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Routledge
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Theatre and Performance Design

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rdes20

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To cite this article: Chloé Duane (2022) The listening chamber: experiencing scenography in Pan Pan's *All That Fall*, Theatre and Performance Design, 8:3-4, 152-169, DOI: 10.1080/23322551.2022.2139487

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/23322551.2022.2139487

THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE DESIGN
2022, VOL. 8, NOS. 3–4, 152–169
https://doi.org/10.1080/23322551.2022.2139487

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how scenography, specifically the visual-aural-spatial elements of a performance, shapes the response of an audience by acting as either a guiding element to a performance or its primary meaning. Through the case study of Pan Pan Theatre's *All That Fall* (2011) in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, this article investigates how the sound, lighting and spatial designs exploit the audience's embodied responses. In conjunction with in-depth performance analysis, this article will utilise audience feedback and theatre practitioner interviews in order to investigate how scenography organises the relationship of the audience to the performance through the active foregrounding of perception, as well as demonstrating the evolving theatrical engagements/responses to Beckett's work.

Introduction

Scenography, as Arnold Aronson explains, is defined as the sum total of the spatial, aural and visual components of a performance (Aronson 2017, xiii). These spatial-aural-visual elements shape the response of the audience, acting as either a guiding element to a performance or its primary meaning. In this way, scenography can be understood to organise the relationship of the audience to the performance through the active foregrounding of perception (Aronson 2017, xiii), as scenography is not simply an embellishment to a performance, but a mode of engagement and 'exchange founded on spatial and material relations between bodies, objects and environments' (McKinney and Palmer 2017, 2). The ways in which scenography engages the attention of audiences – through the organisation and transformation of space, through the immersive and distancing effects of sound and through the visual manipulation of lighting – are explored in this article using the case study of Pan Pan Theatre's (PPT's) 2011 stage production of Samuel Beckett's radio play *All That Fall* (*ATF*), first broadcast on the BBC Third Programme in 1957.[1] This article represents a re-focusing of the scenographic lens in order to illuminate the felt, emotional and embodied responses of audiences and offers a fresh view of the broader potential of performance design. This article is informed by seminal research into contemporary scenography such as *The Routledge Companion to Scenography* (2017) edited by Arnold Aronson, and *Scenography Expanded* (2017) edited by Joslin

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McKinney and Scott Palmer, as well as key texts from Beckett studies such as Ulrika Maude's *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (2009) and *Samuel Beckett and BBC Radio* (2017) edited by David Addyman, Mathew Feldman and Erik Tonning.

Through detailed performance analysis, this article will investigate, from a phenomenological perspective, how PPT's artistic directors, Gavin Quinn and Aedín Cosgrove, constructed a theatrical space that would 'concentrate the audience member' and 'whereby the audience would not miss any word' (Quinn as quoted in Tubridy 2018, 70). This phenomenological understanding of scenography is influenced by *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), in which Merleau-Ponty elucidates that our entire experience of the world is embodied and that this embodiment frames each perception and thought, including audience relationships to theatrical events. Merleau-Ponty's work became a common reference point in theatre and performance studies in the 1980s and 1990s, and has since been used to frame scholarly discussion of corporeal and audience responses. This article argues that the audience is encompassed within this 'listening chamber' (Quinn as quoted in Tubridy 2018, 70), which generates an immersive space in and from which the audience experiences the work of art, guided by visual and aural components. These components, I suggest, include a lighting design that both soothes and aggravates the senses, and a sound design that prompts physical responses from audience members. As a result of *ATF*'s origins as Beckett's first radio play, this article will also seek to explore questions regarding what Cosgrove calls the 'mind space' (Crawley 2016), which this research addresses as the individual and internal visualisation of the play's narrative, as well as exploring questions of liveness, such as what this performance achieves by being on stage rather than on the radio.

In addition to a detailed performance analysis of PPT's scenographic design, this article's methodology draws on a range of performance reviews and audience feedback, as well as relying on my own experience as an audience member of this production at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin on 12 February 2016. Laura Ginters observes in *About Performance* that 'spectators have historically been the least studied and the most generalised of all participants' (2010, 7). This article seeks to challenge this historical generalisation of the audience that Ginters details, especially within Beckett studies – for example, there has been a limited exploration of the audience in Beckett studies, with notable exceptions from Herbert Blau (1990) and Stanton B. Garner (1994), and very little written regarding contemporary, twenty-first-century productions of Beckett's works and their audiences. This exploration of the audience's embodied responses in PPT's *ATF*, although influenced by Blau and Garner's work, expands their work in accordance with contemporary research methodologies, such as empirical studies, to examine recent performances.

In addition to the pioneering production from PPT, which opened up new methods of approaching scenography for the company and other contemporary theatre practitioners, *ATF* has been chosen as a case study for this investigation due to its contemporary resurgence, both on stage and on the radio, as well as the play's long-standing legacy of technological innovation. At the roots of this innovation is collaboration, as well as a careful consideration of how to shape the response of audiences, as I will outline in the subsequent section on Beckett and the BBC, which demonstrates how the historical and technological origins of the play both inform and are reconfigured by contemporary theatre practitioners such as PPT.

Beckett and the BBC

All That Fall was written for the experimental Third Programme after the writer was approached by Cecilia Reeves in the Paris office of the BBC in 1956. John Morris, the controller of the Third Programme, wrote after a meeting with Beckett that he 'got the impression that he [Beckett] has a very sound idea of the problems of writing for radio and that we can expect something pretty good' (as quoted by Tonning 2017, 67). Beckett wrote to Aidan Higgins on 6 July 1956 describing the soundscape of this piece:

> Have been asked to write a radio play for the 3rd and am tempted, feet dragging and breath short and cartwheels and imprecations from the Brighton Rd to Foxrock station and back, insentient old mares in foal being welted by the cottagers and the Devil tottered in the ditch – boyhood memories. (Beckett 2012, 632–633)

ATF is set in the community of Boghill on the outskirts of Dublin, Ireland. It begins with the journey of the elderly female protagonist, Maddy Rooney, to Boghill railway station on a Saturday morning to meet her husband, Dan. During her laboured excursion, Maddy encounters a range of locals on the road (including Christy with his hinny and cart, Mr Tyler on his bicycle and Mr Slocum in his car) with whom she discusses her ill health, as well as that of their relatives. Once Maddy reaches the station, aided by a lift from Mr Slocum, she discovers that her husband's train has been unexplainedly delayed. Eventually, the train arrives, and the couple begin their long and arduous walk home. During this walk, Dan seems unwilling to reveal the reason for the train's delay despite Maddy's repeated questioning of him. In the final moments of the play, Jerry, a small boy who assists the blind Dan at the train station, reveals to Maddy that the train delay was caused by a child falling onto the track. Dan's involvement in the child's death, as well as his reasons for almost complete silence on the subject, are left ambiguous and unclear. Beckett's script, as many scholars have suggested, evokes a de-naturalised soundscape – a chorus of unnatural farm animals suggests an initial rural landscape, a litany of strange noises at the train station then emerges, followed, finally, by an arrangement of seemingly on-demand and uncanny sounds on the journey back at the end of the day. The strange, de-naturalised soundscape, as Everett Frost suggests, is due to the fact that the 'audience experiences Maddy in the act of experiencing the world — her consciousness, and therefore her existence — coming into being in the act of perception' and that the 'sounds (or, for that matter, the other characters) are the way they are because that is the way that Maddy Rooney experiences them' rather than how they are in reality (Frost 2007, 10).

To capture the de-naturalised corporeality of 'the feet dragging and breath short and cartwheels' that the narrative suggests, the BBC used technical innovations which are regarded as seminal in the development of radio drama in the UK, leading directly to the founding of the BBC's innovative and hugely influential Radiophonic Workshop in 1958 (Laws 2017, 109). In *Samuel Beckett and BBC Radio* (2017), a timely text exploring the production practices of the BBC regarding Beckett, Catherine Laws explores the limited role of the writer with respect to the realisation of his soundscape on the radio at this time:

> Beckett's scripts certainly do reveal a concern with the specifics of radio, but the gap between this conceptual starting point and the actual process of sound production is considerable, due to issues of technical know-how and Beckett's distance from the hands-on experimentation that took place in the recording studio. (Laws 2017, 105)

This is echoed by Erik Tonning in 'Meditating Modernism' (2017), who states that Beckett was willing to accept the advice of radio professionals as he felt he could offer 'no more than an amateur's statement of what is common radio practice' (Beckett 2012, 656).[2] Beckett was kept informed of the production of his radio play by Donald McWhinnie from mid-December 1956 until its broadcast on 13 January 1957.[3] McWhinnie was particularly interested in exploring the French focus on the electronic manipulation of concrete sound and Pierre Schaeffer's concept of the 'acousmatic' which involves divorcing sound from its original context through recording, thus affording the listener a phenomenological experience through listening (see Laws 2017, 119). McWhinnie's objective in creating a soundscape that resembled music through its rhythmic patterning, for example, resulted in the BBC being pushed to its technical limits as some sound effects had to be worked on tape machines, while others could only be created on gramophone records from the BBC's Sound Effects Library. This was made more difficult by the differing starting point of the BBC's discs: 'some […] played from the middle outwards (rather than the pick-up working inwards from the edge of the disc): [Desmond] Briscoe writes about learning to create a complex sound picture by operating six or eight turntables at once, some spiralling inwards and some outwards' (Laws 2017, 127).[4] McWhinnie's innovative techniques 'consolidate[d] the underlying rhythm, and […] merge[d], imperceptibly, the musical and realistic elements of the play' (McWhinnie 1959, 136) in order to offer a specific focus for Beckett's concerns with questions of presence and absence, self and other, mind and body, the imagination and the real. These thematic considerations were explored through McWhinnie's dissolution into a symbolic soundscape as the play progresses. For example, Maddy's footsteps transform from realistic sounds in the opening section to abstract, symbolic reverberations in the closing sections. In more recent years, the sonic landscape of McWhinnie's realism and symbolism has been reimagined in a range of influential theatre productions that seek to explore Beckett's thematic exploration, while simultaneously staying faithful to the soundscape that changed the trajectory of radio in the UK.

Influential productions from 2001 to 2015

There are relatively few productions of *ATF*, especially staged readings or performances, that took place before the turn of the millennium (Knowlson 2008). The reason for this was partly Beckett's strong aversion to adapting it for the stage and screen, rejecting the likes of Ingmar Bergman, Sir Laurence Olivier and Alan Schneider, insisting that the play was written only for the ears (Alston and Welton 2017). Since 2001, there have been many influential productions that have acted as an impetus for theatre companies, such as Prime Cut's staged reading of *ATF* which took place at the Waterfront Hall Studio in Belfast in 2006 starring Stella McCusker as Maddy. This production, possibly the UK and Irish premiere of *ATF* on stage, was described by director Frost as 'a dramatic reading augmented with the actual production of sound effects – [this] seemed an acceptable "no frills" middle ground between a fully dramatised performance as a stage play and a straight dramatic reading of the text. This is what I have come to refer to as a "staged reading"' (Frost 2007, 10). William Gaskill, artistic director of the Royal Court between 1965 and 1972, produced *ATF* and *Catastrophe* with final year students at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in 2008.[5] This live-actor production was intended to

gesture towards the visualisation of the auditory landscape, rather than detract from it. Sean Lawlor, in his review of the production, writes of the gestural aesthetic which added to the act of listening:

> The stripped-down representation of the cart was a sure way of establishing, from the outset, a gestural aesthetic which, as in a Noh play, invited the audience to engage its imagination in a way that paralleled the experience of listening to radio. (Lawlor 2009, 173–174)

Over four years later in 2012, Michael Gambon and Eileen Atkins as Dan and Maddy, respectively, starred in *ATF* originally at the 70-seat Jermyn Street Theatre, London, before the production transferred to the Arts Theatre, London. This production, directed by Trevor Nunn, was at the time heralded as the play's UK premiere. The actors, led by Atkins and Gambon, performed with scripts in their hands beneath low-hanging microphones (the minimalistic studio set was rendered by Cherry Truluck, who also designed the costumes).[6] Frost writes that 20 years after first seeking permission to stage *ATF*, Nunn finally succeeded in 'liberating Beckett's radio play' (Frost 2013, 245–246), thus launching the play from the fringes of the avant-garde into a popular production that 'played for laughs' (Frost 2013, 251). In 2015, four years after PPT's production, Out of Joint (now known as Stockroom) staged *ATF* at the Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival.[7] Out of Joint's scenographic design focused on spatial and auditory perception, rather than ocular, to accentuate the audience's experience of listening. Within this production, the audience is asked to wear a blindfold, while listening to a soundscape that is composed of recorded and live elements, the latter of which are provided by actors who sit and walk among the audience. Despite the vastly different approaches to concept and design, these productions carefully considered the scenographic elements of staging a radio play, from the gestural aesthetic of Gaskill's production to the installation of a radio studio on the set of Nunn's production. In the following sections, this article will outline how PPT's production of *ATF* offers a qualitatively different audience experience to these live stagings and radio broadcasts of this play.

Pan Pan Theatre and Beckett

Since its foundation in 1993, PPT has staged over 43 productions under the direction of co-artistic directors Cosgrove and Quinn. These productions have been based on either original materials or established writings for which they provide a new expression based on the ideas within the texts.[8] Cosgrove and Quinn's engagement with the works of Beckett began during the first Beckett Festival in Dublin in 1991, where they gained first-hand experience working with David Warrilow and Jean Martin, the latter of whom was the first actor to play Lucky in *En Attendant Godot* (Knowlson 1996, 386). The Beckett Festival, produced by the Gate Theatre Dublin in conjunction with Trinity College, presented 19 of Beckett's stage plays.[9] In more recent years, Cosgrove has worked as a designer with director Sarah Jane Scaife of Company SJ on projects including *Beckett in the City* (2009), *Rough For Theatre I* and *Act Without Words II* (2013). In 2006, as part of the Samuel Beckett Centenary Residency programme, Scaife and Cosgrove travelled to Malaysia and Greece to produce Beckett's *Come and Go*, *Rough for Theatre I*, *Act Without Words II*, *Footfalls* and *Nacht und Träume*.[10] After visually alluding to *Endgame* in their 2010 production of *Playing the Dane* (an adaptation of *Hamlet*), PPT

developed a series from Beckett's radio plays that has seen international success, including *ATF* (2011), *Embers* (2013) and *Cascando* (2016). In this series, PPT turned their focus to an examination of Beckett's work to create unique environments that prioritised audience experience, and specifically the act of listening. This is achieved through the creation of listening environments where innovative and technologically enhanced scenography re-enforces the act of listening at performances in theatrical and non-theatrical spaces. PPT has continued to reimagine a broad range of Beckett's *oeuvre*, including *Quad* in 2013, and most recently in 2020 with *What Is the Word*, described on their website as an 'audio cinematic experience', but their initial specialism came in the form of stage adaptations of the radio plays, beginning with *ATF*.[11] *ATF* was first staged at the Project Arts Centre, Dublin in 2011, before touring internationally to notable locations such as the Sydney Theatre, Australia (2014) and the Barbican, London (2015). In the following sections, I will explore PPT's installation of a listening chamber on the stage of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, in 2016.[12] The installation of this listening chamber, which facilitates a dynamic relationship between the audience and the scenography, is also explored in relation to its fluid boundary between theatre and installation, which I argue situates the audience at the centre of this performance.

Space: a performance installation

PPT's pioneering *ATF* focuses on the dynamic scenographic relationship between sound and lighting in a space that is created to re-centre the felt, emotional and embodied responses of audiences. The stage space of the Abbey Theatre, which is ordinarily

Figure 1. The seating at Pan Pan's *All That Fall*. Copyright © Pan Pan Theatre.

where the audience would view the action of a performance, is repurposed as a seating area with 60 white rocking chairs adorned with skull-emblazoned cushions. These black cushions, which emphasise *ATF*'s central themes of death and mortality, are contrasted with the rocking chair's familiar association with old age – two themes that converge in Beckett's text in the form of Maddy's lamenting for her deceased daughter who died as a child. Concurrently, the use of rocking chairs is reminiscent of Beckett's inclusion of a rocking chair in his late play, *Rockaby* (1980) – a device that allows the image of the 'prematurely old' woman dressed in a black 'lacy high-necked evening gown' (Beckett 2006, 433) to rock in and out of perception, due to the position of the spotlight. In *ATF*, Maddy similarly struggles with perception, as evident in her lambasting of Miss Fitt, a woman at the train station: 'Am I then invisible, Miss Fitt? Is this cretonne so becoming to me that I merge into the masonry?' (Beckett 2006, 182). Unlike Maddy, the audience at this performance is rarely invisible.

Beckett's thematic concerns with invisibility and perception are brought to the fore in this set design, as the audience members rock forward and back in their rocking chairs, thus impacting the perception of others, which adds not only to the communal aspect of this performance, but also to the deliberate staging of the audience as a social sculpture – a concept that will be developed further in the subsequent sections. These wooden chairs, positioned at seemingly arbitrary angles, are contrasted against the softness of PPT's set design. The floor of the Abbey stage is covered by a plush, colourful children's carpet depicting roads, trees and buildings. The 'walls' are made of heavy, black curtains which enclose the space from the backstage and the auditorium to create an intimate and soft chamber, where sound is absorbed into layers of fabric. Reflecting on their initial reaction to the space, one audience member described the design, in distinctively Beckettian terms, as 'womb-like' where 'everything appeared soothing, soft and welcoming' (Questionnaire response 4, 2021).[13] The chamber is immersed in light by low-hanging household light bulbs and a wall of floor-to-ceiling lights (stage left), that change saturation depending on the tone of the audio recording. When the performance begins, recorded voices emanate through speakers that are strategically placed around the room for audience immersion. PPT's *ATF* as Angela Butler elucidates, 'presents the audience with a multiform performance space in which programmed sound, diegetic lighting design, and a sculpture formed by audience members are the main points of information, as opposed to a set stage with physically present actor bodies' ensuring that 'the regular conventions for communication with, and comprehension of, the performance space are altered to encourage affective encounter, that is, a largely "felt" comprehension of the play' (Butler 2018, 737).

Patrick Lonergan noted his initial reaction to encountering the unfamiliar spatial and seating arrangements in his review for the original Project Arts Centre staging, by stating, 'we're confronted not with a conventional performance area but with a room full of rocking-chairs' (Lonergan 2011). In Anthony Uhlmann's review of the production in Sydney, PPT's design is compared to the work of James Turrell and Jim Campbell whose 'contemporary visual art […] use[s] light and space to shape the perceptions of audience members by isolating and stimulating particular senses' (Uhlmann 2014). The establishment of an enclosed space, where audience perception is affected through the engagement or isolation of senses, may well work as a description of PPT's aesthetic as well as the artistic practice of Turrell or Campbell. But this scenographic design is also in dialogue with a contemporary performance context, including

Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's *The Forty Part Motet* (2001) or Fuel Theatre's production of David Rosenberg's *Ring* (2015) – both of which explore sound intimacy with the audience, as well as investigating how sound can be used to construct space. The intersections between performance and installation art have been well documented, as well as the appeal of Beckett's work for adaptation in contemporary art (Tubridy 2018). The word 'installation' is used consistently throughout reviews of PPT's production, but often in conjunction with a qualifier. In Lyn Gardner's review, she describes the production as 'Gavin Quinn's intriguing installation-*style* production' (Gardner 2013; my emphasis). Similarly, Judith Wilkinson highlights Neil Cooper's review in the *Herald Scotland* where he defines it *'as a kind of* installation' (as quoted in Tubridy 2018, 68; my emphasis). Quinn's artistic vision for the site involved the audience experiencing it in a 'corporeal way, because they are actually part of the installation, part of the performance' (Walsh 2011). In these three examples, it is evident that there is an acknowledgement of this production's fluidity – it is not just an installation, but similarly it is not just a performance. In *Installation Art*, Claire Bishop defines installation art as a site that encompasses the viewer, generating an immersive space in and from which the viewer experiences the work of art (Tubridy 2018, 69). Bishop argues that the viewer is central to the development of installation art, since the art 'addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space', emphasising the 'insistence on the literal presence of the viewer as arguably the key characteristic of installation art' (Bishop 2005, as quoted by Tubridy 2018, 69). PPT's multisensory environment addresses the viewer as a literal presence in the space and surrounds the audience – bodies feel the rumbling of the words, and eyes follow the individual lights as though they were a physical actor. The enclosed space of this performance is integral to the work, and PPT creates an immersive space where the audience experiences the art through sensory perception. The importance of this space to the performance is evident from audience feedback, as one audience member at the Abbey Theatre performance in 2016 stated:

> The situation of this performance – literally on the Abbey stage – was interesting, as it gestured towards putting the audience at the absolute centre of the performance. I'd never been to anything like this before, and although I have subsequently attended similar performances, they don't seem to have attained the same power. (Questionnaire response 1, 2021)

For audiences, this combination of installation art and scenography offers a unique theatrical experience which is the outcome of atmosphere, embodied immersion, and of altered viewpoint.[14]

Central to the theatrical and installation features of this production is listening. In order to make the act of listening the focus of this piece, Quinn conceived of an environment in which the act of listening was central: 'to concentrate the audience member, to make a space – an installation – a kind of listening chamber whereby the audience would not miss any word' (Quinn 2015, as quoted in Tubridy 2018, 70). Further elaborating on this point in an interview with Trish McTighe, Quinn stated that:

> our only purpose in making this piece […] was simply to give people the time and the environment to listen to this piece in a very dreamlike or a controlled way. You enter the space and you get an opportunity to listen to this radio play, and not miss a moment, allowing yourself to be totally immersed in it. […] The spectators are really part of it. You become aware of people listening to it as you're listening to it; it's a private yet shared experience. (McTighe 2013)

PPT's listening chamber contains only scenographic elements that enhance the audience's state of listening – lighting that assists with narrative interpretation, sound that brings the audience on an imaginative journey and an audience that acts as a silent corporeal presence. Beckett explicitly stated in a letter to Keith Johnstone, a British director, on 7 March 1958 that 'a theatre stage is an area of maximum verbal presence and maximum corporeal presence' (Dudeck 2013, 39). PPT's space is a combination of maximum verbal presence from the recorded voices that fill the space and maximum corporeal presence that manifests in the physicality of the audience, and, more obliquely, in the ghostly presence of the speakers' bodies. Through the act of listening in this space, the audience can become a communal entity, a micro-society that is listening together. The presence of the audience together in a communal setting such as this may enhance the sense of being in it together (Pearson 2017, 298). This, in essence, creates a sense of witnessing – we saw it, we were there. This form of witnessing is heightened through the play's ambiguous ending where we learn of a child's death on the train lines. The audience becomes a symbolic jury, who, after listening to Dan's evasiveness, individually decide whether they consider the man guilty or not guilty of the crime. The communal aspect is also underlined by the lack of other bodies populating the space – we are the only ones to be in it together. It is this communal gathering, Quinn states, that decentres preconceived ideas of theatricality and radio performances:

> […] having everyone there, listening together, in a specially designed space; in this kind of pan-geometric space. And it's sort of de-centering the idea perhaps of a radio play, but also de-centering the experience of coming into an auditorium front on and sitting watching a play with a group of actors. In this situation, it's still a live experience, as the audience enter, and get a ticket, and the time goes by, and they are together breathing and listening. (Walsh 2011)

Each audience member is staged as part of the installation as they populate the space, listening and breathing together. As one audience member at the production stated, the presence of the audience was undeniable:

> I tried to disengage from my surroundings and kept my eyes closed at times but found one or two fellow audience members were rocking in their chairs, and this was somewhat distracting. (Questionnaire response 3, 2021)

As an audience member at this production, I found myself looking to the audience members around me for confirmation of my physical reaction – did they too feel drowsy, or alarmed, or scared? Rather than distracting, the audience became for me a source of vindication as their bodies also responded in voluntary and involuntary movements to the scenography. This emphasis on the body – as both sculpture and social being – 'enables us to reconsider elements vital to his [Beckett's] theatre: the experience of the body in space in terms of duration and endurance; the role of repetition, reiteration and rehearsal; and the visceral interplay between language and the body' (Tubridy 2014, 49–50). It is here that PPT's production intersects with theatre: as without a corporeal presence to process the information of sounds and images, theatre is not performance. The body of the listener in *ATF* is not a passive recipient of art, but its active producer; the bodies perform for one another, as non-matrixed representations that do not represent any character other than themselves, within their environment (Johnson and Heron 2020, 33).

Sound: amplifying perception

When a train enters the station in PPT's *ATF*, Jimmy Eadie's sound design reverberates up through the floor and into the chests of the audience. As a breath of wind rolls, a trail of lights comes alive. Footsteps fill the whole space. The discoveries that sound has a theatrical materiality and theatre has a sonic materiality have been associated with the twentieth-century modernist and avant-garde movements (see Curtin 2014), while the realisation that sound might be 'an actor in the drama of things' can be attributed to 'postdramatic' theatre (Ovadija 2013, 9). Recent books such as Ross Brown's *Sound*, Lynne Kendrick's *Theatre Aurality* (2017), David Roesner's *Sound (Design)* (2015), George Home-Cook's *Theatre and Aural Attention* (2015) and Kendrick and David Roesner's *Theatre Noise* (2011) focus on broadening and diversifying the discourse of sound and aurality. In doing so, these authors are arguing for a re-evaluation of sound – sound design, much like scenography more generally, is no longer a secondary effect added as embellishment to live bodies or spoken words, but rather it is conceived as a design that can bind our miscellaneous experience of the world. As Gernot Böhme points out, the powerful influence of atmosphere in theatre settings and beyond is derived from the way in which things, especially elements such as light and sound, can 'radiate outwards' and can be 'felt present in space' (Böhme 2013, 5–6). This sense of aliveness creates a 'dreamlike environment' (Barry 2016) in PPT's production, one that has a comfortable and secure atmosphere in which audience members are invited to listen to the soundscape of the play, whilst being led through the action by the scenography, in an atmosphere that encourages comprehension.

In Eadie's pre-recorded sound design, Áine Ní Mhuirí, who portrays Maddy, shifts from a self-deprecating old woman, to local flirt, to affectionately needy wife. Andrew Bennett's recorded performance encapsulates Dan's wry cynicism, and the undertow of tender sympathy coupled with his denial of the child's death on the tracks. Eadie utilised anechoic recording for this production – a recording technology that enables a recording free from echoes and reverberations (Tubridy 2018, 70). This creates an intimate, concentrated sound without any reflections or distractions: 'It's just the voice. You start with the voice and build' (Walsh 2011). This highly advanced technology allowed Eadie to achieve a much closer, drier sound than the BBC's original 1957 recording. However, the intimacy of the anechoic recording creates a closeness to Maddy, which is comparable to the BBC's production, as it recorded Mary O'Farrell's voice closer to the microphone than it had for any other actor (Laws 2017, 105). According to Eadie, though, the microphone in the BBC production would have been placed in the centre of the studio, thereby picking up all the ambient noise and room reflections along with the actors' voices (Wilkinson 2014, 132). It was important to Eadie to erase the ambient noise and produce a completely 'neutral' edit (Wilkinson 2014, 132) which is delivered to the audience using monophonic sound.

PPT's pre-recorded soundscape exceeds conventional volume for theatre, which solicits physical responses from members of the audience, one of whom stated that the sound design prompted 'something approaching pain (but tinged with awe) when the sound reached its maximum volume' (Questionnaire response 1, 2021). Another audience member stated that they felt 'my body and the ground shaking – I couldn't think straight anymore' (Questionnaire response 6, 2021). Speaking about the sound levels, Eadie has

stated that: 'It might seem like a cheap gag or something hitting people over the head with loud volume … but it wouldn't have had the intensity that we achieved with [out] it […]' (Wilkinson 2014, 134). Eadie elaborates that with such heights of volume he could achieve greater sound pressure levels so that he 'was moving air at you, so you were getting this physical intensity from it' (Wilkinson 2014, 134). This physical intensity towards the audience comes from multiple sources, as oval-shaped speakers are embedded into the black ceiling of the performance space, and into free-standing poles strategically placed throughout the room. The presence of these speakers provides a visual reminder of the medium of sound, but it also allows Eadie to achieve a depth from soundscape throughout the performance space:

> There are eight speakers surrounding the audience and also 4 subwoofers within the room. Each speaker is focused on a certain part of the audience. A lot of time is spent tuning the PA system to the room to get the optimum performance from each speaker, so that the audience can really get a sense of depth within the recording. (Eadie 2016)

The depth of the recording is evident from the play's first moment. A chorus of animal sounds (voiced by human actors) surfaces from the speakers, inviting the audience into a distinctly theatrical atmosphere. These sounds are undeniably human and signal the entry into a sphere detached from reality. Speaking with RTÉ Lyric FM, Daniel Reardan, who plays Mr Tyler, recalled that Quinn requested that all cast members voice the wind and animal sounds.[15] From this collection of sounds, Quinn selected the best ones. This was also McWhinnie's ideal in 1956–7, as only human voices could afford him the strict musicality and unrealism that he wished to achieve, though ultimately Beckett did not approve, stating: '[…] I do not see why the animal utterances by mere humans. […] I may be wrong, but it seems to me a rather gratuitous complication' (Beckett 2011, 687). PPT followed the trajectory of McWhinnie's decision, stating that 'with the actors doing these sounds you can create shifts in tone and create music […] but it also blends better, becoming a bit like a choral piece' (McTighe 2013). When the chorus of animal sounds subsides, Ní Mhuirí's voice rises up from an invisible realm, with distanced footsteps that are reminiscent of someone tapping the microphone before they begin to talk. Eadie's sound design draws on Beckett's vagueness by underscoring each sound as possessing multiple meanings. For example, Lonergan describes Maddy's dragging feet as vivid and realistic while simultaneously sounding like the 'troubled breathing of a body close to death' (Lonergan 2011). As many critics have noted, the unrealistic elements of *ATF* stem from the interpretation that Maddy's journey takes place in her own mind. Frost notes that the emphasis is on her *perception* of the journey (Frost 2006, 130) and Anna McMullan has stated that Beckett uses the radio medium 'to create a world that is simultaneously culturally and historically specific (post-independence middle-class south Dublin, circa the 1930s), and has the vast temporal and imaginative perspective of the fable' (McMullan 2010, 73). Since the journey of the main character is presented ambiguously, the natural sounds are therefore presented unnaturally. This is a common theme across Beckett's radio plays, such as the sound of the sea in *Embers* (1959) which does not correlate to reality. It instead calls to 'an old sound I used to hear, [*Pause*.] It is like another time, in the same place' (Beckett 2006, 258) where we can understand that Henry's father drowned. In other words, PPT, in conjunction with Beckett's aesthetics, makes its audiences 'into very intense listeners […]' (Walsh 2011). It is only through close and intense listening that the audience can deduce that Maddy's journey is

an assemblage of her mental landscape, in this PPT interpretation of the text. Quinn alludes to a need for acute listening during a radio play by Beckett:

> There's a very good book called *Radio Beckett* […] one chapter talks about how in modern Arabic singing they have different words for different types of spectators, and one group of spectators is called 'talented listeners', people who are aware of the codes and have a good knowledge of the art form. (Walsh 2011)[16]

Quinn also acknowledges that this production is 'completed by the audience', and that they deliberately positioned their audience inside a 'pan-geometric' configuration in order that they might feel more part of the work (Walsh 2011). The audience is integral to establishing the shifting trajectory of each of Maddy's conversations on her outbound journey, as well as forming characterisations of each individual based on their manner of speaking. When Maddy encounters Mr Tyler, for example, the rhythm of her speech changes, while Mr Slocum's rapid movement up and down the tonal register, voiced by David Pearse, conveys his growing sense of hysteria and frustration. In essence, without the intense listening of the audiences, the play would not become whole as each theatrical performance is only partially composed when it is presented to the audience.

As a challenge to Clas Zilliacus's suggestion that Beckett employs radio as a medium because of its capacity for 'aural, temporal, nonspatial and uncorporeal' expressions (Zilliacus 1976, 37), Ulrika Maude maintains that radio is not a blind medium (Maude 2009, 50) and is therefore deeply entangled with imagining corporeality.[17] Maude's emphasis is on Beckett's utilisation of bodily sounds to evoke embodiment in the mind of the listener, in the absence of a visually perceptible actor and set. Kim Conner argues that Beckett created a 'radioactive voice', which is 'procreative precisely because of its disembodiment' (Conner 1997, 311). Thus, sound can conjure corporeality in the audience's 'mind space'. Without the body of the actor to anchor a performance, the sound of their voices can transcend the boundaries of time and space. This indistinctness emerges as a result of the recorded aspects of PPT's performances – the voices originated from a live body that is now absent, and the body/voice do not unify in the performances. In short, the audience is occupying two spaces – a mind space and a specifically designed physical space. The mind space is one where the internal visualisation of Beckett's narrative world can be created as assisted by cues from the physical world such as sound, lighting and atmosphere. Additionally, the audience's imagination is made up of a personal bank of information, including memories, scenes, smells, faces and feelings. This results in each reiteration of the imagined landscape of *ATF* differing, as can be noted from the following two instances of audience feedback of this production at the Abbey Theatre:

> I visualised a tree-covered setting in suburban South Dublin, with distinctive local and period features such as particular architectural styles and costumes. (Questionnaire response 1, 2021)

> I imagined a landscape of seemingly endless fields, on either side of a secondary road where grass goes up the centre, on a moderately warm day in Ireland. On one side of the road is a ditch, that seems to threaten Maddy by covering a deep, dry recess which once had a stream, and on the other side of the road is a dishevelled, stone wall. (Questionnaire response 5, 2021)

Just as Maddy's journey reveals her mental landscape consisting of the sounds that she hears and reimagines, the audience enacts a similar process of utilising their personal

and mental landscapes to create a visualisation prompted by Beckett's language and soundscape. PPT's scenographic design invites audiences to become co-creators in the production, as each rendition of the imagined landscape of *ATF* is unique and distinctive.

Lighting: illuminating states of listening in Pan Pan's *All That Fall*

PPT's digitally programmed lighting design appears to the audience in two varieties: overhead, hanging bulbs and a grid of 12 vertical by 14 horizontal built-in wall lights facing the audience. The overhead bulbs radiate from a soothing, pale blue to pale yellow light which is in contrast to the vibrant red-yellow tones that exude from the built-in grid. The lighting, which partly responds to the text and partly responds to the pacing and emotional impact of performance, was designed by Cosgrove to appear as an accompaniment to Beckett's narrative. When the lights fade to a gentle background, audience members at this production have been noted as falling asleep. However, in moments of tension within the text, the lights become interrogative – jolting the audience awake and demanding their attention. One audience member reflected that the light design created the impression of instability, as it 'fluctuated between soothing, soft lighting to distressing, high-intensity lighting – I didn't know what was going to come next' (Questionnaire response 6, 2021). Intermittently throughout the performance, the lighting grid also visually represents scenes from Beckett's text. For example, a long straight line appears when the characters stand on the train platform, and a cross appears during a religious discussion with Miss Fitt. This distinct and shifting lighting design, with its array of vibrant colours, invites the audience to be in a constant state of negotiation with the space they occupy, as conveyed by the audience member who stated that they 'didn't know what was going to come next' (Questionnaire response 6, 2021). Referring to theories of embodied cognition, Stephen Di Benedetto writes that humans are constantly scanning their environment for clues about 'how and to what we ought to respond' such as 'moving lights, bright colors and actions' (Di Benedetto 2017, 72). Manipulating this instinctive response in a performance space provokes a 'mode of engagement [so] that audiences explore what the theatrical event offers' (Di Benedetto 2017, 72).

What gives PPT's lighting design such power is not so much its form as its breadth and scale – the lighting oscillates from pitch darkness to scorching bright. At times the intensity of the brightness forces the audience to instinctively cover their eyes or wince, as I experienced as an audience member at the Abbey Theatre in 2016. This intensity is matched by the soundscape that works in tune with the lighting. When the wind roars through the speakers, for example, drowning out Maddy's tirade, the lights on the downstage wall rush up to meet the sound at full brightness. The intensity of the blinding light and the deafening sound appear to become one, creating a state of synaesthesia in which the audience can hear Maddy's expression and see the roaring wind. This is, of course, an illusion, but an effective one. One audience member reflecting on the relationship between the design elements stated that: 'when the train pulls into the station, the sound and lighting were so intense that I could actually see and feel the train emerging from the wall coming towards me' (Questionnaire response 5, 2021). The power of the performance comes as much from the lighting design as it does from the sound design, and through these scenographic designs PPT ensures that the audience experience this performance physically and imaginatively.

Figure 2. The lighting at Pan Pan's *All That Fall.* Copyright © Pan Pan Theatre.

Cosgrove's lighting design contributes to the audience's sense of mood and atmosphere, consciously and subconsciously, through the audience's knowledge of colour association. The red hues from the lighting grid, for example, can be associated with danger, violence and rage. This lighting grid can also produce an intense, bright light which may trigger a sensory memory of being uncomfortable, or scenes of interrogation or isolation (when considering a spotlight, for example). The blue hues of the overhead lighting, in contrast, may be associated with peace and serenity. As an audience member, the contrasting colours of lights appeared to me, at moments of tension such as the climactic ending of the performance, as though the Abbey's stage had caught fire. This feeling was underlined by the heat emitted from the various lighting sources. The prolific use of yellow tones, in both the overhead lighting and the lighting grid, also references Maddy's meditation on the yellow laburnum – 'There is that lovely laburnum again. Poor thing, it is losing all its tassels' (Beckett 2006, 196), an image that prompted Cosgrove to design the canopy of hanging lights (Tubridy 2018, 71). The instability in the yellow tones (from pale yellow to pale blue, for example) also refers to the instability in the text's landscape, stemming from Maddy's sensual perception of the landscape, rather than an accurate portrayal.

As a result of the lighting design working in conjunction with the seating arrangement, audience reactions are presented as part of the performance at crucial moments. This perception of each other's reactions ensures that the audience are reminded of their own situatedness and their bodies (McMullan 2020, 126) – a physical awareness that may also emerge as a result of the sensory responses to the digitally programmed lighting

and the pre-recorded aspects of the sound design. Concurrently, the audience can be transported into different spaces and bodies as noted from audience responses relating to visualisation. This is referred to as a 'split consciousness' (Chiang 2018, 20), where the audience retreats from the physical world into that of the imagined spectacle. When doing so, Michelle Chiang explains that the audience 'recedes into the background of [their] consciousness' (2018, 20). This immersion into another world can be understood as a fact; the audience is figuratively there, inhabiting the fantasy world created. As a result, a spectator's physical body can respond to both the real, physical world and the imagined environment (Frieze 2016, 62). On a physical level, this provokes sensual impressions that are 'ultimately incommensurable with linguistic expression and only very inadequately describable' yet they form the basis of understanding where the perceived object triggers associations and becomes 'inter-linked with ideas, memories, sensations and emotions' (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 142).

Conclusion

In summary, the audience's reactions are being guided by the scenography; the spatial-aural-visual elements of PPT's production shape the response of the audience, acting as a guiding element in this performance. This use of scenography can be understood as organising the relationship of the audience to the performance through the active foregrounding of perception (Aronson 2017, xiii). In many regards, the lighting of this performance works as a surrogate actor as it assists the audience in their comprehension of the performance and provides a visual source that the audience follow. Gardner echoes this view in her review in *The Guardian*, noting that PPT's use of scenography is 'bleatingly alive' (Gardner 2013). Rather than using live actors, the scenographic design creates a sense of aliveness gleaming out from semi-darkness. Pulsating in the final moments of the play, the wall of lights creates pace and energy as the performance creeps closer and closer to the climactic ending which is signalled by a continuous, blinding intensity from the lighting and the raucous sounds emitted from the speakers:

> Jerry: It was a little child, Ma'am.
> [Mr Rooney *groans*]
> Mrs Rooney: What do you mean, it was a little child?
> Jerry: It was a little child fell out of the carriage, Ma'am. [*Pause*]. On to the line Ma'am. [*Pause*]. Under the wheels, Ma'am. (Beckett 2006, 199)

Even though the interpretation of scenographic signs does not stop, the production does eventually stop issuing them. When the play is over, I observed that the audience of the Abbey Theatre sat in silence waiting for some definitive cue from the actors or space itself that everything was over, that, to quote Clov from *Endgame* (1958), 'it's finished' (Beckett 2006, 93). As the sound is recorded, no actors are present, and the immersive lights remain impassive and motionless; no such cue is forthcoming.

Notes

1. Pan Pan Theatre, founded in 1993 by co-artistic directors Aedín Cosgrove and Gavin Quinn, is a contemporary Irish theatre company. To date, the company has created 43 new theatre and performance pieces and staged performances nationally and internationally.

2. Until recently, there was little literature regarding the collaborative nature of the production process of *ATF*. However, the work of Rosemary Pountney and radio director Everett Frost, along with more recent contributions by Julie Campbell, Ulrika Maude and others, has spurred more detailed considerations of Beckett's radio work and the collaborative practices that took place.
3. McWhinnie was appointed Assistant Head of Drama at the Third Programme in 1953.
4. See Briscoe and Curtis-Bramwell (2013).
5. Gaskill was a seminal figure in the artistic development of the Royal Court Theatre from 1965 onwards, before becoming associate director with Laurence Olivier at the National Theatre and director of Joint Stock with co-founder Max Stafford-Clark.
6. This design also included a red light that flashed on when the 'recording' began and turned off when it ended. A vivid soundscape completed with expertly timed footsteps, animal mews and thunderclaps was provided by designer Paul Groothuis over onstage speakers.
7. This production was later restaged at Wilton's Music Hall, London (2016), the Bristol Old Vic (2016) and then finally at the Arts Theatre in London's West End for five weeks (2016).
8. Examples of PPT's work include a postcolonial interpretation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* named *Mac-Beth 7* (2004), a new work titled *Oedipus Loves You* (2006) inspired by Sigmund Freud and the Oedipus the King plays of Seneca and Sophocles, and J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (2006) set in Beijing and performed in Mandarin.
9. See "All Samuel Beckett Stage Plays Performed: 1991," entry on the RTÉ archive, https://www.rte.ie/archives/2016/0928/819793-beckett-festival/ (accessed 26 November 2020).
10. See http://archive.dublintheatrefestival.com/artists/display.asp?m=&artistID=869 (accessed 16 November 2020).
11. PPT describe *What Is the Word* on their website as an 'audio cinematic experience presenting a curated collection of Samuel Beckett poems'. See https://www.panpantheatre.com/shows/what-is-the-word (accessed 31 January 2021).
12. The Abbey, also known as the National Theatre of Ireland, is a state-subsidised theatre that was founded by playwrights W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory in 1904 (Trotter 2001).
13. Audience questionnaires were circulated online on 15 April 2021. In total, six participants completed the anonymous survey. Each of the six participants are quoted in this article and they have been numbered to differentiate between the submissions.
14. For more research on atmosphere, see Böhme (2013).
15. See https://soundcloud.com/kennethjhickey/pan-pan-theatre-all-that-fall (accessed 3 February 2021).
16. See "Ecstatic Response: The Creative Role of the Listener in Beckett's *Word and Music* and *Cascando*" in Branigan (2008, 215–242).
17. See "Paying Attention to Designed Sound" in Home-Cook (2015, 99–130).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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