

"Timeless Now" in Space: Beckett's Plays via Arendt

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Introduction

Although they cannot be considered to express any political intent, Beckett's plays have the power to affect the minds of those who live in difficult situations such as those under oppression, exploitation, or imprisonment. In *Damned to Fame*, James Knowlson writes about a mixed-race production of *Godot* performed at the Baxter Theatre in the University of Cape Town in 1981 during the time when apartheid had not yet been abolished. Noting that "the Baxter Theatre version has often been portrayed as if it were an explicitly political production," he observes, "What such a reaction showed, however, was that, although the play can in no way be taken as political allegory, there are elements that are relevant to any local situation in which one man is being exploited or oppressed by another."¹

Knowlson also discusses the staging of *Godot* in Lüttringhausen prison near Wuppertal in Germany. He writes that in Lüttringhausen prison *Godot* had been performed by prisoners fifteen times since 1954, and that the play had an electric effect not only on the prisoners who performed the play but also on the prisoners who saw the play. Beckett himself was strongly affected by the letters he received from the Protestant pastor of the prison and a prisoner who performed the play.² This suggests that *Godot* has the power to affect the people who are in a predicament. Indeed, the prisoner wrote in his letter to Beckett, "Your Godot was Our Godot," and explained that "every inmate saw himself and his own predicament reflected in the characters who were waiting for something to come along to give their lives meaning."³

We can also recall the staging of *Godot* in Sarajevo directed by Susan Sontag in August, 1993. It was performed by actors in Sarajevo with twelve candles on the stage, in the situation in which "a UN APC thundering down the street and the crack of sniper fire" were being heard outside the theatre. Sontag recalls this performance in her essay, "Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo." As soon as she was asked, "What play will you do?" the idea of staging *Godot* occurred to her. She writes: "there was one obvious play for me to direct. Beckett's play, written over forty years ago, seems written for, and about, Sarajevo."⁴ But, concerning her plan of staging *Godot*, she was asked, "But isn't this play rather pessimistic?" The question meant, of course, that the play was too depressing for an audience at war, and that it was pretentious or

insensitive to stage *Godot* there as if the representation of despair were redundant for people really in despair. Sontag thinks that those who asked such a question "don't understand at all what it's like in Sarajevo now, any more than they really care about literature and theatre." She continues, "It's not true that what everyone in Sarajevo wants is entertainment that offers them an escape from their own reality. In Sarajevo, as anywhere else, there are more than a few people who feel strengthened and consoled by having their sense of reality affirmed and transfigured by art."⁵

Not only *Godot* but also other plays of Beckett show no intention of expressing any political meaning in a symbolic fashion. In fact, Beckett never tries to convey any political message in his works. Further, Beckett's stage direction refuses the audience's efforts to search for any meanings or symbols in the plays. However, it is undeniable that his plays acutely affect those who live in difficult political circumstances, and that his plays have the power to evoke some kind of action from those who are intensely moved by them. What aspect of Beckett's plays involves this power?

Hannah Arendt's observation about "the standpoint outside the political realm" and "its significance for the political realm" may help us to comprehend this singular power of Beckett's plays. Arendt's observation concerns the possibility that the withdrawal from the world of politics comes to have political significance. If we look at Beckett's plays in light of Arendt's thought, we could say that Beckett's plays originate from "the standpoint outside the political realm," that is, from the condition of withdrawal from the world of politics. At the same time, we could say that Beckett's plays show that they have "significance for the political realm," as seen in the examples that we have looked at briefly.

This article is an attempt to understand how Beckett's plays contain the political significance of "the standpoint outside the political realm." Certainly there is a difference of context between Beckett's work and Arendt's work; whereas Arendt's work is made of political reflections on some of the agonizing issues of the twentieth century (especially totalitarianism), Beckett's work shows detachment from direct involvement with the political reality. Despite this gap between the two, I believe that Arendt's observation provides us with helpful leads to understanding the power of Beckett's plays (the power to affect those who live in a predicament and evoke some kind of action from them). Arendt's reflection on the political significance of withdrawal from the world is very important, because in it the possibility of the political and the problem of time and space meet. She holds that only when the temporal dimension of "timeless now," experienced in the withdrawal from the world,

has a spatial dimension, this dimension comes to have a political significance. We can apply this view of Arendt to Beckett's plays, for in his plays the dimension of "timeless now" is presented in the theatrical space between actors and the audience.

Withdrawal from the World in Arendt

For Arendt, "withdrawal from the world of appearances" is not simply withdrawal into the interiority of the self where others do not exist. It is the precondition of the mental activities, especially the activity of thinking. She stresses that "the withdrawal from the world of appearances" is not withdrawal from the world but the withdrawal from "the world's being present to the senses." Arendt writes that mental activities "cannot come into being except through a deliberate *withdrawal* from appearances. It is withdrawal not so much from the world . . . as from the world's being *present* to the senses."⁶ In "the world of appearances" men "are totally conditioned existentially – limited by the time span between birth and death, subject to labor in order to live, motivated to work in order to make themselves at home in the world, and roused to action in order to find their place in the society of their fellow-men."⁷ Also in this world we are conditioned by the sensory objects given by this world. In this regard, "withdrawal from the world of appearances" means liberating ourselves from all these conditions, in other words, gaining the autonomy of mental activities. It becomes possible only when we deliberately withdraw from the relations in which we are tied to the world through the senses.

Arendt explains this "withdrawal from the world of appearances" in terms of time. In the activity of thinking which takes place in our withdrawal from the world, we experience the temporal dimension of "timeless now." According to Young-Bruehl, Arendt metaphorically describes this "thinking space" taking place in the withdrawal from the world as "timeless now"; she calls this a "perfect metaphor."⁸ This temporal dimension of "timeless now" is explained as "the gap of time between past and future."

In the preface of *Between Past and Future*, Arendt discusses Kafka's parable describing a battleground on which the forces of the past and the future clash with each other. The man called "he" stands between these forces. The parable that Arendt cites reads as follows:

He has two antagonists: the first presses him from behind, from the origin. The second blocks the road ahead. He gives battle to both. To be sure, the first supports him in his fight with the second, for he wants to push him forward,

and in the same way the second supports him in his fight with the first, since he drives him back. But it is only theoretically so. For it is not only the two antagonists who are there, but he himself as well, and who really knows his intentions? His dream, though, is that some time in an unguarded moment – and this would require a night darker than any night has ever been yet – he will jump out of the fighting line and be promoted, on account of his experience in fighting, to the position of umpire over his antagonists in their fight with each other.⁹

Arendt regards this parable as "a kind of thought-landscape," that records "a mental phenomenon, something which one may call a thought-event."¹⁰ And through this parable, she shows that the activity of thinking takes place in the temporal dimension of "timeless now," and that it is "the dimension of the forces of time."

But Arendt points out the problematic nature of this parable; though Kafka's description shows that a thought-event takes place in the temporal dimension of "timeless now," in the "gap of time between past and future," his description of a thought-event lacks "a spatial dimension where thinking could exert itself without being forced to jump out of human time altogether."¹¹ In other words, she finds in this parable the danger of falling into "the old dream which Western metaphysics has dreamed from Parmenides to Hegel of a timeless, spaceless, suprasensuous realm as the proper region of thought." It is the danger, recognized in Western philosophical tradition, of falling into the dream of a timeless realm which transcends human time. Arendt stresses the importance of finding a dimension of "timeless now" not in "a timeless, spaceless, suprasensuous realm" but in human time which has a spatial dimension on earth.

Only insofar as he thinks, and that is insofar as he is ageless . . . does man in the full actuality of his concrete being live in this gap of time between past and future. The gap . . . is coeval with the existence of man on earth. It may well be the region of the spirit or, rather, the path paved by thinking, this small track of non-time which the activity of thought beats within the time-space of mortal men and into which the trains of thought, of remembrance and anticipation, save whatever they touch from the ruin of historical and biographical time. This small non-time-space in the very heart of time, unlike the world and the culture into which we are born, can only be indicated, but cannot be inherited

and handed down from the past; each new generation, indeed every new human being as he inserts himself between an infinite past and an infinite future, must discover and ploddingly pave it anew.¹²

Arendt says that the "small non-time-space" within the time-space of mortal men "can only be indicated, but cannot be inherited and handed down from the past," and that each new generation or every new human being "must discover and ploddingly pave it anew." Here Arendt shows the importance of finding what she calls the "small non-time-space" — "the dimension of the forces of time." For this realm is free from the determination of "historical and biographical time," and it protects whatever thinking touches from "the ruin of historical and biographical time." She emphasizes that we should find the "small non-time-space" not in the eternity that transcends human time but in the time of mortal men which has a spatial dimension.

In "The gap between past and future: the *nunc stans*" in *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt again offers her reading of the same parable by Kafka. Here she says that this parable describes "the time sensation of the thinking ego" which is based on our withdrawal from the everyday world. She writes:

Kafka's time parable does not apply to man in his everyday occupations but only to the thinking ego, to the extent that it has withdrawn from the business of everyday life. The gap between past and future opens only in reflection, whose subject matter is what is absent—either what has already disappeared or what has not yet appeared. Reflection draws these absent "regions" into the mind's presence.¹³

Then she compares "the time sensation of the thinking ego" with the time sensation of "the self" that moves in "the world of appearances." She holds that "the thinking ego is not the self as it appears and moves in the world, remembering its own biographical past, as though "he" were *à la recherche du temps perdu* or planning his future." The time described by Kafka's parable is different from "the time sequence of ordinary life, where the three tenses smoothly follow each other and time itself can be understood in analogy to numerical sequences, fixed by the calendar, according to which the present is today, the past begins with yesterday, and the future begins tomorrow." The reason why ordinary life has this time continuum is that it is "always spatially determined and conditioned."¹⁴ In "the historical and biographical time" in our everyday life, "the

gaps in time" do not occur.¹⁵

And Arendt points out that the trouble with Kafka's parable is that "he" tries to jump out of human time, out of "the dimension of the forces of time," and transcend it. Arendt tries to take a step further than Kafka by introducing the idea of a third force which is the diagonal force that remains on the same plane. This diagonal force is "a perfect metaphor for the activity of thought," for this diagonal force is rooted in the present. What is stressed here is that timelessness in the "timeless now," in the activity of thinking, is by no means eternity. Here in order to explain the temporal dimension of the activity of thinking, Arendt brings in the concept of a *nunc stans* which means the standing now in medieval philosophy. It is "the dimension of the forces of time" where the force of "the not-yet" and that of "the no-more" are gathered; "The temporal dimension of the *nunc stans* experienced in the activity of thinking gathers the absent tenses, the not-yet and the no-more, together into its own presence."¹⁶ This dimension is, as Arendt depicts, Kant's "land of pure intellect" (*Land des reinen Verstandes*), which Kant describes as "an island, enclosed by nature itself within unalterable limits," and "surrounded by a wide and stormy ocean" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B294f). The dimension of the *nunc stans* is an island surrounded by "the sea of everyday life."¹⁷

We should note that there remain two aspects to the temporality of the dimension of "timeless now." On one hand, the timelessness in the dimension of "timeless now" means that the temporal dimension of thinking is not determined and conditioned by "historical and biographical time." It is the dimension where we make present "the forces of time" or the forces of what is absent ("the no-more" and "the not-yet"). On the other hand, this timelessness does not mean eternity. It is rooted in "an entirely human present" — within the time-space of mortal men. Arendt describes this temporality of the activity of thinking as "the quiet of the Now in the time-pressed, time-tossed existence of man" or "the quiet in the center of a storm."¹⁸

The temporality of "timeless now," of the *nunc stans* corresponds to the temporality in St. Augustine's idea of memory that Arendt discusses in her dissertation, *Love and Saint Augustine*. In her interpretation of St. Augustine, the power of memory is the power to bring back into the present the past origin, "a transcendent and transmundane past." In other words, in memory man can bring back into the present what is timeless in the origin of his existence. In this sense, memory is directed toward "a past that is prior to all possibilities of earthly, mundane experience," "a transcendent and transmundane past" which is "outside the human condition" and "before human

existence."¹⁹ In memory the man who is created opens the relation to the Creator, the creator that is both outside and before man. "The Creator is in man only by virtue of man's memory."¹⁹ In other words, only in "referring back" to the Creator, to the immortal source of the mortal existence, does created man find the determinant of his being.²⁰ In memory man refers back to "the original beginning" of his being.

What leads to remembrance, recollection, and confession is not the desire for the "happy life" . . . but the quest for the origin of existence, the quest for the One who "made me." Hence, transcending the faculties of perception, which we have in common with the animals, and rising gradually "to Him who made me," Augustine arrives at "the camps and vast palaces of memory." There he finds the notion of the "happy life," which is his origin and as such the quintessence of his being. . . . By recalling a past that is prior to all possibilities of earthly, mundane experience, man who was created and did not make himself find the utmost limit of his own past – his own "whence."²¹

In this realm of memory described as "the camps and vast palaces of memory" (*The Confessions*, 10. 8. 12), the past and the future coincide in the present. The great power of memory lies in "the fact that the past is not forever lost and that remembrance can bring it back into the present."²² In memory in which the past comes back to the present, "the yearning for a return to the past origin turns into the anticipating desire of a future that will make the origin available again." By virtue of memory where man initiates the quest for his Being, for the Creator of the creature, "the beginning and end of life become exchangeable."²³ In the process of "re-presenting" in memory, of making the past present again to the mind, "the past not only takes its place among other things present but is transformed into a future possibility," and "the return to one's origin (*redire ad creatorem*) can at the same time be understood as an anticipating reference to one's end (*se referre ad finem*)."²⁴ Thus Arendt interprets the Augustinian concept of memory as a relation to "the twofold 'before' of absolute past and absolute future." For Being (the Creator as the immortal source of the mortal existence) is before man in the twofold sense of past and future; Being was before life began as "that from which it [human life] comes," and Being will be when life has passed away as "that to which it goes."²⁵ Memory is the power to bring back this "twofold 'before' of absolute past and absolute future" to the present within the time-space of mortal men.

We have discussed Arendt's notion of "withdrawal from the world of appearances." We have seen how in this withdrawal, which is the precondition of the activity of thinking, we experience the present as the dimension of "timeless now." It is "the dimension of the forces of time" where the forces of the absent tenses, "the no-more" and "the not-yet" are made present. A withdrawal from the world grasped in this sense can have political significance. But, as Arendt's reading of Kafka's parable shows, the withdrawal itself does not have political significance. It can have political significance only insofar as the temporal dimension of "timeless now," where thinking takes place, has a spatial dimension — "a spatial dimension where thinking could exert itself without being forced to jump out of human time altogether." Arendt thus emphasizes the necessity of space.

For Arendt, space here means the space that exists between men, the space based on the plurality of men. We can regard this space as what Arendt calls "the space of appearance"—"the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly."²⁶ It is the space where "man qua man, each individual in his unique distinctness, appears and confirms himself in speech and action." Arendt holds that to be deprived of this space means to be deprived of "the reality of one's self," "one's identity," and "the reality of the surrounding world."²⁷

Before proceeding to Beckett, we shall briefly look at the political and historical context in which "withdrawal from the world" comes to have political significance in Arendt's thought. What follows shows that this withdrawal becomes political only insofar as the activity of thinking comes out of the withdrawal and "appears" in its unique distinctness in "the space of appearance" or the world of men.

First, in her later period Arendt comes to think that the political significance of the activity of thinking lies in that it has a possibility of interrupting and hindering the automatic process of totalitarianism. Totalitarianism is characterized by the automatic process that leads communities toward catastrophes like total terror, the movement that destroys the "space" between men and human capacity of motion.²⁸ Arendt holds that although thinking is generally regarded as not useful for society and "dissolves accepted rules of conduct," in political emergencies thinking comes to have political significance; in political emergencies in which "everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in," "those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join in is conspicuous and thereby becomes a kind of action."²⁹ In other words, in political emergencies in which everybody is swept

away by the totalitarian movement, the activity of thinking emerges from the state of withdrawal and "appears" in its unique distinctness in the world of men. Secondly, Arendt holds that "withdrawal from the world" makes possible "the quest for meaning" in considering the events in the world of reality.³⁰ In our withdrawal from the world we can have a sufficient distance from events in reality and avoid the dangers of falling into the spell of the event. That is to say, we can "understand" the meaning of the event. "Understanding" here means "an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world."³¹ Here, too, the activity of thinking comes to have a relation to the world and has a possibility of appearing in the world. This meaning of the withdrawal should also be understood in relation to totalitarianism. Arendt tried to "understand" various aspects of the world, but what was particularly important to her was "understanding" and "coming to terms with" a world in which totalitarianism was possible. She writes, "To the extent that the rise of totalitarian governments is the central event of our world, to understand totalitarianism is not to condone anything, but to reconcile ourselves to a world in which such things are possible at all."³² Thirdly, if we regard the "withdrawal from the world" as the experience of "worldlessness," we find in that very "worldlessness" the possibility of "love of the world (*amor mundi*)."³³ Chiba calls this "the paradox of 'love of the world.'" According to him, Arendt sees "the paradox of 'love of the world'" in the experience of "worldlessness" in the early Christians and in the Jewish people as pariahs (including her own experience); for "though living in the world, they did not belong to the world, and only by going outside of the world they could have an appropriate relation with the world." They tried to resist the world and were conscious of the need to go outside of the world. Yet precisely from this experience of "worldlessness" their affirmation of the world arose. In this regard, "love of the world" means the manner in which those who have experienced "worldlessness" establish a relation with the world and love the world.³³ Here we see the possibility that the experience of "worldlessness" returns to the world as a manner of loving the world.

Thus, for Arendt, the "withdrawal from the world" is not simply a negative state that excludes the existence of others but the precondition of the activity of thinking which takes place in the dimension of "timeless now," "the dimension of the forces of time." It comes to have political significance only when it situates itself in the world of men and is revealed in "the space of appearance" — "a spatial dimension where thinking could exert itself without being forced to jump out of human time

altogether."

"Timeless Now" in Space – *Waiting for Godot and Krapp's Last Tape*

In light of Arendt's view, we can say that Beckett's plays present a space which evokes the temporal dimension of "timeless now." As we will see in the temporality of waiting in *Waiting for Godot* and that of remembering in *Krapp's Last Time*, Beckett's theatrical space reveals "the dimension of the forces of time" where the force of the absent tense — "the not-yet" or "the no-more" — appears in "now." The space presented by Beckett's plays *indicates* the "small non-time-space in the very heart of time." We could further say that in Beckett's plays the "timeless now" is revealed in the theatrical space, the space that exists between actors and the audience, "here and now," in a particular place and a particular time. And this space is the space where human finitude is shared. We can think that this nature of Beckett's space is closely tied to the power of his plays to affect those who are in a predicament.

Steven Connor's reflection on Beckett's radical finitude stresses that Beckett's work is characterized by "embeddedness, the impossibility of ever being otherwise than at a specific place and time, 'en situation':"

To say that Beckett's work constitutes a radical finitude is to say that it strives to allow itself the very least remission it can manage from this awareness of always having to live, move and have its being in 'such a world...on such and such a day,' never in the world in general, or 'as such.' Beckett is, as Heidegger alleged animals were, 'poor in world,' poor in 'the world' as such.³⁴

Quoting Jean-Luc Nancy's view on an ethics of finitude, Connor holds that Beckett's work refuses "every appropriation of the 'here' by an 'elsewhere,' and of the 'now' by an 'afterward' (or by a 'beforehand')." ³⁵ He also says: "The paradox of Beckett's writing is that, while he continues to try, or feint to try, to detach his characters from 'the world' or to limn various forms of 'little world' against the 'big world' of the *polis*, a copular form of being-there is always necessary for him."

Unlike the Kafka parable discussed by Arendt, Beckett's plays never show the possibility of transcending human time-space. They depict the temporal experience of being entrapped in human time and show the finitude of being embedded in the "here and now." Paradoxically, in this very finitude Beckett's plays reveal the temporal dimension of "timeless now"— the dimension that is not determined by "historical

and biographical time." In this dimension, like the realm of Augustinian memory that Arendt discusses, the past and the future are present in the "now"; the "now" in Beckett's plays exists in and as the relation to "the no-more" or "the not-yet," as Estragon and Vladimir are "tied to Godot" in *Godot*.³⁷

We could say that Beckett's plays show the condition of human beings who "live" the paradox of "timeless now" in the midst of human time-space. As Beckett writes "that double-headed monster of damnation and salvation –Time" at the beginning of *Proust*,³⁸ time is the double-headed monster for him. It is both "damnation" and "salvation." And this ambiguity of time is revealed in the human condition that Beckett describes in his work. In *Godot*, Estragon and Vladimir are entrapped in the temporality of waiting for the arrival of Godot, "the not-yet," and they cannot go outside of that condition. They are "damned" to wait for Godot forever. But at the same time, waiting for Godot gives them salvation. Only by waiting for Godot can they survive despair. The only thing that sustains their lives is their tie to Godot, to "the not-yet." In *Krapp's Last Tape*, Krapp is entrapped in the temporality of remembering "the no-more." His life near death continues only as looking back, as the tie to "the no-more." Krapp's experience of time is also at once damnation and salvation.

In *Godot*, Estragon and Vladimir are caught in the strange temporality of waiting. They continue to wait for Godot and do various things in order to kill time. They experience the endless time which deviates from the time of the clock, from the time sequence of ordinary time. The characters exist within human time, yet they experience the "timeless now" in the act of waiting. In *Godot* Beckett reveals the paradoxical condition of human beings who "live" the "timeless now" in the midst of human time.

In this work, time is presented as uncertain. Everything that we think is certain in our everyday habitual lives is made uncertain. But there is one thing that is certain. It is the fact that Estragon and Vladimir are waiting for Godot.

Vladimir: . . . What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come –

Estragon: Ah!

Pozzo: Help!

Vladimir: Or for night to fall. (*Pause.*) We have kept our appointment and

that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?³⁹

Thus Beckett brings the temporality of waiting into relief by describing Estragon and Vladimir, a "pseudo-couple," who are suspended in endless time.

The temporality of waiting here means the endless duration of the present which "is tied to" the arrival of Godot, to the absent tense of future. The future in this play, that is, the arrival of Godot cannot be understood in terms of our customary idea of future; the arrival of Godot has no relation to the future which involves the purpose of our action or our future plans in everyday life. This work begins with the words of Estragon, "Nothing to be done" in English and «Rien à faire» in French. The very first line of the play which shows Estragon's irritation toward the boot that he is trying to take off is a declaration that 'there is nothing to be acted or performed in this play' — a declaration of the impossibility of the drama itself. Moreover, this line means the suspension of the action ("doing") itself. The play declares at the beginning that withdrawal from the world in which we act with purposes is its only precondition. In this regard, the future in this play is not the future which involves the purpose of action or plan in everyday life but the future which is forever being postponed. At the end of Act II a boy appears and Vladimir forces him to promise that Godot will come on the following day. In this scene, against the content of their conversation, we sense that the arrival of Godot is being put off to a future time endlessly. The future reveals itself only as the endless postponement of the future.

Vladimir: You have a message from Mr. Godot.

Boy: Yes Sir.

Vladimir: He won't come this evening.

Boy: No Sir.

Vladimir: But he'll come to-morrow.

Boy: Yes Sir.

Vladimir: Without fail.

Boy: Yes Sir.

*Silence.*⁴⁰

Just after this scene, Vladimir forces the boy to tell Godot that the boy saw Vladimir. It indicates the predicament of man who is arrested in the temporality of endless

waiting and the uncertainty of all that happens.

Boy: What am I to tell Mr. Godot, Sir?

Vladimir: Tell him . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . tell him you saw me and that . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . that you saw me. (*Pause. Vladimir advances, the Boy recoils. Vladimir halts, the Boy halts. With sudden violence.*) You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me to-morrow that you never saw me! Silence. *Vladimir makes a sudden spring forward, the Boy avoids him and exit running. Silence. . .*⁴¹

In the temporality of waiting in *Godot* we find that time does not have a beginning or an end, and that time is based on the infinite repetition with a difference. A song sung by Vladimir at the beginning of Act II whose textual structure is based on the infinite repetition is a metaphor for this temporality.

The experience of the duration of timelessness in waiting corresponds to the experience of the time of the dark which lies behind clock time. We find the experience of the time of the dark in Pozzo, whose sense of time changes in the play. In Act I, as symbolized by his watch, he lives by time as measured by the clock. For example, in measuring time he says that he has been walking for six hours, or he has been with Lucky for sixty years. He lives in the time as it can be measured by clock or the calendar, or in the chronological sequence of historical time. Beckett contrasts Pozzo, the figure dominated by historical time, with those living in the timelessness in waiting. When Vladimir says to him, "Time has stopped," he responds to Vladimir, "Don't you believe it, Sir, don't you believe it. . . . Whatever you like, but not that." However, just after these words, he says, ". . . behind this veil of gentleness and peace night is charging (*vibrantly*) and will burst upon us (*snaps his fingers*) pop! like that! (*his inspiration leaves him*) just when we least expect it. (*Silence. Gloomily.*) That's how it is on this bitch of an earth." He thus indicates the possibility that all of sudden the day (the time of the clock) will end, and the night (the suspension of time) will attack us from behind the veil of gentleness and peace.⁴² Indeed Pozzo loses his watch at the end of Act I. In Act II, he appears as a blind man who "lives" the dark and says violently, "Don't question me! The blind have no notion of time. The things of time are hidden from them too."⁴³ He declares that he no longer has notion of time. And, to Vladimir who asks for how long Lucky has become dumb, Pozzo responds furiously:

Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*Calmer.*) They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (*He jerks the rope.*) On!⁴⁴

These words show that he no longer lives in the chronological time fixed by the calendar, and that he does not see any reason to situate an event historically. The historical axis of time no longer exists in his mind. The figure of Pozzo shows the possibility that the timelessness in the dark comes over us as if suddenly tearing the veil of the historical time, of the time sequence of ordinary time.

We recall here Beckett's words in "La peinture des van Velde ou le Monde et le Pantalon." After writing that A. van Velde's painting gives the impression of "the thing in suspense," "the dead thing," or "the thing in the void," and that what is important for A. van Velde is to catch a vision in an inner space, Beckett adds:

C'est là que parfois le temps s'assoupit, comme la roue du compteur quand la dernière ampoule s'éteint. C'est là qu'on commence enfin à voir, dans le noir. Dans le noir qui ne craint plus aucune aube. Dans le noir qui est aube et midi et soir et nuit d'un ciel vide, d'une terre fixe. Dans le noir qui éclaire l'esprit. C'est là que le peintre peut tranquillement cligner de l'oeil.⁴⁵

Beckett holds that "the thing" that A. van Velde depicts in his painting appears in the dimension where the power of time is appeased («le temps s'assoupit»), in the timeless dimension where dawn, noon, evening, and night coincide. And this temporal dimension is said to be the dark that illuminates the mind («le noir qui éclaire l'esprit»). We could say that Pozzo is a figure who actually experiences this timeless dimension. He first experiences time as if it were the wheel of a meter («la roue du compteur»), but one day it suddenly stops working within him as if a light bulb died out. He suddenly loses the notion of time and is thrown into the time of the dark.

In *Godot* the temporality of waiting is described as the duration of "the present" which is "tied to" the future (the arrival of Godot) being infinitely postponed. This temporality is the duration of "timeless now" in the dimension where historical time is suspended and the time of the dark prevails. And we could say that this temporal

dimension reveals itself through the human beings who are entrapped in endless waiting, in the endless duration of "now," in other words, through the human finitude that is expressed and shared between actors and the audience in theatrical space.

While *Godot* depicts the temporality of waiting which exists as a relation to the future (the absent tense of "the not-yet"), *Krapp's Last Tape* shows the temporality of remembering which exists as a relation to the past (the absent tense of "the no-more"). In this play which is set in "Krapp's den," a dark place like a cave, a "wearish old man" who is near death (Krapp) tries to record his retrospective of the year on his sixty-ninth birthday, following the custom which he has continued for many years.⁴⁶ Before he starts recording, he listens to the tape that he recorded 30 years ago. He hears the voice of his younger self who just turned to 39. On tape we hear Krapp-at-39 says that he has just been listening to the tape of a still earlier Krapp that was recorded at least 10 or 12 years ago. Here we recognize the structure of memory within memory, of the past within the past. It is the structure of nested boxes or a play within a play which we also find in *Waiting for Godot* and Beckett's other works.

As Arendt studied St. Augustine in her youth, Beckett also had a strong interest in St. Augustine. According to Knowlson, before writing *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, Beckett "immersed himself deeply in the Confessions of St. Augustine" and used many quotations from the *Confessions in Dream*.⁴⁷ In his letter to MacGreevy in 1931, Beckett described himself as 'phrase-hunting in St. Augustine.' He read the *Confessions* in the translation of E.B. Pusey, from 1907, and from time to time consulted the Latin original.⁴⁸ In the *Dream* notebook, the notebook that he kept between 1930 and 1932, we find many quotations from the *Confessions*. In this notebook, we find Beckett pays attention to St. Augustine's idea that the memory is a stomach for the mind.⁴⁹ St. Augustine writes, "we might say that the memory is a sort of stomach for the mind, and that joy or sadness are like sweet or bitter food," indicating the analogy between the memory and a stomach.⁵⁰ The memory is considered to be a container which stores food. Furthermore, St. Augustine points out the similarity between the act of remembering and that of ruminating; he writes, "Perhaps these emotions [desire, joy, fear, and sorrow] are brought forward from the memory by the act of remembering in the same way as cattle bring up food from the stomach when they chew the cud." He depicts the act of remembering as that of "chewing the cud," of 'eating' what is stored in memory.⁵¹

One could say that this aspect of Augustinian memory is evoked in *Krapp's Last Tape*. In the same way that St. Augustine regards memory as a stomach which contains

the past emotions, *Krapp's Last Tape* presents memory as a tape-recorder with reels of tapes, that is, as a container which holds past sensations and images.⁵² And Krapp's act of listening to his past voice and remembering his past moments can be seen as the act of ruminating. In listening to his past voice, he reflects on his past experiences such as sitting outside by the canal watching his mother's window during her dying days, seeing a vision on memorable night in March at the end of jetty, and having his last amour in a punt drifting in a lake before agreeing to end the relationship. Thus we see the subject who 'eats' the images of past moments, in other words, the subject who re-produces and re-experiences past moments retained in his memory.

In this regard, it is important to note that this play begins with Krapp's act of taking out a large banana from a drawer of the table, peeling it and eating it meditatively while pacing to and fro at the edge of stage. This act of eating a banana suggests that the act of eating and that of remembering the past are inseparable from each other. Krapp's act of eating a banana at the beginning of the play can be considered as a kind of switch that puts Krapp in a mode of re-living the past. In this mode, he can be liberated from the things in the present, from the everyday with its depressing realities. Indeed after eating the banana, Krapp starts preparing to listen to the tape of his past. Uttering the word 'spool' with relish and a smile, he starts poking at the boxes and picks up Box three, and opening it, peers at the reels inside. Then he takes out Spool five and peers at it, and loads it on the tape-recorder and rubs his hands in anticipation. It is as if he were about to taste some food. This scene where hearing, taste, touch, and sight are interestingly mingled with each other indicates the analogy between remembering and eating.

This striking image of eating a banana is repeated in the play, for example, when the voice of Krapp-at-39 says he has just eaten three bananas in his den. The play repeats Krapp's movement of returning to his den, eating bananas, listening to the tape, and recollecting the past. But as Krapp treads on the skin of the banana, slips, and nearly falls at the beginning of the play, this state of indulgence in recollection symbolized by the act of eating bananas is soon destroyed. He is forced to face his present self who is in complete solitude, misery, and despair.

If we consider that the act of eating is a bodily act, the act of remembering which is inseparable from that of eating in *Krapp's Last Tape* can also be regarded as a bodily act. Remembering takes place in the body, or to be more specific, in the weak and deteriorating body of Krapp-at-69, the character which physically exists on stage. In the theatrical space of this play, the actor and the audience share the

body that ruminates or 'eats' the images of the past moment stored in "the stomach" (an internal part of the body) which is externalized as the tape-recorder with reels of tapes. As Ulrika Maude observes, "what is distinctly Beckettian about the memories is the plainly corporeal nature of the recollections," and, "the past is sedimented in the body itself,"⁵³ so too the act of remembering or ruminating past moments in *Krapp's Last Tape* involves bodily senses, especially touch, taste, and hearing. For example, remembering the moments of his mother's death involves the feel of "a small, old, black, hard solid rubber ball" that Krapp-at-39 says "I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day." Here, remembering the moments of his mother's death is remembering the feel of the small ball in his hand. Memory and tactile sensation are intimately connected to each other. Indeed, *Krapp's Last Tape* is full of bodily movements involving tactile sensations which are inseparable from the act of remembering; for instance, fumbling in the pockets, feeling about inside the drawer, stroking the banana, rubbing his hands, moving his lips without uttering any sound, touching the banana in the pocket, and so on. Past moments return to the body of the remembering/ruminating subject through bodily sensations.

We have seen that Arendt understands Augustinian memory as the power to bring back into the present the past origin, "a past that is prior to all possibilities of earthy, mundane experience." In *Krapp's Last Tape*, too, the present exists as a relation to "the past" that is prior to all past moments. This temporality is similar to the dimension of "timeless now" or the realm of memory that Arendt discusses. The "past" that precedes all past moments here recalls what Jean-Luc Nancy calls "the immemorial" in *Visitation (de la peinture chrétienne)* which is about Pontormo's Visitation. According to him, art never exists in order to commemorate or retain memory. Art exceeds itself toward what precedes it or what succeeds it and approaches toward "the immemorial" — what precedes the birth, what is absent in all memory. "The immemorial" is what is infinitely ancient and definitively present. It is this place and this moment of provenance and of presence which we cannot reach back but which is *always-already-there*.⁵⁴

Krapp's Last Tape approaches this "past" that precedes all past moments in the scene in which Krapp-at-69 hears the following voice of Krapp-at-39 from the tape-recorder. It is about the moment in which he sees the vision on one memorable night in March:

Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indigence until that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when

suddenly I saw the whole thing. The vision at last. This I fancy is what I have chiefly to record this evening . . . What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely — [KRAPP *switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again*] — great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propeller, clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most . . .⁵⁵

Here Krapp curses, turns off the tape-recorder, winds the tape forward, and turns on the tape-recorder. Since he winds the tape forward, we don't know what he says at the end of the sentence. Concerning the moment of vision we only hear some fragments of words. But precisely because of this, we sense the hidden nature of the dark and its importance for Krapp's existence. It is as if we had a glimpse of a secret. The memory of the dark which grounds Krapp's existence itself is at once concealed and revealed. Here the play brings back into the present the memory of the dark — the "the past" that precedes all past moments, in Nancy's words, "this place and this moment of provenance and of presence which we cannot reach back but which is *always-already-there*."

Also when Krapp-at-69 remembers the eyes of his lover after listening to his old tape, these eyes of hers represent "a past that is prior to all possibilities of earthy, mundane experience," the moment of provenance to which we cannot reach back:

The eyes she had! [*Broods, realizes he is recording silence, switches off, broods. Finally.*] Everything there, everything, all the — [*Realizes this is not being recorded, switches on.*] Everything there, everything on this old muckball, all the light and dark and famine and feasting of . . . [*hesitates*] . . . the ages! [*In a shout.*] Yes! [*Pause.*] Let that go! Jesus! Take his mind off his homework!⁵⁶

Here we recall that in *Proust* Beckett refers to the mystery that the narrator in *À la recherche du temps perdu* finds in the eyes of Albertine; for she seems to symbolize "the immaterial reality," and that "in her nothingness there is active, mysterious and invisible, a current that forces him to bow down and worship an obscure and implacable Goddess." It concerns the fact that her temporal existence is endowed with something like "an abstract, ideal and absolute impermeability" — "the extratemporal."⁵⁷ In a word, Albertine's eyes reveal the mystery of timelessness

enveloped in time.

Thus, some aspects of Augustinian memory are evoked in *Krapp's Last Tape*. Especially the following aspect is important in our context: the Augustinian idea that memory is the power that brings back into the present "a past that is prior to all possibilities of earthy, mundane experience" is evoked in the temporality of remembering in *Krapp's Last Tape*. The theatrical space of this play in which exists "here and now" shows the temporal dimension of what Arendt terms "timeless now" where the force of the past origin is made present.

Conclusion

Arendt's reading of Kafka's parable, which she thinks describes "the time sensation of the thinking ego," shows that she tries to find the possibility of political thinking in the temporal dimension of "timeless now" experienced in the withdrawal from the world. For Arendt, although Kafka's description gives us the insight that a thought-event takes place in "timeless now," his description of a thought-event lacks "a spatial dimension where thinking could exert itself without being forced to jump out of human time altogether." Only insofar as the experience of "timeless now" has "a spatial dimension," can it have a political significance. The space means the space that exists between men, the space based on the plurality of men. It is "the space of appearances" — "the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly." To be deprived of it means to be deprived of reality.

This observation about the political possibility found in the experience of the dimension of "timeless now" leads us to think that the power of Beckett's work to affect people in a predicament involves the fact that Beckett's plays let the audience experience the "timeless now" in space — the bodily space where the human finitude is experienced and shared.

Unlike Kafka's parable, Beckett's plays do not show any possibility of transcending human space. As we have seen in *Waiting for Godot* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett's plays make present the temporal dimension of "timeless now" or "the dimension of the forces of time" in the condition of withdrawal from the world of politics and thus *indicate* the "small non-time-space in the very heart of time." But in Beckett's plays the temporal dimension of "timeless now" is revealed only in the space — the theatrical space, the space between actors and the audience, or the space that exists "here and now," in a particular place and a particular time.

In Beckett's plays, the temporal dimension of "timeless now" reveals itself in the bodily space where the human finitude is shared. For instance, in *Krapp's Last Tape*, the act of remembering takes place in the body; the body appears as the relation to "the no-more." It is the body that exists "here and now," the body that is entrapped in the time-space of the mortal men ("here and now") and shows itself as the human finitude. And this body is shared in the theatrical space that exists between the actor and the audience. We can say the same thing in *Waiting for Godot* where the act of waiting takes place in the bodies that appear in the theatrical space.

Here we should note that the finitude is experienced in the temporal dimension of "timeless now" liberated from the determination of historical time. It is the dimension where the forces of what are absent ("the no-more" and "the not-yet") are made present. In *Waiting for Godot*, this dimension is shown as the temporality of waiting (the relation to "the not-yet") and in *Krapp's Last Tape*, as the temporality of remembering (the relation to "the no-more").

Beckett's plays present the space where the limit-experience is shared — the limit of human life is experienced *as* the limit. It is the space where the questions like 'What is life?' and 'What is being?' are posed to the audience at the boundary of life and death. In this sense, his plays have the power to communicate to the audience, in particular to those who are in suffering and despair, something that 'touches' the basis of life and being and awakens the hidden force of life.

Notes

¹ James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, New York: Touchstone, 1996, p.563.

² *Ibid.*, pp.368-9.

³ *Ibid.*, p.369.

⁴ Susan Sontag, "Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo," *Performing Arts Journal*, No.47 (1994), p.88.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.89.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.75.

⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1978, p.70.

⁸ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, p.450.

⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, New York: Penguin, 1968, p.7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.13.

¹³ *The Life of the Mind*, p.206.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.205-6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.210.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.211.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.211.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.209.

¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp.48-9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.50.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.49.

²² *Ibid.*, p.56.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.57.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.55-6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.55.

²⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, pp.198-9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.207-8.

²⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1973, p.466.

²⁹ *The Life of the Mind*, p.192. Here Arendt also discusses how the activity of thinking ("the purging component of thinking" which destroys the unexamined opinions) liberates another faculty, the faculty of judgment which she regards as "the most political of man's mental abilities."

³⁰ For Arendt's discussion of thinking's quest for meaning in contrast to knowledge's quest for truth, see *The Life of the Mind*, p.62.

³¹ Hannah Arendt, "Understanding and Politics" in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994, pp.307-8.

³² *Ibid.*, p.308.

³³ Shin Chiba, "Translator's Comments," in *Augusutinusus no ai no gainen [The Concept of Love in St. Augustine]*, Tokyo: Misuzushobo, 2002, pp.246-50.

³⁴ Steven Connor, "'On Such and Such a Day...In Such a World': Beckett's Radical Finitude," a lecture given at Borderless Beckett, International Samuel Beckett Symposium in Tokyo 2006. He discusses Beckett's radical finitude as "the coiled conjuncture" of two contrasting aspects of finitude. On one hand, radical finitude means "the lack or insufficiency that haunts being at its heart." It is, not the finitude of mortality — Heidegger's "being-towards-death (*zum Tode sein*)" or "the certainty of coming to an end," but "a kind of privation in the heart of being, an awareness of the ever-present

possibility of loss, and the looming necessity of death" or "the certainty of ending unfinished, dying, as we all must, before our time." On the other hand, radical finitude means "the inability to live anywhere else but in the here and now." Connor develops his view on Beckett's radical finitude in terms of Heidegger's view that the animal is "poor in world (*weltarm*)" in his lecture, "Beckett and the World" given at the Global Beckett Conference in Odense, 2006. He observes: "the condition of being *weltarm*, or short of world, is what constitutes the particular kind of worldliness of Beckett's work, which is a work, not so much of trying to escape from the world as of trying to find a way to have your being, or better still, to have had your being, in it."

³⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, p.19.

³⁶ "Beckett and the World," a lecture given at the Global Beckett Conference.

³⁷ Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, New York: Grove Press, 1954, p.14.

³⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1931, p.1. The words, "damnation" and "salvation" have theological connotations.

³⁹ *Waiting for Godot*, p.51.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.58.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.59.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.24-5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.55.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.57.

⁴⁵ Samuel Beckett, "La peinture des van Velde ou le Monde et le Pantalon" in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, London: John Calder, 1983, p.126.

⁴⁶ Calder writes that Beckett was aware of the biblical length of a life which is seventy years. John Calder, *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett*, London: Calder Publications, 2001, p.69.

⁴⁷ *Damned to Fame*, p.114.

⁴⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Beckett's Dream Notebook*, ed. John Pilling, Reading: Beckett International Foundation, 1999, p.11.

⁴⁹ The most relevant to our discussion is the following quotation. "[182] Mind not memory: When with joy I remember my past sorrow, the mind hath joy, the memory hath sorrow; the mind upon the joyfulness which is in it, is joyful, yet the memory upon the sadness which is in it, is not sad. ... The memory is the belly [ticked] of the mind & joy & sadness the sweet and bitter food; which, when committed to the memory, are, as it were, passed into the belly, where they may be stowed, but cannot taste." *Beckett's Dream Notebook*, p.26.

⁵⁰ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961, p.220.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.221.

⁵² St. Augustine's view that memory is a container or a place of storage is found in *Krapp's Last Tape*. In the *Confessions* (Book X), using a spatial metaphor, St. Augustine depicts memory as "the great storehouse of the memory," or "a great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images of all kinds which are conveyed to it by the senses." And these images are classified and preserved in this container, as he writes, "everything is preserved separately, according to its category." Similarly, in *Krapp's Last Tape*, the reels of tapes contained in the boxes are numbered, titled, and catalogued, and preserved separately, and the contents of the tapes are recorded in an old ledger. In other words, his past experiences are classified and stored in the storehouse of memory as in St. Augustine. This image of memory as a container is reinforced by a series of things on the stage including cardboard boxes, drawers of the table, four capacious waistcoat pockets, a bottle, an envelope, and Krapp's den itself. Krapp's storehouse of memory can be seen as a parody of St. Augustine's; while in St. Augustine it is regarded as a holy place ("a vast, immeasurable sanctuary"), Krapp's storehouse of memory is presented as a junk room. The voice of Krapp-at-39 says, "Good to be back in my den, in my old rags."

⁵³ Ulrika Maude "The Body of Memory: Beckett and Merleau-Ponty" in *Beckett and Philosophy*, ed. Richard Lane, London: Palgrave, 2002, p.119.

⁵⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Visitation (de la peinture chrétienne)*, Paris: Galilée, 1999, pp.9-10, 30, 35.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.60

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.62.

⁵⁷ *Proust*, pp.33, 38, 40-42, 56.

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