Kinesthetic Empathy, Physical Recoil: The Conflicting Embodied Affects of Samuel Beckett's *Quad*

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Exploring audience responses to Samuel Beckett's Quad *(1981) reveals the play's tendency to evoke intense but contradictory embodied affects for its spectator. Audience members recurrently testify to experiencing a heightened kinesthetic empathy that catalyzes their sense of identification with the onstage figures. However, they also repeatedly record a simultaneous impulse to recoil from the performers, a sense of revulsion or the refusal of immersive engagement with their moving bodies. A hybrid methodological framework of kinesthetic empathy and disability theory offers a means of better exploring both the generation and the consequence of* Quad*'s conflicting embodied affects. This framework emphasizes* Quad*'s foregrounding of its performers' embodiment, and permits a consequently clearer recognition of* Quad*'s value as a performance that demands that its spectator confront the physical fact of others' bodily existence—while acknowledging the difficulty of such engagement.*

Keywords: Samuel Beckett / *Quad* / kinesthetic empathy / disability theory / affect

Although first published by Faber and Faber as *Quad* in 1984, Samuel Beckett's wordless play was originally introduced to the public as *Quadrat I* and *Quadrat II* in a recorded performance by members of the Stuttgart Preparatory Ballet School. The performance was first broadcast in Germany in October 1981 by the Süddeutscher Rundfunk television network, and then in Great Britain by BBC Two in December 1982. In both *Quadrat I* and *II*, four

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Journal of Modern Literature Vol. 42, No. 2 • Copyright © The Trustees of Indiana University • DOI 10.2979/jmodelite.42.2.08

physically similar figures enter the quadrangle space one by one, each beginning at a different corner. Each figure walks along one side of the quadrangle and then along the touching diagonal towards its center. Whenever any figure comes to the middle of the quadrangle where the diagonal paths cross, each sharply swerves around the central "danger zone" in order to avoid colliding with each other (Beckett, *Complete Works* 453). Following this sharp swerve, each figure makes a ninety-degree counterclockwise turn and repeats the same path, which now takes them away from the center, back around the quad's periphery. In *Quadrat I*, the figures are dressed in red, blue, yellow, and white djellabas, and each performer's walk is accompanied by a different musical instrument. In *Quadrat II*, the same movement is performed at half the original pace, with a metronome replacing the percussion instrument accompaniment.

In what follows, I investigate *Quad*'s tendency to evoke intense but contradictory embodied affects for its spectator. Audience reaction to *Quad* frequently testifies to a particularly visceral and discomfited spectatorial response to the precisely controlled movement of its four performers. *Quad*'s staging of an ambiguous confrontation-and-evasion movement is mirrored in the audience's own confused feelings of empathy and repulsion; its spectators, we will see, recurrently attest to confused feelings both of identification and of revulsion, mesmerized fascination and nervous recoil, or what Laura Salisbury eloquently terms "wrinkles in the affective experience of an observer" (212). *Quad* engages its audience members in empathetic identification with the moving bodies in performance, and simultaneously generates a resistance to such identification, creating a tension between immersion and alienation in the spectator. As a result of this unsettling affect generated by the embodied nature of the television or theatrical performance, *Quad*'s spectators frequently find themselves resisting immersion in or identification with the movement before them, inhabiting a midway point between recognition and revulsion, empathy and recoil, in confrontation with *Quad*'s material moving bodies.

Quad has frequently been recognized as one of Beckett's most "distinctly dance-like" pieces (Starte 199), "a piece of contemporary dance staged for the camera" (Bignell 43), given the precisely choreographed movement of its performers and its rejection of any verbal component in favor of a focus on bodily movement. Beckett's note "Some ballet training desirable" in his description of his preferred cast (*Complete Works* 453) and his hiring of ballet students from the Stuttgart Preparatory Ballet School for the performance's 1981 filming add additional weight to a reading of *Quad* that prioritizes its staging of bodily movement. However, while many scholars note in passing *Quad*'s dance-like focus on corporeal choreography, this recognition tends to remain a brief introductory parenthesis in works that move on almost immediately to extra-bodily ideas. Academic engagement with *Quad* has been dominated by focus on the technological capacities of the television medium, as by Linda Ben-Zvi (2006), Eckart Voigts-Virchow (2000), Elizabeth Klaver (1991), and Enoch Brater (1985), and by interrogations of its mathematical particularities, as by Baylee Brits (2017), Conor Houghton (2013), and Piotr

Woycicki (2012).[1] While these approaches have generated productive insights, the field currently lacks sustained scholarly engagement with the "devastatingly physical" elements of *Quad*'s performance (Homan 155).

This lack of engagement not only signals a gap in current academic understanding of *Quad* specifically, but also indicates a broader breakdown in the application of performance studies methodology to texts that more traditionally fall within the remit of "literary scholarship" (a category that includes many of Beckett's later television and theatre works) in which the focus on the bodily movement of its performers demands "a sensory mode of perception on the part of the listener/viewer that is materially different from the act of reading," as performance scholar Anna McMullan describes *Quad* (1). A failure to draw on the critical language and conceptual frameworks that performance studies uses to speak about the functioning of the human body in performance is one of the reasons, I suggest, for the widespread critical confusion faced with *Quad*. "Beckett's bewildering stage piece," as *The Telegraph* critic Tim Martin calls it (par. 14), "one of the most puzzling pieces of work by Samuel Beckett" (Schmid 263), remains perplexing only while we lack the critical capacity to interrogate the range of affect produced by its moving bodies. S.E. Gontarski notes specifically the difficulty encountered by those who try to speak about Beckett's television plays and "especially *Quad* without access to the productions. On the page, without the iconic, ideogrammatic counterpart, the works are unreadable in any traditional literary sense" (88). For all its fascinating mathematical permutations in textual form, *Quad* becomes *Quad* only in performance, embodied in human physicality; as Elizabeth Klaver observes, "the script is only a pre-text, for the television performance constitutes the text" (375). In contrast to the written mediation of the body that typifies prose and poetry, the media of embodied dramatic performance generates affect in being physically embodied by the human performer, necessitating the spectator's confrontation with the living, moving human body in what McMullan terms "an intercorporeal network" that draws attention to "the perceptual and corporeal experience not only of the actors/personae but also of the spectator" (13). Consequently, scholarly approaches that fail to engage with the sensory and emotional affect of the confrontation with the human body in television and theatrical performance risk overlooking a crucial element of *Quad*'s functioning.

Accordingly, in order to investigate the moments in which audience members find themselves both mesmerized and repulsed by *Quad*'s moving bodies, I move away from the script analysis, television theory, and application of mathematical concepts that have typified earlier scholarly approaches to the play. Instead, I turn to recorded audience responses to performances of *Quad* drawn from professional and amateur reviews and from academic testimony, and employ a hybrid methodological framework drawn from disability theory and kinesthetic empathy to interrogate these responses. Kinesthetic empathy, the spectator's bodily response to an observed object's physical existence or bodily movement, offers a model for understanding the audience members' embodied response to the physicality of

Quad's performing bodies. By contrast, disability theory's focus on the common ableist rejection of the unfamiliarly or upsettingly moving body, as demonstrated by the work of Lennard J. Davis, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, and Tobin Siebers, offers a counterpointed but complementary framework for exploring spectatorial recoil from bodies that move in an unfamiliar manner. By countering what Beckett scholar Steven Connor calls "the difficulty of discussing non-verbal action in words" (181), and returning focus squarely to the embodied materiality of the human figure in performance, this hybrid framework will allow us to explore the value in how *Quad* both engages and limits the audience member's sense of identification or union with the play's moving bodies.

KINESTHETIC EMPATHY AND DISABILITY THEORY

According to the modern definition provided by H. Charlton Bastian, kinesthesia (often used interchangeably with the term proprioception) is the synthesis of information regarding the body's position, motion, and orientation provided by the sense organs (543). Empathy in its modern sense, as defined by Robert Vischer and Theodore Lipps, refers not merely to "a capacity for fellow-feeling" but rather the "ability to move into and feel anything in the observable world" (Foster 154), the process of "projecting oneself into the object of contemplation" (Reynolds and Reason, "Introduction" 19). The related term "kinesthetic empathy," then, denotes the specifically physiological variant of empathy, the spectator's physical reaction to the contemplated object's physical being, experienced as an automatic, unwilled, physiological response in contrast to an active process of imagination. The dance critic John Martin, an early proponent of kinesthetic empathy as a model for understanding the embodied affect generated by performance media, identified this effect as "the inherent contagion of bodily movement, which makes the onlooker feel sympathetically in his own musculature the exertions he sees in someone else's musculature" (*Dance* 105). More recent work on kinesthetic empathy has criticized the incorrect biological assumptions that formed the basis of Martin's understanding of the process, but retains the idea of the "contagion of bodily movement."

Two closely related models, motor mimicry and neural mimicry, have been advanced to explain this phenomenon. Motor mimicry involves the observer unconsciously adopting the posture and/or facial expressions of the observed sufferer (Dimberg, Thunberg, and Elmehed, 2000). The neural mimicry model contends that perception and action rely on the same neural circuits, and so both produce similar experiences (Preston and de Waal, 2002). This matched neural processing does not necessarily produce visible matched motor activity, but both the motor and neural mimicry models cite a motor resonance between observer and observed, and consequently a matched internal state between the two.

Current kinesthetic empathy work, especially that focused on the neural mimicry model, has drawn legitimacy from neuroscience's inquiry into mirror neurons. In the 1990s, Vittorio Gallese et al. recognized mirror neurons as part of the neurological system that explains the already-observed phenomenon of

movement's contagious nature (Gallese et al., 1996; Gallese, 2000; Gallese, 2001). The brain's mirror neurons fire in the same manner both when the individual performs a certain action and when the individual witnesses that action being performed. Consequently, the observer receives the sense that she is "actively participating in [the observed motion] and directly experiencing both its movements and their associated emotion" (Reason and Reynolds, "Related Pleasures" 54). An understanding of kinesthetic empathy, then, permits a new angle from which to explore spectator response to the movement of *Quad*: the audience's visceral experience of the perceived movement, and their potential close identification with the performers' bodily experience.

However, the kinesthetic empathy stimulated by bodily performance is often invoked as a model of harmonious union between individuals, a catalyst to a total empathetic identification that erases all felt distinction between individuals. As such, it is inadequate by itself as framework for exploring *Quad*, which appears to resist the audience's empathetic identification as much as or even more than it elicits it. Dee Reynolds, for example, argues that the experience of kinesthetic empathy between performer and audience means that the "spectator can be invested as both subject and object in a shared materiality" (129). Kinesthetic empathy, she declares, "does not take as its object a perceived other," but rather a liminal association of both beings "which is neither 'self' nor 'other'" (129) and which allows the spectator access to the very "materiality" of the performer's existence and performance (123).

This extreme feeling of physical union, while relevant to many other experiences of performance spectatorship, is an incomplete summary of the effect of *Quad*, which presents a defamiliarized body to the audience, a body from which spectators frequently recoil. As we will later explore in more detail, audience members admit struggling to recognize *Quad*'s bodies as mutually human, and even to resisting what they find to be a distressing rather than a satisfying kinesthetic immersion in *Quad*'s bodily movement, an "involuntary breach of individual separateness" (Langer 129). *Quad* thus demands that we consider not only how embodied performance stimulates the spectator's own bodily reaction in response to the moving body before them, but also when and why the spectator might resist this feeling of kinesthetic empathy with another body, refusing to "feel along with" another human being.

Against this model of intense simultaneous identification with another's bodily experience, recent disability theory offers a close examination of the resistance to empathy or identification with another's embodied experience. Disabilities studies emphasize how, as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson puts it, "varying degrees of disability or able-bodiedness" are determined by how far bodies

> conform to social expectations [. . .] the meanings attributed to extraordinary bodies reside not in inherent physical flaws, but in social relationships in which one group is legitimated by possessing valued physical characteristics [. . .] [and] by systematically imposing the role of cultural or corporeal inferiority on others. (7)

Tobin Siebers calls this phenomenon, in which narrow social expectation determines how the human body should and shouldn't function, the "ideology of ability." It is "at its simplest the preference for able-bodiedness," and "at its most radical" defines "the baseline by which humanness is determined" ("Complex Embodiment" 279). Seminal work in the field of disability theory has repeatedly located fear and consequent recoil as the operating factors of the ideology of ability, underlining the recurrent link between the perception of physical disability and the rejection of that body, the refusal to recognize the differently functioning individual as mutually human. "The ideology of ability makes us fear disability," Siebers observes ("Complex Embodiment" 279), by setting up what Lennard J. Davis calls "the nightmare" of the body that is "deformed, maimed, mutilated, broken" (5). Davis cites "horror, fear," "avoidance" and "strong feelings of repulsion" as likely responses to such a body (12), from which the self-declared able-bodied individual retreats. The body perceived as disabled, which does not fit these categories, is resisted by the able-bodied, who refuse empathy or identification with it for fear of aligning themselves with it.

Crucially for our analysis of *Quad*, what constitutes "incorrect" physical functioning remains socially determined, and can equate to the refusal to recognize as mutually human that body that is interpreted as excessively, inhumanly *able* rather than impaired. Garland-Thomson's study of the freak show demonstrates how the disabling gaze of the spectator can turn on the "over-" as well as the "under-performing" body, reading perceived physical excess as well as perceived physical deficiency as inhumanly Other: the bearded woman alongside the dwarf, the conjoined twin alongside the amputee (17). Any bodily experience perceived as unfamiliar or undesirable to the normate observer can be rejected as Other by the resistant disabling gaze. Thus we will see *Quad*'s dance-trained, hyper-controlled bodies persistently read as non-human by the play's spectators.

Quad, Salisbury observes, does not "simply gather up the viewer into transcendent, annihilating ecstasy or drop them into a disinterested shrug," but instead "inaugurates distinctively uncertain affects" (212) that generate "complex materialisations of sensations of self-coincidence and alterity" (214). A combined framework of kinesthetic empathy and disability theory thus offers a useful model through which to read the odd mixture of immersion and resistance so frequently reported by *Quad*'s spectators. Both fields are concerned with an onlooker's response to another human body, focusing respectively on the felt sense of physical communion and on the resistance to identifying with another human body. Bringing information and theories from both fields together to bear on staged performance offers a productive new perspective on *Quad*'s affective functioning.

QUAD: GENERATING CONTRADICTORY AFFECTS

Audience response recorded across commercial and amateur reviews and academic engagement suggests that *Quad* generates conflicting affects throughout its performance. While the change from *Quadrat I* to *Quadrat II*—from color to

monochrome, percussion instrument to metronome, and to a half-speed tempo—most predictably produces a shift in audience feeling, most spectators also report often radically changing affective responses even throughout the individual halves of *Quad*. Anecdotal evidence gathered from both scholarly engagement and commercial theatre criticism indicates a general movement from relatively neutral curiosity to hypnotized fascination as the sense of a choreographic pattern begins to emerge to an increasingly distressed discomfort as the performance continues seemingly endlessly.

However, *Quad*'s lack of narrative or dialogue makes it difficult to link the reported changes in affect firmly to any precise stimulus in the performance itself beyond a more idiosyncratically developing spectator response to its moving bodies, and I do not claim to lay out a map of changing affect as experienced in the same way by every spectator over every instantiation of *Quad*. Rather, I am interested in how the play generates both fascinated immersion and resistant recoil in spectators in ways that do not seem directly or predictably linked to any precise scripted moment of narrative, dialogue, or even radically changing movement,

Both *Quad*'s televisual and theatrical spectators testify recurrently to the manner in which the play's choreography can produce an intense level of physically and psychically felt absorption at moments during its performance. Tellingly, variations of the word "mesmerizing" recur throughout variously situated audience members' reflections on the performance. Amateur reviewer Emily Aherne confessed herself "mesmerized" by her first viewing of the 1981 Süddeutscher Rundfunk recording (par. 3), performance scholar Piotr Woycicki called it "mesmerising and simply beautiful" (155), and theatre critic Frances Winston declared Pan Pan's 2014 performance "completely mesmerising" (par. 7). More specifically, Beckett scholar Andrew Gibson likewise praises the Süddeutscher Rundfunk performance's "mesmerising, addictive rhythms" (238), and this focus on specifically the rhythm of the performers' movements and the accompanying percussion as being particularly "mesmerising" indicates the significance of the repetitively measured movement of *Quad*'s figures in generating the spectator's kinesthetic immersion.

Dominic Symonds and Millie Taylor's work on musical theatre, drawing on an understanding of kinesthetic empathy, emphasize how "corporeally overwhelming" the performance of rhythmic bodily movement can become (161), reminding us that "the power of gestures like music and dance [. . .] can overwhelm audiences with the rhythms and emotions of enchantment: we are immersed" in the observation of choreographed gesture which begins to "invade our bodies physically" (163, 211). While not often considered a musical theatre text, *Quad* likewise foregrounds reiterated bodily movements set to a measured tempo, thus heightening the effect of the spectator's kinesthetic empathy into something "mesmerizing." Intriguingly, the word "mesmerizing" that *Quad*'s spectators use so often to describe the play's effect finds its roots in "mesmerism," a term created by German doctor Franz Mesmer in the eighteenth century

to denote what he also dubbed "animal magnetism," the energy transference between animate beings:

> the efforts which the bodies make towards each other produce animal electricity, which in fact is no more than the effect produced between two bodies, one of which has more motion than the other; a phenomenon ferving to prove that the body which has moft motion communicates it to the other. (*Wonders and mysteries* 12)

While Mesmer's concept of the body organically producing transferable electricity would quickly be disproven, his recognition of the physically felt effect of one body in motion on another body at rest bears parallels to modern neuroscience's discovery of the mirror neuron's effect. It is a remarkable quirk of language development that *Quad*'s spectators so regularly describe the play in performance as "mesmerizing," thus speaking indirectly to an earlier version of the very same physical process of response.

Linda Ben-Zvi has convincingly traced how the televisual medium has "a heightened power" to "involve viewers directly" in comparison to other media (478), and is "employed to create intimacy" within Beckett's works (482). Although Ben-Zvi leaves *Quad* out of her analysis of Beckett's television plays, her interrogation of how the medium can generate a stronger immersive spectatorial response remains helpful for thinking about *Quad*'s effect in its 1981 recorded version. Ben-Zvi cites Marshall McLuhan's observation that the relatively "low-density, blurred images of television" (478)—in comparison with the typically sharper definition and higher resolution of the film image—demand a greater concentration and interpretative effort from the viewer, and so become "more intimate and moving" by dint of this heightened engagement (480). The partial obscuring of the human body via the televisual media works to render the body itself more absorbing for the spectator, runs Ben-Zvi's argument. That is, the more the spectator is required to labor to make out the on-screen image, the more immersed she finds herself becoming in what she observes, to "forge a deeper, more direct relationship with it" (477) and thus to end up "feeling what the figure is feeling" (482). Although neither McLuhan nor Ben-Zvi mention *Quad* specifically, the 1981 recording's darkened screen and high camera angle, in tandem with the complex pattern of the choreographed movement and the cloaking of the performers' bodies in their djellabas, certainly demand a heightened spectatorial attention. Ben-Zvi also notes how the reception format of the televisual in the second half of the twentieth century, "the small size of the screen and the intimacy of the reception—seen in rooms in private houses rather than in public spaces amongst strangers," did much to intensify spectatorial immersion in broadcast content (477). Today, nearly three decades after *Quad*'s first recording, when so much television media is watched on the still smaller and more private laptop screen, this intimate absorptive effect is yet more marked.

The manner in which the television medium can heighten audience immersion in the performers' movements may go some way toward explaining Beckett's reluctance to see *Quad* staged: "Can't see *Quad* on the stage," he admitted to Alan

Schneider in 1981 (*No Author* 416), and "I am dubious about yr. idea for staging Quad," he wrote to Jonah Salz in 1985 (*Letters III* 655). However, transferring the play into the theatrical medium does still offer a heightened potential for the spectator's kinesthetic immersion, as demonstrated by audience response to the multiple theatrical stagings of the play.[2] Crucially, a theatrical adaption of *Quad* retains the necessary confrontation with the physically rather than textually embodied moving figure in the same way that the televisual recording does, and that the prose or radio adaptation would not, immersing the spectator in a prolonged contemplation of embodied movement that "foregrounds the functions and psychosomatic charge of the body" (McMullan 59). *Quad*'s foregrounding of bodily movement allows the felt effect of kinesthetic empathy to resonate more intensely with the engaged spectator. There is no dialogue such as can be found even in Beckett's other highly choreographic late plays like *Footfalls* (1976), and the accompanying or even incidental music of most dance performances is reduced to an atonal and monotonous percussion backing. As the spectator's mirror neurons respond to the observed movement of *Quad*'s figures, the spectator's sense of being "invested as both subject and object in a shared materiality and flow of choreographed moments" (Reynolds 129) is heightened by the relative lack of any staged distraction away from *Quad*'s moving bodies.

However, alongside this kinesthetic immersion in the performers' movements, *Quad*'s spectators also evince more ambivalent responses to the play. "It's not the kind of piece you would sit through several times," Winston observes delicately (par. 8). Even committed Beckett scholars have confessed their irritation. Woycicki frankly acknowledges the possibility of *Quad*'s "constant circular repetition" becoming "annoying and tiresome to watch" (144), while Enoch Brater underlines the play's "relentless" nature (53), and Brian Wall calls the "ruthless" performance "something of an endurance test" (93, 96). The repeated focus on the ruthlessly repetitive or "relentless" nature of *Quad* emphasizes how the very elements of the performance that heighten the potential for kinesthetic absorption—the precise, rhythmic, and repetitive movements of the performers—eventually drive *Quad*'s spectators to resist or reject that absorption.

McMullan has previously noted how frequently Beckett's theatre work presents "a series of confining situations where the body is subject to an implacable system" (64), and how this choreographic control takes on suggestions of "cruelty" for the spectator, since "the material which generates the series is the human body" (61). This description is particularly appropriate to *Quad*, whose audience quickly becomes uncomfortably, even painfully aware of the extremely precise nature of the play's choreography. Of course, most staged performances entail some degree of controlled choreography, particularly much dance performance, but *Quad* both foregrounds this bodily control and renders it particularly distressing, via the quick, seemingly panicked steps of *Quadrat I* and the exhausted, apparently resistant steps of *Quadrat II*. Any sense of onstage movement as the free, self-expressive act of the individual is firmly dispelled; as dance scholar Josephine Starte observes "the subjugation of the performer [. . .] is accentuated rather

than obscured" (199). Many spectators are discomfited by this extreme rigidity of bodily subjugation and resistant to the authoritarian control and surrender of agency it implies, the "relentless" and "ruthless" nature of the performance, as Brater and Wall put it respectively.

Quad's hyper-controlled choreography also pushes the spectator to resist kinesthetic immersion by generating unease regarding the potential for accidental misstep or deliberate revolt by the performers. This sense that there is no margin whatsoever for improvisation or error is frequently cited by *Quad*'s spectators as reason for their discomfort. Gibson observes the anxiety engendered for the spectator of *Quad* by that "tiniest possibility that quadrated organization may break down," the fear that "the figures may become entangled, graze each other, or collide, where there may be a mishap, where the structure may wobble or collapse, the process go wrong" (238). Literary and dance scholar Susan Jones likewise notes how the original laughter often catalyzed in the spectator viewing *Quad* for the first time is frequently cut short as "the tension increasingly builds toward terror" as the figures continue their rotations around the quad (300). The smallest deviation from the prescribed choreography risks a bodily collision in the "danger zone" at the quadrangle's central point (Beckett, *Complete Works* 453), affectively threatening the kinesthetically immersed spectator. The "unbearable and unrelieved tension" generated by the potential for error or collision is so unpleasant an experience for most spectators that it drives them to dissociate from the situation, resisting further absorption into the spectacle of movement before them (Fehsenfeld 361). Again, the very intensity of the kinesthetic empathy that *Quad* can generate in its spectators may drive them to resist this immersion, as the performance becomes increasingly distressing.

This recoil from the observed bodily experience that we do not wish to share underlies Siebers's, Davis's, and Garland-Thomson's explanations of the common shrinking away from the physically impaired or divergent body that they observe beyond the theatrical medium. *Quad* embodies this recoil from the undesirable bodily experience both in performance and in audience response. Spectators have recurrently cited fear as the extreme end of their resistant response to *Quad*. Brater called the play "frightening" (53) and Chris Ackerley admitted to finding it "chilling" (153) in their respective scholarly works on the play, and Mel Gussow's *New York Times* review of Jonah Salz's 1986 performance of *Quad* notes that "a feeling of peril permeates" the performance (par. 2). Martha Fehsenfeld quotes Beckett's own comment that "[t]here was something terrifying" about the play (360). This recurrent response to *Quad*'s bodies mirrors the same "fear" that Siebers ("Complex Embodiment" 279) and Davis (12) locate as the driving emotion behind the all-too-frequent recoil from the perceived "nightmare" of the disabled body that does not move as it is socially expected to do (Davis 5). Thus the movement of *Quad*'s figures around and away from each other enacts both the retreat of the perceived "able-bodied" from the perceived "disabled" body in the model theorized by disability studies, and the spectator's frequent resistance to empathy or identification with these unfamiliarly and uncomfortably moving performers.

A demonstrative example of how deeply this resistance to identify with the unfamiliar or distressing bodily experience of another is embedded lies in how regularly *Quad*'s spectators interpret the play's figures as fundamentally non-human. Woycicki imagines them as animated figures "within a computer program" (139), and Wall likewise perceives the transformation of "people into automatons," during the performance the "attenuation of four human beings to mere circuits" (95). Elsewhere, Salisbury describes the figures as "little more than genderless puppets" (204) and Herta Schmid calls them "'things' in a purely material form" (266). Eckart Voigts-Virchow goes still further, claiming to observe in the performance "a purge of human semblance altogether" (212). The covering of the performers' individually recognizable human bodies and faces as well as Beckett's instruction that they be "[a]s alike in build as possible" (*Complete Works* 453) perhaps partially drives this response by making differentiation between the figures more difficult, "stripping away any notion of individual character" (Starte 194). Yet the figures' clothing and stature alone does not seem sufficient to account for the repeated spectatorial interpretations of *Quad*'s figures as utterly non-human; the similarly clad Auditor in Beckett's *Not I* (1972), for example, is not regularly read as a non-human character.[3] It is rather, I suggest, a combination of the performers' ability to move consistently and precisely within such choreographed restriction—"the inhuman perfection of the players' mechanical movement," as Salisbury puts it (211)—and the instinctive refusal to recognize unpleasant bodily experience as potentially our own, that renders them non-human to many spectators.

We noted earlier that Garland-Thomson has identified how the disabling gaze can extend to perceived physical excess as well as deficiency, "[g]iants, dwarfs, visibly physically disabled people, [...] contortionists, fat people, thin people, hermaphrodites, conjoined twins, the mentally disabled, and the very hirsute," the perceived superhuman physicality as well as the perceived subhuman physicality rendered Other by the spectator's disabling gaze (63). Such, it seems, is the case in *Quad*. The figures' physical capability and its sheer precision generate a gradual recognition by the audience member of how impossible it would be for their untrained bodies to follow such choreography, ultimately pushing the figures beyond the boundary of the recognizably human for many.[4] *Quad*'s spectators resist felt communion with the differently functioning body, and with the unwanted bodily experience; so too, disability scholarship observes, does the self-proclaimed able-bodied individual in wider society.

CONCLUSION: THE VALUE OF CONFLICTING AFFECTS

Spectators and scholars regularly cite "the impossibility of genuine contact" between *Quad*'s moving figures (Ackerley 153), the lack of any "possibility of human connection" (Mac Réamoninn par. 3), as the most pessimistic implication of the play in performance. What is less frequently recognized, however—while perhaps equally pessimistic in implication—is how *Quad*'s foregrounding of its

figures' precisely choreographed movement catalyzes a similar embodied recoil by the *spectator* from the performing bodies. The resistance to human connection, embodied in the performing figures' repeated swerve at the "danger zone" of near-contact (Beckett, *Complete Works* 453), is replicated by the spectators' recurrent refusal of kinesthetic empathy with a physically suffering or unfamiliarly moving body. Just as *Quad*'s figures swerve away from a threatened painful physical collision with each other, so too its spectators recoil from the physically felt discomfort stimulated in their own nervous systems by too intense a kinesthetic immersion in *Quad*'s performance. The spectator—stimulated to empathetic identification by *Quad*'s bodily movement, but resisting this same kinesthetic immersion in the unfamiliar and unpleasant embodied experience of the moving figures—is left stranded in a conflicted state between empathy and resistance, shared feeling and recoil.

My intent here is not a reparative reading of empathy (kinesthetic or otherwise) and disability, nor an activist call for heightened empathetic feeling with all human bodies as a means of facilitating meaningful interpersonal connection. Such a reading could be only very tenuously applied to Beckett's play, since *Quad* itself is in many ways a paranoid rather than reparative performance, dispassionately exploring and exploiting the observed ableist response to the unfamiliarly moving body for theatrical effect rather than seeking to correct it. I disagree with attempts to read *Quad* as in some way reflective of such utopian aims, such as Wall's claim that the play offers "a challenge to the audience to seek the other's perspective" (96). Rather, I see *Quad*'s value as lying in precisely how it limits this opportunity for empathy or self-projection into another's existence. *Quad* challenges its spectator with a stark confrontation with the largely incomprehensible and "other" bodily existence of another. Thus, as Salisbury puts it, "lack of reconciliation will traumatically be felt, in all its material specificity" by the spectator as well as the performer (214). This resistance to immersion in another's experience is emphasized, felt "traumatically" rather than accepted as an ideological norm, highlighted and left as a challenge to its spectator. It is in this proffered trauma or troubling, rather than in any revisionary offer of solution, that we can situate *Quad*'s value to the disability theorist or activist.

This idea of *Quad* as primarily an embodied confrontation with the other's bodily existence counters the long-running attempt to theorize the allegorical or symbolic "meaning" of *Quad*, or what Sidney Homan calls "the self-imposed drive towards symbolism and meaning" that spectators and scholars frequently bring to Becket's wordless plays (155). Disability theorists have long noted the common impulse to re-interpret the unfamiliar body, how disability "always symbolizes something other than itself" in literary and cultural representation (Siebers, *Disability Theory* 48). David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder decry the literary presentation of the impaired body as not a simply a living human being, but as "an opportunistic metaphorical device" to "lend a 'tangible' body to textual abstractions," a character's physical disability becoming, for example, "a metaphorical signifier of social and individual collapse" (222).

Certainly, previous academic engagement with *Quad* has seen such attempts to turn the moving bodies of the performers into just such "an overdetermined symbolic surface" (Mitchell and Snyder 234), as scholars seek a figurative reading of the moving bodies as a means of evading a blunt confrontation with their discomfiting embodied reality. Wall, for example, demands that the play "be consumed as something closer to an allegory than any other Beckett text" (98). He claims that *Quad*'s bodies symbolize "the system of alienated labour" under the capitalist system (98), and that we must hear "the rhythmic noise of industrial machinery" in the percussion accompaniment and see "shift-workers" in the moving figures themselves (99). Connor sees instead "the inhabitants of the Inferno and Purgatory" from Dante's *Divine Comedy* (160) and Sandra Wynands sees the central point E as representative of "a God beyond representation, possibly even a Christian God" and the moving figures as consequently "cloistered monks" (143). Minako Okamuro (2004) constructs a complex interpretation of how Carl Jung and W.B. Yeats's alchemical theories form the basis for the *Quad*'s choreography and color scheme. The almost comically wide range of symbolic interpretation attached to *Quad* indicates the very slight correlative that these readings find in the actual text or performance, and indeed hints at the persistent drive to find some interpretative filter that will allow the spectator to evade confrontating *Quad*'s bodies as *bodies*, and the discomfiting embodied affect generated by this engagement.

Increasingly, however, Beckett scholars are beginning to recognize the error in attempting to attach systematized extra-bodily meaning to *Quad*'s "devastatingly physical" figures (Homan 155). Baylee Brits in particular has decried the "symbolic fallacy" that has marred much previous engagement with *Quad*, and instead argues that we must accept the play as one with "no semiotic meaning," "devoid of a clear referent" or "any clear allegorical reference" (125). Gibson likewise observes that "[a]ny concrete reference is indeterminate" within the play (238), and Woycicki similarly notes that "the abstractness of *Quad* and its sheer formality imply that almost any meaning within could be attributable to it" (147). The difficulty of assigning any satisfactory allegorical or symbolic significance to *Quad* means that the spectator is left to confront the bare fact of the performers' bodies—"this last extremity of human meat," as Beckett elsewhere puts it (qtd. in Zilliacus 3)—and their distressing movement. The lack of any perceivable extra-bodily reference eliminates this final opportunity for the spectator to evade the uncomfortable confrontation with *Quad*'s bodies. The performers' embodiment is *Quad*'s primary focus, and the consequent conflicting embodied affects represent its primary value, as a performance that challenges the spectator to confront the physical and irreducible existence of the Other's very "other" body.

In conclusion, *Quad*'s performance tends to evoke intense but contradictory embodied affects for its spectators. Recorded audience response testifies to the recurrent experience of a heightened kinesthetic empathy that catalyzes its spectators' sense of identification with the onstage figures, as a result of the

performance's rhythmically patterned movement and foregrounding of the body in place of dialogue or narrative action. However, this kinesthetic absorption is countered with a simultaneously drive to recoil from the performers, a regularly recorded sense of revulsion or the refusal of immersive engagement with the performing bodies, born of the commonly cited intuition of the unpleasant, even dangerous nature of the figures' movements.

In this article, I have proffered a hybrid methodological framework of kinesthetic empathy and disability theory as a means of better exploring the generation and consequence of *Quad*'s embodied affects. As Salisbury recognizes, "it is precisely in the uncertainty of affect elicited in a play like *Quad*, its resistance to pre-existent structures of feeling, the difficulty of describing what is going on in affective terms where there is no pre-digested lexicon to outline its distinctions" (214–15) that its performance values lies. Investigating *Quad* through the perspective of kinesthetic empathy and disability studies offers just such a lexicon for a more rigorous discussion of *Quad*'s embodied functioning, while remaining sensitive to what Salisbury calls the "uncertainty of affect" and I here call the "conflicting affects" generated by *Quad*. Acknowledging more fully the tension between spectatorial engagement and resistance allows us to recognize that *Quad*'s primary value lies in the manner in which it demands that its spectators confront the physical fact of others' bodily existence—while acknowledging the difficulty of such engagement.

Notes

1. Voigts-Virchow does prioritize what he calls an "aisthetic" view of *Quad*, exploring the audience's sensory perception, but he is focused on the play's "pure sensory media perception," the technical elements of the television medium itself, rather than on the human bodies of the performers (211). One notable exception is Susan Jones's chapter "Samuel Beckett and Choreography" in *Literature, Modernism and Dance* (2013) which explores the links between *Quad* and Oskar Schlemmer's Bauhaus dances. This paper is indebted to Jones's earlier work, but it does not attempt to replicate the dance history approach that she has already productively applied to *Quad*.

2. Theatrical stagings of *Quad* include the Noho Theatre Group's 1986 production at the American Folk Theater, the Analog Arts 2006 production at the ARTSaha festival, Pan Pan Theatre Company and the Scottish Ballet's joint 2013 production at the Edinburgh International Festival, and Pan Pan and the Irish Modern Dance Theatre's 2014 production at the Ardhowen Theatre in Enniskillen.

3. To overemphasize the coalescing of the figures' identity is, moreover, to ignore Beckett's careful individualization of the characters of *Quadrat I*. "Each player has his particular percussion" and "particular sound" of footstep in the first section of the performance, and wears a differently colored djellaba (*Complete Works* 452). A slightly more convincing argument could be made for the de-individualization of the figures in *Quadrat II*, in which the characters appear in white, and the sound of their footsteps replace their individualized percussion accompaniments.

4. Of course, the spectator lacking dance training could not perform the movements required of many other dance performances either, and the *entrée* or *divertissement* in the classical ballet structure frequently highlights this. The spectator's perception of such skilled movement ability being beyond the capability of the mortal human could equally be exploited in many Romantic ballets to characterize the performance of a sylph, sprite, witch, devil, or Willi as non-human figures.

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