subjectivity and her spatial location are indeterminate. Catherine Laws has identified some of the musical procedures that Feldman employs to convey sonic presence and absence. 'The effect is of ceaseless movement back and forth through contexts that shift by minute degrees.... Feldman seems to play with notions of presence and absence... soprano and orchestra each fixing its own presence in terms of a lack or an absence in the other, yet neither is stable.' [xvi] Another absence: Feldman himself, in a letter to Beckett, describes how it is as though the soprano is 'singing a tune but it's not there.' [xvii]

For Beckett it would seem that music had the capacity 'to defer (though not indefinitely) the dictates of time and space'. [xviii] *Pas si* is a poetic text that, despite its relentless negations, conveys 'presentness' in both the temporal and spatial sense of the words: the words locate us in the here and now, without past, future or beyond. But its presentness means that it is also spatially and temporally unmoored, an effect that is made more unsettling by the lack of an obvious subject of enunciation. The music makes no attempt to illustrate the dramatic situation literally (no plodding footsteps); instead it oscillates between spasms of snatched breath and little flurries of lyrical energy that go nowhere.

Gervasoni's 'Notes on the Performance' are extremely helpful as pointers to what is going on in the score. The parts for the two performers are written on two staves, indicating two kinds of utterance - one is a "foreground" pattern of breathed, semi-pitched enunciations, inhaled and exhaled; the other is a "background" pattern of pitched singing which Gervasoni specifies as a kind of echo of the foreground voice. The singers are also described as being engaged in a hoquetus with each other - the first singer's upper staff with the upper staff of the second. The singers seem to be two manifestations of one being, a being who can never be fully present to himself. The accordion player is asked to emphasise his gestures 'so that the movements of the actors appear to be a sort of effect and expansion of his closing and opening the bellows.' There is a sort of life cycle going here: as in many of Beckett's work there is even a suggestion of some sort of deity behind the scenes, in-spiring the singers. The staging of *Pas si* must, I am sure, capture this sense of an organism 'breathing'; an organism that is more than the individual performers.

April 2008. I have decided to hold a one-day workshop on *Pas si*, the latter part of which we will present as a public workshop to my colleagues and other interested parties to try and elicit some responses to the work. I have invited Frances Lynch of Electric Voice Theatre, with whom I have collaborated over many years, to work on the piece with us. Frances suggests working with another member of the group Margaret Cameron, who has taken part in two of my other projects. Both are fearless in their willingness to tackle difficult project. And both are extremely gifted musicians. If anyone can crack this piece they will.

Before approaching Frances I had written first to Gervasoni. His score implies two male performers ('attori'). How would he feel about female performers? He responds: 'My answer is that more than male or female the actors should be able to sing.... So better to say: two singers "with theatrical skill".' We have also found an accordionist - a young Latvian student at the Royal Academy called Ksenija Sidorova who is reported to be game for anything. She will need to be! I am somewhat relieved that, should we be successful in securing the funding we will need to complete the project, this will give us a single gender team for the piece. I had been concerned about the gender implications of, say, two female singers and a male accordionist (who would implicitly seem to have masculine power over the female performers), or mixed gender singers, which would inevitably imply a difference between the two singers; if they are both female then we have the choice to make them either the same or different according to how they are dressed.

The musicologist Catherine Laws, who is working on a book on Beckett's relationship to music, and whom I have contacted about the project, recognises the text instantly as a poem from the collection of short poems entitled *Mirlitonnades* of 1978 (also set by Kurtág and Roger Redgate). According to Ruby Cohn a *mirliton* is a kazoo, and Beckett's made-up term '*mirlitonnades*' implies something a little primitive and makeshift. [xix] I am beginning to get an idea of the piece. But I need to experience it, to get a sense of how it actually works, before I can really know how to stage it.

May 5. Frances writes: 'After much consideration (well at least 30 seconds), I have come to the conclusion that this piece is impossible. However, given that we are all game to give it a go, I would like to suggest that we focus on getting some quite specific bits sorted out in slightly different ways.'

These sections are chosen in order to demonstrate the interaction between the voices and the instrument both gesturally and very particularly on the dynamic levels; on the physical movements of all 3; the in and out breaths of the singers; the dynamic and technical leaps for the accordion, and the singing parts.

'It seems to me that in order to focus on these important elements of the piece it is quite important to separate them out and look at them independently - thus giving us, and anyone who is interested, an insight into the construction, mechanics and possible final workings of the piece.'

May 12. Frances writes, in response to my email expressing confidence that there is 'method in your madness' (and concern about the amount of work involved in preparing for the workshop): 'Yes - there is method - this time more than usual! And don't worry - it's not giving me grief, I'm actually finding it quite addictive! Enjoy your weekend. Yes let's talk at the beginning of next week - I can let you know what it all means!'

May 21. The Workshop

Frances has broken the work down into some of its constituent parts, revealing how the score is put together. First she demonstrates that the text is employed according to an additive principle (pas à pas; pas à pas nulle; pas à pas nulle part; etc), a process that iterates the tentative form of the text itself. However, the two singers have slightly different patterns of addition, which means that their texts are never quite in step (so to speak!). Gervasoni's additive structuring of the text reminds me of one of Beckett's last pieces of writing *What is the Word?*:

folly seeing all this this here -

for to -

what is the word -

see -

glimpse -

seem to glimpse -

need to seem to glimpse -

folly for the need to seem to glimpse -

Here the additive principle is in reverse, a series of pre-emptive modifications, cautious disclaimers as to the possibility of attaining knowledge.

Secondly, there is in Gervasoni's score an invariant pattern of alternating in and out breaths running throughout the piece, often bouncing back and forwards between the singers, although not consistently so.

What all of this suggests is that there are some complex structural principles underpinning the seemingly random surface of the work. On the surface what we seem to hear are fidgety little coaxings in the upper register from the accordion, interrupted by tetchy, bad-tempered crunches. The accordion seems to prompt the irregular ejaculations of the singers, and sometimes appears to catch them on the hop. We are yet to discover exactly how complex the structures underpinning this surface are, but there is something Beckettian about Gervasoni's strangely hermetic systems which is beginning to suggest to me an approach to staging the work.

Systems and Structures

A distinctive aspect of Beckett's writing was an obsession with formal structures and patterns. In the earlier works Beckett's characters often seem to be prey to obsessive compulsive disorders. Molloy states that 'I always had a mania for symmetry'[xx], and we may also remember Molloy's obsessive counting of farts ('One day I counted them. Three hundred and fifteen farts in nineteen hours, or an average of mover sixteen farts an hour...Four farts every fifteen minutes. It's nothing. Not even one fart every four minutes. It's unbelievable. Damn it, I hardly fart at all, I should never have mentioned it. Extraordinary how mathematics help you to know yourself.'[xxi]), and the even better known scene where, on the beach, Molloy tries over several pages to work out a system for ensuring that his sixteen sucking stones will have been sucked once at least in perfect succession, not one sucked twice, not one left unsucked. [xxii] In Beckett's later works this obsessive 'mathematical' principle, which Herbert Blau refers to as Beckett's 'traumatizing mathematics' [xxiii] underpins the construction of the works themselves. In *Lessness* Beckett creates two random orderings of sixty sentences. The text is divided into six sections of ten sentences, and

Ruby Cohn writes that 'Though the text is almost bare of figures, it compels calculation, and the resultant numbers serve to call attention to human time. The number of sentences per paragraph stops at seven, the number of paragraphs reaches twenty-four, the number of hours in a day. The number of different sentences is sixty.'[xxiv] Beckett used a random method to generate the structure - writing the sentences on separate pieces of the paper, mixing them in a container, and then drawing them out randomly, a la Dada or John Cage. As Rosemary Pountney writes, 'Beyond the man-made or imposed order, Beckett seems to be saying, lies an arbitrary and capricious world of chance.' [xxv]

I have found Daniel Albright most helpful in understanding this aspect of Beckett's work; the search for satisfying forms that at the same time do not imply some sort of successful aesthetic control over chaos or aesthetic redemption (as was perhaps the case with other 'mathematical' modernists such as Mondrian or Webern). Albright writes that 'To reduce all human behaviour to rhythmic forms of tentative vague movements satisfied Beckett. The movements had to have a pattern, because Beckett wanted aimlessness to be intelligible, and the movements had to be uncertain, hesitant because Beckett didn't want the pattern, the strict form, to have any particular aesthetic prestige'.[xxvi]

Visually and spatially it seems that the grid was the analogue for Beckett's 'traumatized mathematics'. The grid is, of course, a recurrent form in modernist painting from Mondrian to Robert Ryman, Agnes Martin, Jasper Johns.[xxvii] In an early fragment 'J M Mime' Beckett instructs that the stage be laid out as crossed grid with 9 points A-H (+O); instructions include 'solutions' (OB, BD, DO, etc) and 'errors.... [xxviii] Albright refers to 'the dialectic of the disfigured grid' as one of Beckett's key figures. [xxix] 'As an old writer' says Albright, 'Beckett found ways of showing that Apollonian formal invariance could be as purposeless and bleak as formlessness itself. In a system with few elements... chaos can be fully displayed in an orderly table of permutations, an orderliness that offers no relief from disorder, for it is one with it.[xxx] This is exactly how I feel about Gervasoni's approach to Beckett's text: he has loaded so many systems into the structure of the piece that in the end the effect for the listener is, as Ligeti once commented about total serialism, the same as chaos. A comment from the workshop has given me a clue as to how to deal with this: since the piece has so many cross-cutting systems at play (quite how many we don't know yet) one visual strategy might be to complicate these - to add another layer of complication that offers a visual analogue for the acoustic systems.

Staging 'Pas si' Part 2

Projections

I have determined four things that I feel the staging of the piece must achieve:

1. It must engage with, enhance even, the tension between the stasis of the stage image and the implied movement of the text.
2. It must engage with the dialectic of spatial and temporal presence and absence.
3. It should make visible in some way, or offer a visual analogue for, the complex concealed systems of the score.
4. Alongside the systems and structures (contradicting them, even?) it must also convey/enhance the effect of 'breathing' that runs throughout the work.

The solution to all this seems to me to be the use of projections as a means of creating a set of active



visual systems, as well as the possibility of creating a virtual space that can play with spatial presence and absence. I decide to ask theatre projection designer Lorna

Heavey to work with us on the project. The starting points I give her are: the image of 'disfigured grids'; the idea of moving shapes that might seem to have some sort of calculative intelligence of their own - as if they were playing their own game to outwit the performers; and the idea of 'breathing'.

Gervasoni indicates in his instructions that the singers are holding the music in their hands. I am uncertain if this is an indication of dramatic intention, or simply an acknowledgment of the difficulty of the piece. Although in every other respect we have undertaken to follow Gervasoni's instructions to the letter, I think that if the singers can manage to learn the piece it will be theatrically much stronger. I ask Frances how much I would have to pay her and Margaret to learn the piece - 'more than you can afford' is her response, 'but we'll give it a go.'

September 20. First company meeting.

Frances has undertaken even more in-depth analysis of the work in her attempt to find a method of leaning it. What she has discovered is that, in addition to the systems already uncovered, the work is divided into seven (unequal) sections, each section based on a different subdivision of the beats into 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. At the hiatus of each section there is what Frances calls a 'hiccup' when the beats stumble, which gives a kind of audible clue of the transition from one section to the next.

This discovery of yet another concealed system seems to confirm my sense of the importance of the 'traumatized mathematics' of the work. Lorna suggests that she should use the sections as means of structuring the visuals, which she will have to make without knowing the 'sound track' of the piece (Frances has made clear that there is no way of making a recording of the whole piece based on a reading of the score - it is simply too difficult). We discuss some of the possible visual analogues for the systems and structures. Lorna has suggested whirring numerical figures. I have recently been to see the Cy Twombly retrospective at Tate Modern and have been struck how in many of his works Twombly combines his frantic scribbles (often a kind of hopeless attempt at erasure of a failed image - hopeless in that the scribbling erasures simply add to the disfigured image - very Beckettian that) with floating rectangles and grids (often themselves vehemently erased or defaced) that are annotated with numbers and figures - as if, like Beckett, Twombly is attempting to impose some impossible mathematical order on the mess he has created. The more violent scribbles remind me of the angry crunches of Gervasoni's ill-tempered accordion.

Two works by Twombly that struck me especially were the Treatise on the Veil paintings of 1968/1970. Austere works in which Twombly creates a sombre grey base on which he draws in white, like chalk on a blackboard. The drawings, of measured rectangles, are like demonstrations of some sort of axiom. The first painting is divided into six panels, and shows the gradual swallowing up of the rectangles where they meet edges of the panels - a very Beckettian diminution, which also implies some sort of temporal passage from panel to panel - both movement and stasis.

We discuss the idea of grids again, and Lorna suggests that perhaps each section should start from a grid as a kind of visual punctuation, and as a kind of attempted restoration of order.

Costumes: Who are these people? We have discussed whether we should indicate some sort of real-world situation (e.g., perhaps the accordionist is wearing a lab coat, as if she were conducting some sort of experiment). But all the way through my instinct is for abstraction, and to locate the performers in a theatrical here and now that is indeterminate. It seems to be almost a cliché to dress the performers in black, but if they are barefooted their faces and hands and feet will stand out against the black costumes, and black is effectively neutral. Costume designer Tina Waugh has made bunched skirts for the two singers which suggest that they are slightly hobbled. Kseninja wears tight black jeans, which suit her slightly gamine look, and makes her more gender unspecific relative to Frances and Margaret. Frances and Margaret are a similar height, build and age, which makes them visibly plausible as two emanations of the same being.

November 13. DMCE Colloquium, Paris.

Our work on the Paris presentation has been interrupted by my suffering an unexpected heart attack in October. We are able to show about 7 minutes of the work, with some first sketches for the projections. I have seen some of Lorna's ideas on the computer screen, but there is no way of knowing how these will translate as projections in space. The most valuable aspect of this stage is in seeing how the projections work in performance.

Lorna has created sequences of moving horizontal and vertical lines; the verticals are rather like bar codes that can bunch and separate, creating a curtain-like effect that reveals and conceals virtual spaces. This

spatial effect works well - it locates the performers in some kind of vertiginous space that is never stable - hinting at glimpses of a spatial beyond that are repeatedly denied or closed off. These glimpses are analogous to the moments of melodic togetherness in which the singers suddenly find themselves, almost to their surprise, that are like little epiphanies. The video is projected onto floor, walls and the performers themselves, and on the floor the lines seem to be in some kind of play with the steps of the singers: at times the columns of light delineate virtual boxes in which the performers seem to be separated from each other; at other times they find themselves momentarily in the same space. The space is in constant flux, and despite the use of verticals and horizontals throughout, at times crossing to create transitory grid patterns, the images have a kind of organic life - the expansion and contraction of the vertical lines echo the bellows of the accordion.

What is clear is that the projections work best when they maintain the illusion of space. The recurrent fixed grid that returns at the beginning of each section actually flattens and deadens the space. We must lose this.

It is also clear that the movement of the lines needs to be erratic and unpredictable - as soon as the pace becomes too steady they become simply distracting - one somehow becomes mesmerised. They need to imply some sort of wilful, capricious consciousness at work, as erratic as the stuttering of the singers or the arbitrary crunches of the accordion.

Watching the T & M production in Paris (very different from our approach) has given us the privilege of being to hear the whole piece all the way through - something we haven't managed to achieve ourselves. There is a clear development as the piece progresses: the accordion part gets less melodic and cajoling, and the crunch-like chords become increasingly dominant, until the accordion is playing nothing else but these galumphing crunches. From this I suggest to Lorna that as the speed of musical events increases the visuals also need to become increasingly turbulent and disorienting. Gervasoni describes the piece to us as 'a crescendo to infinity'; the visuals must find this crescendo too.

After seeing these performances I also think that perhaps the text of the poem needs to be projected. Gervasoni has done everything he can to ensure that the text is inaudible. The score is written phonetically, the intention of which is, I suspect, to dissuade the singers from trying to convey the meaning of the words. But at the same time, I think that it's important that the audience know what the text is, otherwise their attention will be distracted by the need to try and hear what is being said. Another poem from Mirlitonades gives the clue here: 'écoute-les s'ajouter les mots aux mots sans mot les pas aux pas un á un'. [xxxix] This is obviously the partner poem to 'pas á pas', and makes clear Beckett's equation of words and steps, writing and walking. We will introduce the words *les mots aux mots*, *un á un*, additively, as they are sung, at the beginning of each new section, so that the audience knows from the start that all will be revealed eventually.

February 27 2009. Performance of the finished work at the Beckett and Music Symposium at University of Sussex.

Frances has said that she cannot be certain if she and Margaret will have learned the whole piece by the time of the performance. I am confident that they will do so, and they do (just!).

The studio theatre at Sussex has a black cyclorama. Lorna has suggested that her projection designs will look better on white, so we have hired a white cyclorama and spent most of one afternoon putting it up. The result is disastrous - the projections do indeed read better, but the illusion of space is lost; what seemed to be dark recesses opening to infinity have become dead white cloth, and the singers are flattened out against the bright backdrop, instead of hovering in an indeterminate space. We decide to return to the black drapes and laboriously dismantle the whites.

We have pushed the idea of restraint with the costumes; I have suggested some Vivienne Westwood straps tying the singers' arms to their bodies, but Tina has taken this a step further so that their arms are now in extended sleeves that tie behind them, like straightjackets. Tina has also attached some tiny reading lights to their costumes so that the singers are now lit only by these lights, Ksenija by the light reflected off her music stand, and the projections. Now they really seem to hover in the space.

The performance is shown to an audience of Beckett specialists who have just spent two days discussing Beckett's relationship to music in a symposium. The work was shown to them without any introduction or contextualisation, so their very acute responses seem to be a valuable guide as to whether we achieved our aims:

I thought this was a great piece and a breathtaking experience. I only thought it rather short: it takes you so far away that it's a bit of a shock when it's over. The way the accordion seemed to soak up the vocal sounds is particularly uncanny: it seemed to become more alive than the two vocalists, not least in the way it combined both characters (reverse ventriloquism?). The sparseness of the production was also very effective: the moment one of the singers turned to face the other (who was still facing away) was a genuine dramatic climax. Obviously, the lighting contributed a lot too: I suppose it created some kind of shadow-world which made you wonder about the status of the singers (revenants?) which is entirely apposite given the text and the vocal production/voicing by the accordion mentioned above. - The barred lighting united the singers and musicians in a performance plane that abolished the boxiness of the stage area and transformed the performance space into a visual equivalent of the plosive sound world of Beckett's mirlitonade. Finally, the use of the text itself: the gently assertive unscrolling of the poem line by line so that only the final line and the whole poem was revealed in the final moments of the setting was a superb *mene mene tekel upharsin* which rather than a prediction of doom was an assertion of the perseverance of this step by step work obstinément. I very much liked the use of space (or tension in the small space articulated), and also the projections. Having the text gradually disclosed worked for me, as did the echoing of the accordion squeezebox movement and the (barely) steps of the singers in the projected vertical lines moving in and out across the space. This might have driven me crazy if the piece was much longer, but the lighting achieved a true Beckettian tension between movement and stasis, and the patterning of the lights hinted at structure while being so intricate as to be impossible to pin down.' The black 'straightjackets' and the cage-like vertical stripes of light perfectly conveyed the sense of confinement and limitation. I also loved the effect when the stripes as if 'condensed' behind the singers, which reminded me of a sort of a spectrogram reacting to the pitch of the voice. The projections created a strange and ambiguous labyrinth. The development of the 'grille', the grid of light in Paris and the evolution into an even more sophisticated but still 'impoverished' moving grid system in Sussex for the final performance: this was very interesting work and well done. These 'lines' of light gliding on the black curtain wall behind the performers had something of another 'breathing' effect. The piece pushes the listener in a strange feeling of tension from the very beginning when the first sound is played/sung. What worked out well too, was the integration, step by step, of the words of the poem as they come along, onto the background curtain. As Gervasoni in a way follows their appearance and order in the poem, while often breaking them down into bare sounds within the different parts of the poems as the whole goes on, it was probably very helpful for most of the listeners to get them visualized. Integrating it this way in the performance seems a very elegant solution to the question: 'what to do with the text?'

[i] Samuel Beckett and Music, ed. by Mary Bryden (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).[ii] Stefano Gervasoni, Parola - Concerto pour alto - Due poesie francesi d'Ungaretti - Due poesie francesi di Rilke - Due poesie francesi di Beckett, Musique Française d'Aujourd'hui, Radio France, Septembre 1997.[iii] Samuel Beckett, 'Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit' in Samuel Beckett: Poems, Short Fiction Criticism, The Grove Centenary Edition Volume IV, ed. by Paul Auster (New York: Grove Press, 2006), pp.555-563 (p.556).[iv] Samuel Beckett, Trilogy (London: Calder & Boyars, 1959), p.382.[v] Alan Schneider, 'Alan Schneider directs Rockaby', in Directing Beckett, ed. by Lois Oppenheim (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp.13-19 (p.17).[vi] Mary Bryden, 'Beckett and the Sound of Silence', in Samuel Beckett and Music, ed. by Mary Bryden (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp.21-46 (p.37).[vii] Lawrence E. Harvey, Samuel Beckett Poet and Critic (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp.14-15.[viii] Quoted in Bryden, 'Beckett and the Sound of Silence', p.36.[ix] Ruby Cohn, Just Play: Beckett's Theater (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.31. [x] Quoted in Shane Weller, A Taste for the Negative: Beckett and Nihilism (London: Legenda - MHRA and Maney Publishing, 2005), p.1.[xi] Russell Smith, 'Beckett, Negativity and Cultural Value', <http://www.samuel-beckett.net/smith.html> [accessed March 15 2009] (para. 1). [xii] Quoted in Weller, p.117.[xiii] David Pattie, 'Space, Time and Self in Beckett's Late Theatre', Modern Drama, Vol.43 No.3, p.10.[xiv] Pattie, p.1.[xv] See his comments in 'Proust', Samuel Beckett, Proust, and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit (London, John Calder, 1987), p.92.[xvi] Catherine Laws, 'Beckett - Feldman - Johns' in Beckett at 100: Revolving It All, ed. by Linda Ben-Zvi and Angela Moorjani (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 230-245 (p.233). [xvii] Cited in Guy Debrok, 'The Word Man and the Note Man: Morton Feldman and Beckett's Virtual Music', in Samuel Beckett and the Arts: Music, Visual Arts, and Non-Print Media, ed. by Lois Oppenheim (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1999), pp. 67-82 (p.72).[xviii] Bryden, 'Beckett and the Sound of Silence', p. 31.[xix] Ruby Cohn, A Beckett Canon, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p.345.[xx] Beckett, Trilogy, p. 84.[xxi] Trilogy, pp.29-30.[xxii] Trilogy, pp. 64-67.[xxiii] Herbert Blau, 'Apnea and True Illusion: Breath(less) in Beckett', in Beckett at 100: Revolving It All, ed. by Linda Ben-Zvi and Angela Moorjani (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.35-53, p.40.[xxiv] Ruby Cohn, Back to Beckett (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), p.265.[xxv] Rosemary Pountney, Theatre of Shadows: Samuel Beckett's Drama 1956-76: From All that Fall to Footfalls (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988), p.16.[xxvi] Daniel Albright, Beckett and Aesthetics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945), p.47.[xxvii] See Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids', in Rosalind Krauss, The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths (Cambridge Mass and

London: MIT Press, 1986), pp.8-32.[xxviii] Pountney, pp.12-13.[xxix] Albright, p.113.[xxx] Albright, p.156.[xxxi] Samuel Beckett, *Mirlitonnades* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1978), p.34.