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ALIENATION OF LANGUAGE IN THE WORKS OF SAMUEL BECKETT AND DAVID LYNCH

The notion of linguistic autonomy undoubtedly defines Samuel Beckett and David Lynch's conception of reality. A declaration of linguistic independence encountered in all of their works points to their stance on the relativity of meaning and its expression via words. Beckett's theory on the futility of language is additionally supported by his ideas of the "unsayable" and the "unnamable" within language.

Verbal expression may be a compulsive need, but it is self-defeating – in saying anything the potentially sayable becomes unsayable.

(Kennedy 134)

The incapability to express the meaning destroys the purpose of speaking in the first place. Hence, all utterances are deprived of any understandable message, becoming meaningful merely to their producers. The lack of reason for talking contradicts the dire need for verbal self-expression, which leads to great unease and frustration, resulting in the production of utterances like: "Say no more. (*Pause.*) But I must say more. (*Pause.*) Problem here." (Beckett 155). This self-contradictory remark from Winnie (*Happy Days*) emphasizes the hopelessness of the speaker in her quest for effective communication and a solution to satisfy her natural inborn verbal creativity.

The 'absurd potential' of Beckett's language, pointing to the linguistic autonomy represented in the author's works, can be traced to multiple examples of linguistic grotesque characterizing his dramas. In Beckett's plays the notion of linguistic humour is distorted, preventing the audience from joining in with shared laughter. As observed by Wolfgang Iser:

In Beckett's theatre, laughter itself is toppled: The spectator never laughs at what he is expected to laugh at, only the frustration of his expectations. Instead of relieving insecurity, laughter locks the spectator more firmly into it.

(201–202)

All of the linguistic mediums used by Beckett as ingredients contributing to plays' comic value are based on juxtaposed monologues and parody of dialogues. Beckett's constant abuse of well-known quotes points back to his view on expressing one's self with already existing utterances, which proves that every situation may be commented upon with re-invented statements:

There is parody in all these exchanges; but the traditional overtones are also resuscitated – an overworked literary 'sample' is made to work dramatically.

(Kennedy 143)

Broken monologues, shadow dialogues and stylistic compression are all factors contributing to the build-up of alienated discourse the author chooses to use in his works.

David Lynch also stands as a proponent of this autonomous language. He shows this in works such as *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Twin Peaks* (1990–1991) or *Wild at Heart* (1990) and reflects the extreme break-up with the logic of language as a natural means of communication. Distorted speech, speaking backwards and riddles bewilder, introducing a type of uncomfortable familiarity which unnerves the mind of its audience:

If at times language and other sorts of signs seem to tease up with their many possible meanings, they sometimes taunt with implications that are all too-obvious-as if meaning itself had been swallowed up and then, like the Log Lady's gum, spat out for our inspection.

(Tellotte 166)

Such grotesque humour in Lynch's films, as well as in Beckett's plays, is unchangeably followed by pauses of silence. Yet, the notion of silence itself is more than multi-layered within the authors' works, as their quiet pauses are never random and deprived of significance. Hence, it is worth mentioning that in Beckett and Lynch we are constantly presented with a variety of silence.

There never is pure silence in Beckett's and Lynch's works. Faked moments of quietness are as meaningful and readable, as are the verbal segments within their dialogues. This self-imposed hierarchy of sound and silence in the authors' works allows them to introduce diversity of silence. Such a variety starts with meaningful pauses (Beckett). The element of the visual enables Lynch to support the powerful speechless themes with the white noise¹ sections, which skillfully combine visually appealing elements

¹ **White noise** – a random signal (or process) with a flat power spectral density (PSD). It is a complex signal or sound that covers the entire range of audible frequencies, all of which possess equal intensity. White noise is analogous to white light, which contains roughly equal intensities of all frequencies of visible light. It is the sound of many vibrating systems, and it is useful in describing the spectra of vocal sibilants as well. Just as white light is the combination of all the colours of the rainbow, so white noise can be defined as a combination of equally intense sound waves at all frequencies of the audio spectrum. (www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/642448/White-Noise)

within *mise-en-scène* with the artificial 'moaning' sound of the interiors. The aspect of sound is in itself a separable item in Lynch's productions. Other kinds of silence act as juxtapositions to the writer's pauses and the director's white noise. It is the well-known Beckettian "blubber" consisting of torn phrases spat out at such a pace that in a short time they become one continuous noise, a sort of "white noise" silence being produced by a voice which the audience eventually becomes immune to.

The meaningfulness of silence is reflected by Beckett, in his "being less interested in what is said than in the way in which it is said" (Kennedy 133). Treating language as vision, Beckett's plays rely as much on silence as they do on sound in their quest for effective communication. Still, these moments of speechlessness provide the author with the tools to transmit the concept of people's failure in maintaining meaningful dialogue. As Andrew Kennedy observes:

The total lack of interaction between the speakers is not stated but expressed through the fast-flowing fragments of speech that never interlock.

(Kennedy 132)

Accordingly, Beckett's shadow dialogues interpolated with extended pauses in speech give way to the medium of "blubber" – talking silence. We see it during the blubber fit of Lucky's "thinking" process, where the seemingly random bits and pieces of thoughts, deafening us with one streak of voice, create a meaningful statement.

A similar pattern of meaningful silence is witnessed in *Not I*, where silence reproduced by continuous sound takes place before any kind of action on the stage, providing an uninterrupted stream of consciousness-like monologue. Here, Beckett succeeds in "making language not merely a vehicle for thought but the source of the action itself" (Ben-Zvi 261). Apart from its deafening quality, the female voice manages to establish quite an emotional and dramatic aura within this fifteen-minute monologue. Therefore, in this instance, blubber-talking silence acquires a purely dramatic function.

As in the case of Beckett, silence creates sound, in Lynch's films it is sound that produces silence. The most obvious examples include Dorothy Vallens's "moaning hallways" in her apartment block (*Blue Velvet*) or the interior of Laura Palmer's house (*Twin Peaks*). An interesting aspect of Lynch's play on sound is reflected by the juxtaposition of trivial elements of visual narration, like lighting a match dramatically illustrated with the harsh sound of a large wooden torch. All of the sounds used in Lynch's films are isolated, creating a complex map of subconscious signs that follow and match each other, leading to the final solution of the story. Hence, astute viewers will recognize the saxophone solo of Fred played on the

radio in Pete's garage in *Lost Highway* (1997). The total sound blast created by this jazz cacophony is to spur the audience's imagination and their awareness of detail. The same technique is employed during the orgy scene in *Fire Walk with Me* (1992), where sound replaces dialogue.

The film tests the full range of its aural palette, particularly in the loudest and quietest moments. The orgy scene works so well because the music is so loud, so the dialogue is virtually impossible to hear, just like a real party. Only Lynch would allow this form of reality within a film.

(Le Blanc 60)

With reference to the already mentioned authors' motto that "it is not important what you say, but how you say it," a thought should be spared to the last but not least important element of the authors' fascination with language. It brings us back to the characters' verbal capabilities, or to be exact, a lack of them, as the authors' interest, more than frequently lies in their speech distortions.

The authors' variety of experiments concerning distorted speech raises the question of its actual impact on the basic principles governing effective verbal communication. Beckett's affection for distorted voices finds its reflection in the author's deranged scenery, adding to the general idea of people's incongruity in the surrounding world and its actual desolation.

The dustbins, the sand-mounds and urns are containers for human voices – visual equivalents for Krapp's tapes.

(Kennedy 133)

Beckett's technique of "boxing" voices literally compliments the author's concept of mental imprisonment experienced by individuals compelled to "be." A similar method of vocal confinement was used in the TV version of *Not I*. Here:

The emphasis is less on the monologue itself and its fragmented words than on the physical apparatus of speech-making – lips, teeth, saliva, tongue – captured by the mechanical apparatus of the television camera.

(Iser 264)

The futility in communicating the distorted utterances of phrases is additionally emphasized by the increasing pace of their delivery. The lips spitting out vomit-like, repetitive utterances make the continuous flow of speech futile. It portrays the attempts of the female giving birth to consistent and self-conscious statements that fail to come out. Her lips portray the vagina. Then, in *Waiting for Godot*, Lucky's process of verbal "thinking" introduces visionary and productive elements of the play's narration.

We may start at an extreme point, with the violent movement from rationalist articulateness to final aphasia in Lucky's speech. Here the rundown in the cycle of language is clearly irreversible. But even here there emerges, from the wreckage of syntax, the lost or potential beauty of human utterance. The speech is placed and organized in such a way that the pathological breakdown in language – the agony of lost meaning – becomes a source of creative energy in the play.

(Kennedy 139)

David Lynch's endorsement of speech distortions is one of the devices which he uses in his understanding of film aesthetics. He manages to over interpret simple sound layer of space and objects. Utmost attention should be paid to the author's dwarf character in *Twin Peaks* and *Fire Walk with Me*. The affecting awkwardness of his pronunciation was achieved by an astoundingly simplistic method. The technique of text delivery by the actor was phonetically backwards and projected in the opposite direction to the one in which it was recorded. The result is an incredible fluctuation of human voice intonation. The author's sympathy towards obscuring the human voice may well be noticed during the creepy karaoke session in *Blue Velvet*, where numerous doublings of the voice layer give it an unearthly and spooky aura.

In *Blue Velvet*, where the drug dealer Ben lip-synch to "in Dreams," the sound is at odds with the image, the voice with the body. [...] The aural/visual discrepancy is further emphasized by the multiple doublings and substitutions. In the scene at the Roadhouse, Ben stands in for Orbison's body at the same time Frank mouths the words to the song.

(Kuzniar 120–121)

The extensive use of speech distortion is unquestionably one of the most characteristic aspects of the authors' autonomous language. All the already analyzed elements (including sound juxtaposed with a variety of silence and the speech distortions in their works) have the prime aim of acquainting the receivers with linguistic levels of personal metaphysics created by Beckett and Lynch in their works. These are the mediums that signify the workings of the authors' linguistic code determining their dialogue with the audience. Hence, the concept of linguistic autonomy is by far one of the most significant aspects of these authors' metaphysics. It helps to visualize the individuality and the complexity of Beckett and Lynch's perception of the world, uncovering yet another of their communicative channels leading towards the depiction of menace of the ordinary as an underlying theme in their works.

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Films

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- Fire Walk With Me*. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Kyle MacLachlan, Sheryl Lee, Ray Wise and Chris Isaak. Francis Bouygues with a CiBy Picture, 1992.
- Lost Highway*. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Bill Pullman, Patricia Arquette, Balthazar Getty and Robert Loggia. Asymmetrical Productions with a CiBy Picture, 1997.
- Twin Peaks*. Dir. David Lynch (pilot, episodes 2, 8, 9, 14 and 29). Perf. David Lynch, Kyle MacLachlan, Michael Ontkean and Kenneth Welsh. A Lynch – Frost / Propaganda Films Production with Worldvision Enterprises Inc., 1990–1991.
- Wild at Heart*. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Nicholas Cage, Laura Dern, Willem Dafoe and Diane Ladd. A Propaganda Films Production with Polygram Filmed Entertainment, 1990.

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Alienacja języka w twórczości Samuela Becketta i Davida Lyncha

Koncepcja językowej autonomii niewątpliwie definiuje obraz rzeczywistości obserwowany przez nas w twórczości Samuela Becketta i Davida Lyncha. Deklaracja językowej niezależności charakteryzująca dorobek Becketta i Lyncha ukazuje ich światopogląd na relatywność znaczeniową oraz próby jej ekspresji poprzez słowa. Teoria Becketta dotycząca językowej bezpłodności

jest przez niego dodatkowo wspierana ideą „niewypowiadalnego” oraz „nienazywalnego” w języku. Przerywane monologi, powracające dialogi oraz stylistyczna kompresja są czynnikami budującymi wyalienowany dyskurs będący znakiem firmowym w twórczości obojga autorów.

Filmowy styl Davida Lyncha manifestuje jego poparcie dla autonomii języka, czego najlepszym wyznacznikiem są jego dobrze znane zabiegi językowe z użyciem wstecznej wymowy czy samych zaburzeń mowy. W artykule poruszono również problem różnorodności ciszy w dramatach Samuela Becketta i filmowych produkcjach Davida Lyncha i jej wielowymiarowości nigdy niepozbawionej znaczenia. Wszystkie z wyżej wymienionych elementów mają swój główny cel w zapoznaniu publiczności ze stylem językowym, obojga autorów. Autorka zwraca także uwagę na środki wyrazu, które w praktyce pozwalają twórcom na użycie owego językowego kodu, determinującego ich dialog z publicznością.