Quantizing the Audience Role: Experimental Drama of Beckett and Brecht

Aroosa Kanwal

Abstract

Every new theatre performance is primarily an experiment with its respective audience. The greater the audience interactivity in the theatrical space, the greater is its worth in terms of leaving an amaranthine impression in the minds of literary aficionados and ordinary spectators to achieve the required ends. This paper, in its focus on Beckett's and Brecht's obsessional concern with the participatory orientation of theatrical space, seeks to explore a "revitalization of the dead relationship between the stage and its audience" (Sakellaridou, 2014, p.14). I am particularly interested in the ways in which Beckett and Brecht handle stage-audience transactions: one transforming the stage into a space where both characters and spectators share a physical and emotional experience, the other emphasising spectatorial dynamics with the aim of prompting observation and critical thinking on the part of the spectators, respectively. In so doing, I suggest that Brecht's and Beckett's spectator-oriented theatrical strategies are informed by quantum dynamics and relativity, thereby decentring the Aristotelian canon to refocus actors' and spectators' attention on the issue of representation itself and a fragmented view of the world. Nevertheless, despite their different attitudes towards their respective audiences – one emotionally involving the spectators while the other alienating the spectators from the actors – I argue that both question the classical paradigm of narrative closure in order to foreground postmodern sensibilities.

Keywords: audience participatory techniques, Aristotelian canon, quantum mechanics, existentialism, Marxism, multiple reality, dualism.

Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett are two literary giants of the postmodern dramatic tradition, radically sceptical towards any absolutism with respect to representations of the ontology of physical and mental realities, as well as of literary canons. Brecht's and Beckett's quantum-inspired stage-audience transactions aim to construct this postmodernist multiple way of seeing and perceiving reality, but with different aims and approaches towards their respective audiences. Both Brecht and Beckett ensure their audiences' active involvement in social activism or existential Micawberism, respectively, to capture postmodern sensibilities through unique theatrical techniques. For example, Brecht's epic theatre is a deliberate effort to liberate his spectators from a stagnant passive role and make them cogitative observers who feel stimulated, both intellectually and rationally, but not emotionally; his spectators would never say: I felt that too! Most significantly, Brecht's plots have a tendency to prompt laughs from the spectators even when the situation of onstage performers is far from amusing, and vice versa. In contrast to this, Beckett casts a hypnotic spell on his ecstatic and awestricken audience within his claustrophobic theatrical space; he imposes his authority not only on the onstage performers, but also on his spectators. As Elizabeth Sakellaridou (2014) corroborates, although Beckett "create[s] a dangerous proximity that induce[s] the spectators [in]to an immersive mood, he soon asserts[s] his authority and control when the audience's extended participatory role threatens to alter his own design" (p. 22). Therefore, the audience must feel as dejected, frustrated and neglected as the performers on

stage. Beckettian spectators, agitated by dramatic situations, cry out: I felt that! It's me! This is natural! Unlike Brechtian critical observers, a Beckettian audience is compelled to think what the characters think, to feel what the characters feel; when the characters fail to get answers to ambiguous questions, the audience is left bemused. They cannot speculate as Brecht's critical observers do. If they do, all their speculations must lead to confusion, chaos and absurdity, which are hallmarks of the existentialist world. It would not be wrong to say that Beckett makes his audiences experience the disasters of this world in such a way that without their 'presence' and involvement the whole purpose of his theatre techniques would be dashed.

Both Brecht and Beckett brought their philosophies to the stage through the mediums of Marxist or Absurdist theatre, which offer their respective audience's explanations of the world; one dreaming of changing the world through awakening something in the audience, the other struggling with the inadequacy of the human intellect to resolve mind-body dualisms, respectively. When Brecht first made his appearance in the world of drama, modern approaches and ideas were at war with each other. Both socialism and capitalism had used theatre as a means of propaganda. The Brechtian theory of theatre was not divorced from sociopolitical aims, but Brecht never served any political party. Instead, he envisioned theatre as a didactic platform. As an artist, he pondered a few questions: "How can the unfree, ignorant man of our century, with his thirst for freedom and his hunger for knowledge; how can the tortured and heroic, abused and ingenious, changeable and world-changing man of this great and ghastly century obtain his own theatre which will help him to master the world and himself?" (Tenschert, 1990, p. 40). Therefore, Brecht's idea of theatre was led by a spirit of raising awareness among the masses, as well as promoting change in the world through the active involvement of his audience, an act that gestures towards Jean-François Lyotard's notion of "incredulity towards metanarratives" (1979, p. xxiv). To achieve his Marxian aim, Brecht felt a strong need to establish a tradition and "define his envisioned new theatre" (Thomson and Sacks, 1994, p. 170). He gave his audience "a protagonist position" by posing questions that would force spectators to think critically, and consequently "take action in their society" (Barrios, 2008, p. 58). In this sense, the Berliner Ensemble was the first step toward the fulfilment of a Brechtian dream of revolutionary drama (commonly termed 'epic theatre'), which was predominantly anti-Aristotelian, to achieve the desired socialist end, to which I will return later.

Beckettian theatre, on the other hand, was informed by growing scepticism in the post-Second World War era, which made people contemplate issues regarding the world and existence. The strong impact of existentialist ideas on a war-ridden society was inevitable due to the crumbling of faith. But as a result of these doubts and questions, new theatrical experiments by existentialist philosophers rejuvenated theatre art in the late 1950s and '60s, which had been curtailed in Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War. No wonder then that, in order to comprehend this post-war postmodern uncertain ontological existence, modern dramatists heeded this new form of drama, because existentialists, by moulding their intricate and ambiguous philosophy into a dramatic form, had made the task facile for upcoming writers. Nevertheless, whilst the theatre of Sartre and Camus followed a conventional scholastic dialogue form in drawing room -settings, Beckett resorted to the theatricalisation of philosophy, believing that characters do not discuss philosophy; instead, "characters exist within it and embody it" (Kennedy, 2010, p. 3). Most importantly, Beckett plunged his characters into "the alluvium of the absurd" (Blau, 1990, p. 43) by collapsing the "spatial and temporal barriers in theatrical praxis" (Sakellaridou, 2014, p.14) in

order to capture the ambiguity, subversion and indeterminacy that informed post-twentieth-century sensibilities.

1. Quantum Quandaries: Brechtian and Beckettian Theatrical Praxis

In the quantum-haunted dramatic worlds of Beckett and Brecht, an overemphasis on the role of the spectator gestures towards a shift from an Einsteinian physical world and Newtonian ideas of determinism and fate (both of which are predominantly independent of human observation) to Neil Bohr's idea of complementarity, thereby privileging observational shifts that reveal a "world of total randomness, chance, and accident" (Coale, 2012, p. 48). In fact, Bohr's (1987) dynamic conception of complementarity challenges the conventional notion of an independent objective reality by assuming that "we are both onlookers and actors in the great drama of existence" (pp. 1, 119). This interpretation of an ultimate vision of life and reality, by Bohr, is informed by a probabilistic theory of an individual quantum process. Using Schrodinger's equation for wave functions (according to which the position and momentum of a particle cannot be measured simultaneously), Bohr elaborates the ways in which "the concept of [a] wave is no longer given a physical meaning but only refers, metaphorically, to the way probabilities of our predictions would 'propagate' depending upon the point to which a prediction would refer" (Plotnitsky, 2013, p.163). Hence, according to quantum paradigms, since particles can simultaneously have many different positions, velocities or other physical properties, they cannot be expected to possess exactly determined properties. Consequently, when they are measured, results are drawn randomly from a probability distribution. Schrodinger calls this phenomenon wave function collapse, which according to him is caused by the act of observation or measurement. At the heart of Beckettian and Brechtian theatre resides a similar dependency between observer and observed, spectator and performer, that can shift an ongoing performance at any time into some other dynamic, thereby offering a new way of thinking about existential social realities. When analysed in light of the principles of wave-function collapse, Beckett's absurdist experimental audience strategies tend to produce open-ended plots, emphasising a fragmented and disrupted sense of mystery that remains irresolvable, like the properties of particles in quantum mechanics. Similarly, Brecht, through his observational participatory practices, ensures his respective audiences' perspectival shifts and alternative positions in understanding human behaviour and social life that is foregrounded as fragmentary representation. Given this context, I suggest in this paper that Beckett's and Brecht's intense focus on the spectatorial function in the theatrical space is heavily informed by quantum mechanics, thereby decentring Aristotelian elements and conventions.

In articulating this quantized space within their theatrical praxis, Beckett and Brecht tend to eschew preconceived notions of dramatic linearity and contrive anti-Aristotelian theatrical techniques to meet their desired ends. Brecht's "scenic writing" (Weber 181) or storytelling technique, what he calls *Fabel* – which includes visual elements, music and drapery, is a clear revolt against the notion of *mimesis* promulgated in Aristotelian poetics. For Brecht, drama is illusionistic and individualistic (Thomson and Sacks, 1994, p. 188). To create this illusion, he discards the Aristotelian notion of an ideal plot by presenting episodic plots, thereby undermining the element of suspense and dramatic unity so as to bar his audiences from suspending their 'disbelief'. His *Mother Courage and Her Children* is the most episodic of all the plays. Using a narrative instead of a dramatic mode of presentation, Brecht presents dramatic scenes that are montages, which curve and jump, expelling the spectator from the story to act as a critical observer without being a propagandist. This is done not only to achieve his political and socialist

aims but also to break away from audiences' empathy. Likewise, the Beckettian universe is also divorced from the shackles of an exposition, a climax and a dénouement. Beckett prefers a cyclical structure, commonly described as a "diminishing spiral" (Worton, 1994, p. 69). Existentialists perceive the world as chaotic and meaningless, where man has to live with his perpetual sufferings. Against a backdrop of radically existential scepticism, Beckett's primary concern is not only with such issues as the search for one's own vaporous identity and self, but also confronting audiences with the existence of their own problematic mysterious conditions. In order to make use of the stage without being rejected, Beckett had to "produce a pure and extreme example of one particular dramatic technique in order to draw the audience's attention to that technique and to turn it into an implicit theme in itself" (Pfister, 1988, p. 13). In fact, it would not be wrong to say that both Brecht and Beckett corroborate Max Frisch's claim that, "[w]hoever appears on the stage and does not make proper use of the stage will find it working against him. Making use of the stage means: not just being *on* it, but *with* it" (as cited in Pfister, 1988, p. 45). To that end, both dramatists draw heavily on the relationship between the audience and the onstage world. But what differentiates Brecht from Beckett is the ways in which they define their spectators' roles within the theatrical space.

As argued earlier, Brecht had always wanted his audiences to be cogitative spectators; this is what epic theatre aims at: to examine and "express their genuine critical response" (Heim, 2015, p. 35), not just wallowing in emotions. The erasure of any possibility of the audience's empathy with the performers, to make them critical observers, is the defining reason for Brecht's expostulation of the Aristotelian conception of drama. Brecht had no interest in the cathartic effect of performance. In fact, his disillusionment with Aristotelian drama was based on the fact that,

> …looking around one discovers more or less motionless bodies in a curious state – they seem to be contracting their muscles in a strong physical effort, or else to have relaxed them after violent strain . . . they have their eyes open, but they don't look, they stare . . . they stare at the stage as if *spellbound* [*sic*], which is an expression from the Middle Ages, an age of witches and obscurantism. (Bigsby, 1985, p. 343)

Brecht abhorred this overindulgence and overabundance of sentimentality in conventional theatre because it insidiously removes the characters as well as the spectators from sociopolitical contexts in the name of shared feelings and the universal human condition. Obsessed with a spirit of "changing the world" (Wekwerth, 1990, p. 23), he instead devised various innovative techniques to suit his topical issues, such as the family, religion, meat markets, oil, inflation, social problems and agriculture. For this very reason, he used the term 'parable' for his later works, and even gave this form of drama a new term, 'dialectic', to "induce an enquiring, critical attitude on the part of the spectators towards the events shown" (Styan, 1960, p. 231). Drawing upon Natalie Crohn Schmitt's (1990) quantum mechanics view of observation, I argue that a Brechtian audience, through an act of observation, plays a significant role in the creation of an (alternative) reality, "an alternative world as imagined by a unique, sometimes visionary mind" (p.2). Here, I share Schmitt's belief that, in the articulation of this space, quantum mechanics provides a "model for a different view of social relations" (as cited in Johnson, 2012, p. 154) by rejecting the idea of "an objective reality independent of the observer" (Lewis, 1997, p.107). In fact, as a result of the participatory experience gained at the time of performance, theatregoers learn the art of perspectival shift with regard to alternative positions for understanding human behaviour and

social life. Therefore, the quantum paradigm ensures audiences' active engagement in society. In other words, Brecht's epic theatre epitomises a struggle to metamorphose theatre from an arena of entertainment into a valuable educational tool, and his alienation device is a serious attempt to achieve this political goal.

2. Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*

The Brechtian idea of alienation, *Verfremdungseffekt*, which is central to epic theatre, is indeed a great turning point in the history of theatre. Brecht describes the alienation of a character or an event as "stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about them" (Brooker, 1994, p. 191). This process of estrangement, or defamiliarization, was a deliberate effort on the part of the producers and directors of his plays to discourage intense emotional involvement on the part of the audience. The strategy aims to remind spectators that the performance on stage is not an absolute reality, thus ultimately enabling them to see things more critically, by offering "a broad spectrum of interpretive possibilities" (Plotnitsky, 2013, pp. 82–83). In other words, Brecht endows his spectators with the ability to visualise very familiar events in a new light, by foregoing former biases. In this respect, "Brecht's alienation is regarded as a destruction of habits" (Wekwerth, 1990, p. 31), thereby making the audience understand and perceive the social incongruities he intends to critique on stage. By remaining aloof, spectators may then question the fundamental premises that shape their perceptions of the world. Therefore, Brechtian plays, in following the conceptual framework of quantum mechanics, pronounce "the existence of permeable worlds with sedimenting effects in the unfolding of phenomena" (Plotnitsky, 2013, p. 93). Once this societal conditioning was achieved by performances, "the sphere of social possibilities also revealed itself" (Wekwerth, 1990, p. 23). An oft-quoted example from *Life of Galileo* explains this alienation effect thus: In scene 13, Brecht carefully resorts to interplay between what is shown and what is told. Instead of showing Galileo's recantation, other characters, such as Monk and Andrea, engage in an extensive discussion about the consequences of Galileo's recantation. Since all the characters interpret Galileo's recantation in multiple and conflicting ways, these interpretations provide the spectators with diverse possibilities so that, after much deliberation, they can make their own critical judgements. Thus, critical judgement and distance are reinforced in scene 14 of the play, when Galileo is shown to be under house arrest. His remark: "Correct – Now I must eat", (Brecht, 1974, p.109) in the midst of a philosophically oriented monologue, bars the viewer's elevated perception of a great scientist, turning him, rather, into an unheroic protagonist, a slave of his biological needs. The V-Effekt obviates any possibility of the spectators' identification with Galileo, who is simultaneously presented as a hero and a sinner. In other words, there is a dual tendency towards empathy with and detachment from Galileo. These quantum-inspired multiple interpretive possibilities encourage the spectators to take a pluralistic approach to the discussion of Galileo's recantation, rather than siding with one view or the other. This is further emphasised in the play through Brecht's historicising method that helps the spectators maintain a critical attitude towards the persecuted intellectual protagonist, rather than being "pacified through their [Aristotelian] empathy with the character's dilemma" (Al-Badr, 2014, p.12). This critical attitude towards Galileo's character prepares the spectators to look at the world in a scientific way, as argued earlier in the context of quantum mechanics, which plays a revolutionary role in changing the world. Brecht indubitably envisages theatre as a tool for social and political change, which is possible with the rational analysis of characters and situations, rather than being lulled into

emotional passivity. And in order to prompt this change, Brecht presents reality, human nature and societal structures as changeable.

3. *Beckettisme Hypnotique*

In contrast, Beckett never seeks to alienate the audience from his characters. His dramatic techniques offer him a chance to make his audience feel the same anxiety that the characters on stage feel. Beckett's productions require a pensive and agile audience, yet there is no escape from being rolled down into an emotional well. By presenting boredom by boring the audience, Beckett tries to arouse in man an awareness of his forlorn state. Haunted by their contingency of being, Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* come to represent the thousands of people obsessed with sordidness and distress, communicated in the play on a semantic level. Spectators' intense concentration on the hypnotic signs is impossible without becoming emotionally involved in them. And this is evident from Beckett's instruction to his director Peter Hall to lengthen the "many pauses and bore the audience more, implying that he wanted them drawn more fully into the bafflement, uncertainty, and boredom the characters experience in the course of waiting for Godot: 'Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful'" (Worth, 1994, p. 818). In the same way that characters struggle with the meaning of their fractured utterances and distorted situation, so the audience must struggle too, not because of an Aristotelian paradigm of shared universal human feelings but in order to grapple with their postmodern incarceration instead. And to erase any possibility of perceiving the world as being characterised by eternal or transcendental notions of human existence, Beckett never allows any freedom to his spectators, no matter which theatrical venues they occupy.

Therefore, Beckett's theatrical spaces must epitomise uncertainty; and his early prison performances quintessentially reject any legitimation of society through metadiscourse, in this particular case represented by the figure of Godot – the Christian God. Analysing the 1980s Florida State Prison performance of *Waiting for Godot*, Homan writes that the prison audience:

> …were unable to, or perhaps refused to, make a distinction between their world offstage and ours onstage. For them, the 'stage' properly embraced both the "'boards' and the house" . . . We were performing two plays, the one Beckett wrote and that larger play in which men were waiting no less than Vladimir and Estragon were waiting for Godot, an alternate play whose audience insisted on being part of the scheduled production. (as cited in Koshal, 2010, p. 156)

Similarly, the San Quentin State Prison performance is quintessential of postmodern unpredictability in its foregrounding of a performance space that focuses on "the immediate situation [of the prisoners] rather than looking to a distant future". As a teacher at San Quentin, who had spoken to the prisoners after the performance, rightly observed, no one else can better understand the meaning of waiting and the postponement of "hope to a distant future" than prisoners, since prison is neither a "microcosm of society at large nor a space entirely excluded from that society" (Koshal, 2010, pp. 204, 205). It is in fact a space in which "precarious violence and organised power operate together without much pretence to humanism, even though they operate beneath the tutelary shadow of a bourgeois, legally enforced morality". Prison in this context can be perceived as a "space of intense institutional control and a legalised abandonment of interned populations to the unprotected violence of guards", in which the prisoners not only

"negotiate these pressures but, from this space of daily exposure to violence, they must also perform for the institutional authorities as reforming subjects, soon to be worthy of parole or release" (Koshal, 2010, p. 205). What Koshal suggests is that the responses of different perplexed prisoners decentre the ostensibly universal discourses of a shared humanity, what Lyotard (1979) calls the legitimation of metanarratives or grand narratives (p. xxiii), thereby emphasising divergent ways of thinking about the world and oneself. Traces of this tendency can be found in other plays as well. Clove and Ham, old and young Krapp, are all pictures of individuals on the verge of a postmodernist breakthrough whose self-conscious reflections on their own ontological status can only add to the tale of psychic breakdown the audience experience, as is evident from the psychic breakdown of Beckett's *chosen* audience for a prison performance, prisoners waiting for parole. It is precisely for this reason that if spectators desire to alienate themselves from the protagonist, sordid feelings are inevitable. As Alvin Epstein rightly observes: "No matter how abstract and disconnected you want to keep yourself from the meaning of the text, it still has meaning; it's not notes in music, where you can keep your distance" (as cited in McMullan, 1994, p.199).

It is perhaps in this effort to overpower the minds of his spectators that Beckett never allows any liberty and freedom to his actors. Any changes to stage directions are discouraged. He always exercises absolute control over theatrical instructions, putting the actor's body in a "strait jacket" in such a way that the "body itself becomes a sign" (McMullan, 1994, p. 202). Beckett has always wanted his actors to do what he tells them; he never expects them to act. This is evident from Beckett's letter to Roger Blin, the director of his first French performance in which Pierre Latour, who was performing the role of Estragon, did not allow his trousers to fall down completely. In order to avoid comic banter from the audience as well as "for reasons of personal dignity", he allowed the trousers to fall midway, to his hips. Beckett, annoyed by this gesture, wrote to Blin: "There is one thing which annoys me, it is Estragon's trousers . . . they were held up halfway . . . They should not, absolutely not, that's how it is at that point, he is not even conscious of the great wound inflicted on this touching final tableau." What Beckett suggests is that Estragon is not minded to care about the trousers. So he categorically instructs Blin to be "kind enough to restore it as indicated in the text and as always allowed for in the course of rehearsals, and let the trousers fall completely around his ankles. That must seem stupid to you but for me it is capital" (as cited in Lawley, 2008, pp. 87–89). This disciplined attitude, which Beckett expects from his actors, indubitably gestures towards his obsession to make audiences follow trance-like the path he has chosen for them. Everything is preplanned and pre-decided, "so that all the notes and 't's and vowel sounds are actually there, you don't have to do anything because he's done it" (McMullan, 1994, p. 202). Beckett's protagonists seem to be puppets in the hands of the dramatist, surrendering their bodies and minds to the writer's dramatic material, bound to operate according to certain laws. Unlike Brecht, who is liberal in his approach, allowing his actors to float their ideas, sometimes incorporating them if accommodative, Beckett makes his actors dependent on him, so that the feeling he intends to transfer to his audience will not be ruined.

No wonder then that Beckett's obsession with unreasonableness, laced with paranoia, is also informed by his art of hypnotising his audience, mesmerising them to accept the irrationality and precariousness prevailing in the world, and hence in dramatic spectacle. Interestingly, Brecht and Beckett seem to be poles apart in their concept of reason. Brecht's dramas, though episodic in nature, are still strung together with fine visible knots, constantly channelling the spectator's

attention towards the chains of reasoning of characters, rather than towards a cascade of dramatic action. Brecht's struggle for reason is actually his struggle against ignorance. Galileo's remarks that he believes in reason and its power sounds like a false statement when seen in the context of his own situation. It highlights his fear of ignorance. But the same reason might destroy Beckett's sense of disorderliness, which he conveys through static and incoherent structural representations. Michael Haerdter recorded Beckett's comments in a rehearsal diary regarding his rationale for unreasonableness:

> The eighteenth century has been called the century of reason . . . I've never understood that: they're all mad! . . . They give reason a responsibility which it simply can't bear, it's too weak. The encyclopaedists wanted to know everything
> . . . But that direct relationship between the self and – as the Italians say –
> *lo scibile*, the knowable, was already broken . . . But now it is no longer possible to know everything, the tie between the self and things no longer exists . . . one must make a world of one's own in order to satisfy one's need to know, to understand, one's need for order. (as cited in McMullan, 1994, p. 200)

This chaotic world can only be perceived through chaotic dramatic form where nothing happens at all. Beckett indubitably presents a shape that is not only cyclical and paradoxical, but also a "shape that is self-conscious" (Bradby, 1987, p. 116) – in other words, the shape of a performance. For example, the visual system of patterns in *Waiting for Godot* gestures towards a post-modern malaise, foregrounded in the play through Beckett's unreasonably minimalist presentation of dramatic material, whether it is action, language or setting, which actually forces the audience to direct their attention towards selected perceptual elements being offered for intense involvement. This is the main reason for avoiding elaborate stage settings which tend to divert the spectators' attention away from the main target.

Without overloading or cluttering the stage with too many concepts or characters, Beckett repeatedly introduces human flotsam in his plays. For example, using confinement as a governing mechanism, the landscape of *Happy Days* features an elderly couple, the only characters who remain on stage throughout the course of the action. *Waiting for Godot* similarly presents four characters, two of them waiting on a country road with a bare tree in the background for an unknown person called Godot, who remains absent throughout the whole play. Via a stylized use of space to reflect the inner state of mind of the characters, Beckett's theatre "focuses on a dialectic between formal structure and interpretation, establishing a dynamic tensional relation between the two" (McMullan, 1994, p. 200). Beckett's minimalist presentation of language actually invigorates his dramatic representations. It also shows how much he is committed to words. Lucky's long unpunctuated tirade in *Waiting for Godot* is quintessential of Beckett's art of communicating the incommunicable. Every single word of the tirade carries a burden of nostalgic feelings which, otherwise, cannot be conveyed through elaborate speeches. Where words become stagnant, silences and pauses speak loudly. *Endgame*, *Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days* are plays where it is silence that communicates. That is exactly how quantum strangeness explains "the way reality works, pushing the limits of commonsense notions of reality as composed of separately existing elements" (Oppermann, 2015, p. 92). Quantum strangeness, according to Wolfgang Smith (2005), "stems quite simply from a failure to distinguish between the microsystem [physical reality] as such and its observables . . . (the particle, in this instance) . . .

which consequently seems to combine logically incompatible attributes" (p. 58). Like quantum strangeness, Beckett's strategies, too, seem to be incompatible with our common-sense representation of reality. For example, consciously or unconsciously, Beckett, by studding the text with pauses and silences, resorts to Brecht's episodic presentation of dramatic material with the intention of engaging the audience in a contemplative exercise. Apparently, these pauses and silences of anticipation seem to be Beckett's favourite trick, to put the audience in a meditative mood, to fill in the blank spaces between words, to supply their own meaning to the text. But the characters' ambiguous questioning dismantles and defies any effort on the part of the spectators to find neat solutions to their problems and presumably gives no answers because there are no answers. In *Happy Days*, Winnie's cry, "What does it mean? he says – What's it meant to mean? – and so on – lot more stuff like that – usual drivel. Do you hear me?" (I, 156), is a deliberate warning to the spectators not to make any effort at seeking meaning. The same is true of Vladimir and Estragon who, in *Waiting for Godot*, are engaged in a futile effort to find meaning in their fragmentary existence via an endless series of questions and answers, hat-swapping, abusing each other and other foolish activities. In *Endgame*, Hamm and Clove too baffle the audience by emphasising the futility of interpretation: "Hamm. We're not beginning to . . . to . . . mean something? Clov. Mean something! You and I, mean something! [Brief laugh.] Ah, that's a good one!" (p.115). Any human struggle to create a little order in a senseless universe or to demand interpretation of a chaotic world shows the futility of interpretation: "Ah the creatures, the creatures. Everything has to be explained to them" (p.122). The awe and discomfort induced within the spectators "create equal anxiety for all parties [spectators as well as performers] involved because there is no clear dividing line among the roles designated for each" (Sakellaridou, 2014, p. 22). Therefore, Beckett's skilful, unrealistic and absurd stage settings are meant to be magical as well as hypnotic in order to trap his audience into enigma and entanglement that pervade his theatrical world.

Brecht, on the other hand, by avoiding more naturalistic and realistic stage sets, intends to save his audience from any emotional involvement so as to make his drama "dryly didactic" (Bentley, 1992, p. 194). Brecht's stages are more elaborate as a set is "quoting an environment rather than representing it; there was extensive use of projections and scene tiles; the small chorus, in its songs to the audience . . . there was an enchanting ease . . . elegance with which the most serious scenes were performed" (Weber, 1994, p. 172). He avoids magic or hypnotic fields in his stage representations because he is more interested in human activity. For this reason, he concentrates on a gestic acting style, considering it the best means of revealing human activity. *Gestus*, though originally not introduced by Brecht, becomes largely associated with his dialectic narratives for the expression of human attitudes. More significantly, Brecht does not confine himself to verbal language. *Gestus* is but a story of signs of social relations: gestures, facial expressions, intonation, dialogue, movement, silence, ultimately transcribing to music, something which parallels the wave function's one-to-one correspondence with elements of reality. As Colbeck and Renner (2012) argue, "a quantum system's wave function is in one-to-one correspondence with its 'elements of reality', i.e., the variables describing the system's behaviour" (pp. 1–4). Describing the primary reality of these interwoven elements, Bohm (1995) argues that "[t]he correlations between particles are so interactive that they are intimately entangled in experimental conditions, blurring the lines between seeing and doing" (p.48). The best image to describe this process of entanglement is a flowing stream in which "one may see an ever-changing pattern of vortices, ripples, waves, splashes [which] have no independent existence as such". Instead they appear and

vanish “in the total process of the flow” (Bohm, 1995, p. 48). In perfect harmony with Brecht’s narrative drive of epic theatre, *Gestus* is “the realm of attitudes adopted by the characters towards one another . . . Everything hangs on the story which is what happens between people.” Thus, “the story is the theatre’s great operation, the complete fitting together of all the gestic incidents” (Brooker, 1994, p.195). In *The Life of Galileo*, eschewing all psychological considerations, Galileo’s showmanship, observations or even his frenzied excitement can be read as Brecht’s efforts at using theatrical language to transpose gests. Similarly, gestus plays a significant role in *Mother Courage and Her Children* in which Kattrin can only communicate via gestus. The opening image of scene three in the play usefully captures the gestus of *Mother Courage* as a whole. Mother Courage’s act of stretching “a washing line to a large cannon, across which she and Kattrin are folding the washing”, as well as her bargaining with “an armour over a sack of shot”, draws a nexus between “a loaded emblem of domesticity . . . the emblem of commerce . . . and an emblem of war . . . in a visual instantiation of what [may be termed] the family as the matrix of a system, the machine of war” (Gleitman, 1991, p. 160). The visual images and effects encapsulate the central motifs of the play in such a way that if spectators “were to watch a play through a glass wall blocking all sound, [they] should still be able to follow the essential story” (Weber, 1994, p. 181). Though episodic in nature, Brecht’s stories are told with clarity and lucidity, verbally as well as nonverbally. His ensemble’s productions had a large international viewership, despite the fact that the audience was unable to follow the German text. The gestic idea is encapsulated in, to use Brecht’s terminology, *Haltung* – the attitude and language “is gestic when it is grounded in a gest and conveys particular attitudes adopted by the speaker towards other men” (Brooker, 1994, p.198). Even language is not a barrier. Brecht has always wished to break up his story into episodes and various elements, each aiming at a clear and ordered presentation of a central basic action. This obsession of Brecht provided his actors, performers and even bystanders with an opportunity to corroborate and comment so that they might form their own judgements on the plays’ sociopolitical debate.

This paper has illustrated how a dynamic dialectic between quantum mechanics and theatrical praxis and its resultant quantum-inspired theatre, through mere subversion of classical theatrical paradigms, structures and design, open up space for postmodern fragmented and decentred existential allegory. The quantum realm is indubitably a space where everything dissolves to privilege observational activity in order to foreground the ways in which human consciousness interacts with the world. Lyotard’s (1979) comment usefully sums it up: “postmodern knowledge is theorizing its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, non-rectifiable, and paradoxical. It is changing the meaning of the word *knowledge* . . . It is producing not the known, but the unknown” (p. 60). Seen in this manner, it is not difficult to understand how, by privileging the participatory orientation of theatrical space, Brecht’s as well as Beckett’s plays delegate all responsibility to their reflexive audiences, but in quite contrary ways. While Beckett, simply convinced of the impossibility of a closed ending, since any resolution in this absurd and fragmented world is unthinkable, invariably rejects any opinions of his troubled audience, Brecht’s failure to supply a resolution brings his audience to the forefront to supply solutions to the problems he has proffered. Nevertheless, at the heart of this ambivalence regarding the open endings of Brecht’s and Beckett’s quantum-inspired plays resides a solipsistic dependency between observer and observed that instigates their social activism or existential Micawberism, respectively, to capture postmodern sensibilities.

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