Concentrating on Susan Sontag's production of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo in 1993 and Paul Chan's production in New Orleans in 2007, I argue that the productions in these locations are social performances as well as theatrical performances which express, communicate, and narrate trauma. The play, written after and out of Beckett's experience of war, expresses the mood of collective trauma. However, even in contexts of collective trauma, the metaphor of waiting does not speak for itself. Directors, producers, actors, journalists, and critics insert references to the meanings of the trauma into the play. The central proposal of cultural trauma theory is that trauma does not simply *happen* but must be created through meaning work of construction and narration. Social actors make claims about their trauma—the nature of suffering, who are victims, and who the perpetrators—through these productions of *Waiting for Godot*. The productions communicate the claims to trauma to the audience that is physically present at the performances as well as to a wider audience who read and hear journalists' accounts of them. As social performance, rather than political speech, the claims which are made about the trauma are not posed as claims to truth in a Habermasian sense but as claims to expressive aptness (Rauer 2006: 259). This case study of productions of *Waiting for Godot* illuminates that carrier groups and social actors make different kinds of claims in the trauma process: some claims to trauma appeal to factual truth while others appeal to expressive aptness. Quite simply, this study illustrates that there are different ways to construct and narrate trauma. We must understand the different types of claims to trauma and their different measures of success in order to evaluate how and why trauma processes begin or fail, continue or stall.

Personal, Historic, and Artistic Context of *Waiting for Godot*

"War is latent in much of Beckett's work" (Gontarski cited in Bradby 2001: 13).

Samuel Beckett wrote *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts* in a flourish of literary productivity in 1948/9. Beckett spent most of the 1930s traveling and living in Britain, Ireland, Germany, and France. By the time World War II reached France he was living in Paris where he established himself within Surrealist and avant-garde literary and artistic circles and started writing in French. Distraught by the German occupation of France, Beckett and many of his friends joined The Resistance (Bair 1978: 309&319). After participating in The Resistance for a year, his network was betrayed to the Nazis, and Beckett and his partner Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil went underground for their safety (Bradby 2001: 12). In October 1942, after two months of hiding in Paris, Beckett and Suzanne procured false papers to move to the unoccupied zone. The couple proceeded by foot from Paris to Roussillon in Provence, where they stayed for two and a half years (Bair 1978: 318&319).

The unique aesthetics of the Provence countryside and Beckett's experiences in Roussillon figure significantly, though rather subtly, in *Waiting for Godot.* In Roussillon, war was omnipresent; it was the reason Beckett was compelled to stay in the Provencal village, and it shaped nearly all the conditions of life. Beckett and his neighbors and friends in Roussillon listened to radio reports of the war, and he participated in late-night resistance missions (Bair 1978). Several literary scholars argue that Beckett's post-war writings reflect his real, rather than purely intellectual, experience of war and "all the anguish of waiting for contacts in dangerous circumstances, of seeing friends betrayed, hearing of their torture and death…" (Bradby 2001: 13). Beckett habitually took long walks while biding his time in Roussillon (Bair 1978: 325). The opening stage directions of Beckett's play announce the setting: "A country road. A tree. Evening" (Beckett [1954] 1982: 1). Beckett's travelers wait, uncertain of their fate, along a road like the ones between Paris to Roussillon or like the country roads where

Beckett passed the time waiting for the war to end. In addition, Beckett made several direct references to Roussillon in *Godot*, including the unique red color of the dirt, and he named a character, "Bonnelly," after a local farmer (Bradby 2001: 12&13). As I will discuss later, *Godot* does not explicitly refer to war. However, the fear, anxiety, uncertainty and waiting the play conveys are unmistakably born of his experiences during the war in Roussillon. Before I examine productions of *Godot* which make claims to trauma, let us look closely at Beckett's play in order to understand the literary script employed in the social performance of trauma.

Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts

Simply stated, *Waiting for Godot* revolutionized theater. Several decades after directing the Actors Workshop production of *Waiting for Godot* in San Francisco, Herbert Blau stated, "I think the hardest thing to reconstruct, now that Beckett has been deified among American theater people, particularly academics, is just how startling those plays were" (Blau cited in Bradby 2001: 97). Perhaps the most novel element of *Waiting for Godot* is that it lacks a true plot. As the title indicates, *Godot* is a play in two acts, yet the structure of the second repeats the first. Instead of development, the structure of *Waiting for Godot* is "cyclical and static" (Bradby 2001: 36). In the first act, Estragon and Vladimir meet on a road and commence waiting for Godot to arrive. The setting is simple; as mentioned previously, the stage directions indicate only "A country road. A tree. Evening." Like clowns and music-hall performers, Vladimir and Estragon banter in the form of a "cross-talk act" which features interruptions, unfinished stories, double meanings, and misunderstandings (Bradby 2001: 43). Eventually Lucky, burdened by packages and with a rope around his neck, and Pozzo, holding a whip, enter the stage. Pozzo bosses Lucky with commands such as "Up pig!" (Beckett [1954] 1982: 20). These two couples are the main figures in the play, but they are not typical dramatic characters. They lack reliable personal

histories and evidence of internal life. Bradby argues that "it is best to approach each of the pairs of characters as two halves of a single theatrical dynamic" (2001: 29). Pozzo and Lucky depict an interdependent master-slave relationship while Vladimir and Estragon are cross-talk performers whose symbiotic relationship takes on many shades depending on the performance, including friends, an old married couple, or two comedians (Bradby 2001: 30). Toward the end of Act I, a boy comes to announce that Mr. Godot will not "come this evening but surely to-morrow" (Beckett [1954] 1982: 55). In Act II, the set and the actors appear physically diminished; Pozzo is now blind. As the play ends, Vladimir and Estragon discuss committing suicide but decide to wait to see if Godot will come tomorrow. In their last exchange, they decide to go, yet the stage direction reads, "They do not move" (Beckett [1954] 1982: 109).

Typically in drama and literature, meaning is delivered via standard elements such as the progression of the plot, the topic of the play, and character development. Actions happen in sequence, building toward an end and a resolution from which meaning or a lesson may be gleaned. Static instead of progressing, *Godot* does not allow for meaning to be "read off" the plot (Bradby 2001: 24). *Godot* also evades a structure of being directly "about" something; the play lacks a referent. It has no inherent setting, time period, or message. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is about marriage in the 19th century. *Waiting for Godot* resists that sort of telling. Characters wait on a road, but the object of their desire never arrives. Further, it is not clear who or what "Godot" is. Throughout his life, Beckett insisted that "Godot" was not a stand-in for God and if he "knew who Godot was" he would have said so in the play (Bair 1978: 382; Schneider 1967: 55). Although the figure of Godot is the focus of many audience members and critics, Martin Esslin argues that waiting, rather than Godot, is the subject of the play ([1961] 1980: 50). However, it is not only *about* waiting in a standard sense. Beckett's *Godot* depicts on stage the

existential experience of waiting. One place to find a meaning offered by *Godot* is its presentation of the human—painfully, comically human—experience of time.

The last pairing of utterance and stage direction in the play, when the travelers decide to go yet do not move, is an example of Beckett's treatment of the themes of movement and stasis in such a way as to unsettle meaning. Dialogue and action work at cross-purposes, creating an effect nearly impossible to produce with prose. This double gesture—at once toward movement and toward stasis—is one last destabilizing move in *Godot*; the end of the play, and thus the "meaning" in a standard sense, is left open. Or, perhaps, it indicates that the meaning cannot be fixed or resolved. Beckett himself inveterately declined to illuminate the "meanings" and symbolism of his plays. The director of the first American production who developed a personal relationship with the playwright explains that Beckett preferred to "let the supposed 'meanings' fall where they may…." (Schneider 1967: 55). As I will discuss in detail, the meanings of *Waiting for Godot* do not only passively "fall" where they may; social actors and the audience actively write meanings of their trauma into Beckett's play.

"The play struck such different chords in its various audiences…" (Bradby 2001: 2)

Roger Blin directed the first performance of *Waiting for Godot* at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris in 1953. Beginning with that inaugural performance, critics, journalists and academics have expressed considerable interest and anxiety over whether performances of the *Godot* would be "understood" and received favorably by audiences and critics. In fact, before Blin agreed to stage *Waiting for Godot* at the Babylone, the play was rejected by several producers in Paris who cited concern that it was "incomprehensible, boring, too highbrow, or too deep" (Bair 1978: 397). Despite the concerns, the first production in Paris proved extremely

successful, running for four hundred performances at the Babylone before transferring to another theater in Paris (Esslin [1961] 1980: 39).

Over the course of several decades, concerns that the avant-garde qualities of the play would prevent positive audience reception of the play largely fell off. Despite fears—which proved to be well-founded in some cases—that early audiences would not understand or connect with the play, *Waiting for Godot* has been staged extensively throughout the world.[68] Its success helped propel Beckett to his position as one of the most prominent literary figures of the twentieth century, and, in turn, his literary fame conferred legitimacy on the play. The revolutionary, avant-garde play is now a classic drama. Although the initial anxieties that audiences would not understand or respond positively to the play subsided as it achieved the status of classic, those concerns were replaced by others. Critics and academics now express concern that *Waiting for Godot* has lost its "*provocative* quality" and has become a "*safe* bet" to stage (Bradby 2001: 162). However, critics, journalists, and academics have long identified performances where their anxieties about reception are much less—or even ceased to be—of concern for reasons external to the logic of the theater. When *Godot* was feared to be too dark or too high-brow, audiences understood it. And when critics and academics feared *Godot* is merely a mundane classic emptied of its theatrical surprises, audiences felt a vibrant connection to the

[68] The first production in the United States was, in the words of the director, a "spectacular flop" (Schneider 1967: 56). Staged in Miami, the producers advertised *Waiting for Godot* as the "the laugh sensation of two continents" starring the well-known comic actors Bert Lehr and Tom Ewell (Bradby 2001: 93). Bradby assesses that Lehr and Ewell and the director doomed the production by playing up the comedic aspects of the play and making the tragic elements palatable. Schneider, the director, attributes the production's failure to the audience's expectation of attending a light comedy (Schneider 1967: 56). Due to the "disastrous" run in Miami, *Godot's* first opening New York City was canceled (Bradby 2001: 93). After reorganizing the production and replacing the director and some of the actors, *Godot* opened on Broadway in April 1956 (Bradby 2001: 93). The production in Miami is the first of several examples of *Waiting for Godot* failing to some degree when it was used primarily as a star vehicle or to earn large profits for the theater and production company. A critic for *The New York Times* reports that the Broadway production featuring Robin Williams and Steve Martin as Vladimir and Estragon in 1988 "rode into town on tidal waves of hype" (Rich 1988). However, the show proved "utterly impersonal" and turned *Godot* into "the stage equivalent of a buddy film" (Rich 1988). Instances of failed or less successful *Godot* productions underscore the interest of productions that succeed.

play. In the beginning of *Beckett: Waiting for Godot*, Bradby attributes the varied receptions of the play to variations in the logic of the theater: "It was understood (and misunderstood) differently in the different theatrical cultures (2001: 2)." Yet, later in the book, he joins other critics and academics in acknowledging that the unique history of performances and audience reception of *Waiting for Godot* goes beyond the logic of the theater. In "situations of political oppression" the canonical drama has "special relevance" and becomes provocative once again (2001: 162).

Susan Sontag's production of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo during the siege in the summer of 1993 is one of the productions in "situations of political oppression" cited by Bradby. In "Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo," Sontag articulates that the relevance and resonance of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo was obvious. During her first visit to Sarajevo the preceding spring, Sontag spoke with a director and producer about coming back to the city to direct a play. When he asked which play she would direct, Sontag recalls:

> And bravado, following the impulsiveness of my proposal, suggested to me in an instant what I might not have seen had I taken longer to reflect: there was one obvious play for me to direct. Beckett's play, written over forty years ago, seems written for, and about Sarajevo. (1994: 88)

Why did Sontag, a social critic and literary figure with countless dramas to choose from, realize "in an instant" that *Waiting for Godot* was written for and about the situation in Sarajevo? How is it that *Godot*, a play which cannot properly be said to be "about" anything, could be about the violence and suffering in that city?

In *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse*, David Toole (1998) weaves together philosophy, theology, sociology, and

contemporary politics to explain that Sontag and her audience in Sarajevo turned to *Waiting for Godot* as a way to reflect on the atrocities of the twentieth century. Violence in Sarajevo book-ended the century: the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand began World War I and the citizens of Sarajevo suffered a violent siege, during which thousands died and many more suffered from malnutrition and gripping fear, at the dusk of the bloody century (Toole 1998: xiii). Toole reflects:

> I can imagine that to witness a performance of *Godot* in Sarajevo in 1993 would have been to meet head-on the question of what such a century might mean—or rather, the question of whether *meaning* itself could possibly survive a century such as this. (Author's emphasis 1998: 19)

In Sarajevo in 1993, *Waiting for Godot* was not merely a classic of the theater; here the play seemed ultimately relevant to the situation. Bradby identified the resonance and labeled it "political oppression." Recognizing the same resonance, Toole attributed the "remarkable convergence of text and world" to understanding atrocity in the twentieth century (Toole 1998: 4).

In certain contexts—variously labeled political oppression or atrocity—concerns that critics, academics and journalists normally have about *Godot* lose their importance. Instead of worrying whether *Godot* will be understood, critics and journalists reports it has "struck an instant chord" with the audience (Bradby 2001: 102). Instead of worrying about whether it has been performed too much, it seems instantly obvious to stage it and no other play (Sontag 1994: 88). These critics identify what, in the theory of social performance and cultural pragmatics, is conceptualized as "re-fusion" (Alexander, Giesen and Mast 2006). In complex, mass mediated society, social life has been "de-fused" (Alexander 2006: 29). Rituals, which rely on shared

meanings and cultural understandings, are rare. However, social actors in our complex social world continue to communicate the meanings of their social experiences through social performance. Cultural pragmatics takes as its goal to demonstrate "how social performance, whether individual or collective, can be analogized systemically to theatrical ones" (Alexander 2006: 29). I argue that the theatrical performance of *Waiting for Godot* is a social performance in contexts of trauma. In contexts of trauma, audiences seem to understand *Godot* and its deeply provocative qualities. This "re-fusion" transcends the logic of the theater; audiences not only "enjoy" or "appreciate" the play, but it "speaks to" and "speaks for" their social situations. In these contexts, *Godot* is not only a theatrical performance; it is a social performance.

Instead of the numerous explanations for fusion in these contexts, I offer one: productions of *Waiting for Godot* have achieved fusion in contexts of trauma. To label these circumstances of "trauma" is more than a parsimonious solution for understanding the circumstances in which *Waiting for Godot* is something other—something more—than an avant-garde play or a classic drama. A close study of the productions of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo and New Orleans will contribute to our understandings of social trauma theories. First examining these productions will help to clarify the relationship between collective trauma, a concept describing communities affected by disasters, and cultural trauma which argues that trauma is not born but made. On the theoretical level, I will argue that collective trauma theorizes important elements of mood and emotion, but we must remain theoretically vigilant that it is not events which are traumatic but it is our construction of occurrences as traumatic to cultural structures and expectations that make them so. Further, looking at productions of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo and New Orleans will illustrate the ways in which claims to trauma through construction and narration may be made performatively rather than factually. By staging *Waiting for Godot,* social actors define the

trauma—what the trauma means to the community, who are the victims, and who are the perpetrators—using aesthetics and performative acts rather than evidence such as testimony, dates of events, numbers of the dead, and cost of destruction.

Trauma Theory: Mood and Meaning

Waiting for Godot has been staged in many contexts of trauma or potential trauma (Smelser 2004: 35&36); indeed, there have been too many to adequately address here. *Godot* has been performed in prisons in the United States and Sweden, in Haifa with references to the plight of Palestinians in Israel, and South Africa during Apartheid by a mixed-race cast (Bradby 2001). The very first performance of *Godot* at the Théâtre de Babylone followed shortly after World War II and the Nazi occupation of France. I will discuss at length two other performances in trauma contexts: in Sarajevo during the siege and in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

Academic and clinical work on trauma began in the realm of psychiatry; Freud was the most famous early theorists of trauma (Smelser 2004: 32). Sociologists have specified two more main types of trauma: collective (or social) trauma and cultural trauma. Kai Erikson's seminal study of Buffalo Creek, an Appalachian mining community almost entirely physically destroyed by a flood of mining sludge, defines and illustrates the central elements of collective trauma (1976). Collective trauma holds as its main tenet that "one can speak of traumatized communities as something distinct from assemblies of traumatized persons" (Erikson 1995: 185). In his précis on cultural trauma, Jeffrey Alexander acknowledges Erikson's important contribution of conceptualizing trauma as a collective as well as individual phenomenon, but he criticizes Erikson for holding a "naturalistic perspective" in which trauma is treated as a quality inherent in certain events due to their sudden, devastating, violent, or shocking nature (2004: 2-4). Later in his career, Erikson seems to argue for a less-naturalistic position for collective

trauma. In "Notes on Trauma and Community," an essay reflecting on his decades of fieldwork and study of disasters and collective trauma, Erikson points out that his dictionary defines "trauma" as a "a stress or blow that may produce disordered feelings or behavior" and "the state or condition produced by such a stress or blow" (1995: 184). Erikson encourages his readers to shift their emphasis to the latter definition "because it is *how people react to them* rather than *what they are* that give events whatever traumatic quality they can be said to have" (Author's emphasis 1995: 184). Cultural trauma goes further, arguing that trauma is produced when members of collectivities successfully construct and narrate an event or a series of events as significantly and indelibly undermining part or all of their culture and system of meanings (Alexander et al 2004: especially 10 & 38). Groups make claims to injury and trauma in the "trauma process" of constructing and narrating trauma between the event and its representation (Alexander 2004: 11). It is in this process of claims-making that the production of *Waiting for Godot* represents, speaks for, and specifies the trauma in Sarajevo and New Orleans.

In addition to denying that traumas are born fully-formed and specified, we must also unsettle the idea of the "collective" in collective trauma. Collective trauma signals that a group imagined to constitute a "collective" suffers a trauma together. However, this "collective" may or may not have been experienced as a community or a collective before the traumatic occurrence. The collective trauma, therefore, can form or refigure the collective—its membership, bonds, mutual responsibilities, and stance toward outsiders. We should think of Erikson's "traumatized communities" as a collective that has, in a Durkheimian sense, a reality and a set of logics external to individuals. It is this Durkheimian collective which experiences social trauma. Erikson argues that "trauma damages the texture of community" (1995:187) in

two ways: by damaging social bonds and by creating a social climate of trauma. Specifying the latter sense of damage to the community, Erikson (1995) writes:

> …traumatic experiences work their way so thoroughly into the grain of the affected community that they come to supply its *prevailing mood and temper*, dominate its imagery and its sense of self, govern the way its members relate to one another. (Emphasis added, p.190)

Collective trauma is primarily a concept of emotion rather than, like cultural trauma, a concept of cognition and meaning construction. Erikson argues against a common and rather sentimentalized vision that communities experiencing trauma enjoy a "wave of good feeling" when they realize that they and their community have survived the initial disaster (1995: 189). Erikson flatly states that he has never witnessed this sort of euphoria in any of his fieldwork nor read about it in the recent literature. Instead, collective trauma is characterized by a loss of community bonds, lack of trust in the future and in ones neighbors, and a collective mood of fear and depression (Erikson 1976). Although we must be clear in our understanding of the concept of collective trauma and the language we use to describe it, I contend that collective trauma remains an important sociological concept for understanding when and how communities and collectives experience events as traumatic. Collective trauma may or may not become a cultural trauma at a national or international level in a "trauma process" of articulation, narration, construction, and counter-construction (Alexander et al 2004).

Erikson's study in Buffalo Creek also indicates that collective trauma is characterized by perseveration on the traumatic occurrence. In Buffalo Creek, residents lived in constant, illogical fear of another flood. Many residents reported difficulty sleeping and feeling agitated and apprehensive when it rained (Erikson 1976: 179). The occurrence is over, but the emotions stay

with the individuals and shape the collective mood. In other words, collective trauma involves a particular experience of time. Days and weeks go by, but the mood of collective trauma lingers. When performed in these situations, *Waiting for Godot* expresses waiting, uncertainty, anguish and fear that the people experiencing collective trauma feel acutely in their daily lives. Like Vladimir and Estragon, individuals and collectives experiencing collective trauma do not know when their situation will end. Nor, like Beckett's hobos, do they know what that end will look like in terms of the bonds of community that have been forged, challenged, and upset during the occurrence and the collective trauma.

Productions of *Waiting for Godot* become social performance through which the collective can represent and communicate its present state to itself. In addition, the collective may realize itself as such through a social performance of a shared emotional state and mood. However, productions of *Waiting for Godot* do not become social performances expressing trauma on their own. Claims to trauma do not speak for themselves. There is a "need for walking and talking—and seeing and listening to the walking and talking" which theater and social performance, and theater as social performance, can provide (Alexander 2006: 33). Social performances, like theater performances, require actors, audiences, scripts and settings. Social actors perform and multiple audiences—the in-person audience, journalists, and media consumers—observe and interpret the social performance of trauma via *Waiting for Godot*. It is to these performances that I now turn.

Performing Trauma to Multiple Audiences

Beckett intended *Waiting for Godot* to "avoid definition" (Bradby 2001: 17). Productions of *Godot* honoring Beckett's intentions could express the "mood and temper" of collective trauma. However, as we will see, productions of *Waiting for Godot* in contexts of

collective trauma have gone beyond mood to articulate the meaning of the situation and the identity of "the players." In these performances, directors, actors, journalists, and attendees inject the famously "meaningless" avant-garde play with meanings relevant to their situation. The productions specify the victims, the perpetrators, and the meanings of the trauma itself. The first production of *Waiting for Godot* provides a good example. David Bradby (2001) reports that audiences in Paris were particularly horrified by the Pozzo-Lucky couple which was read as a Nazi-victim pair:

> No doubt a sense of horror was provoked as much by the attitude of Pozzo as by the appearance and behavior of Lucky. Memories of the Nazi occupation were still fresh in people's minds. Indeed the full horror of the death camps had emerged only gradually in the postwar years. The image of a poor, broken-down slave, suffering from a terminal medical condition but obliged to continue to perform whatever tasks he could still manage by an arrogant master, was not very far removed from realities which were only too vivid in the memories of many in the audience. (p. 62)

Bradby indicates that the director, Blin, encouraged the audience to read Pozzo as a Nazi by emphasizing the class differences between the two (Bradby 2001: 62). Of course, the "full horror" of the death camps continued to be given meaning long after the performance of *Godot* in Paris. An interesting question to pose—one which we probably cannot answer now—is how members of the Parisian audience understood the figure of Lucky in 1953. If Pozzo represented a cruel and demanding Nazi, who did Lucky represent? Was he a Jew, a prisoner of a Concentration Camp, or was he a Parisian during the Occupation? We do know that Beckett's potentially generic master-slave pair was rendered and read in Paris as a reference to the collective trauma of Parisians at the time. And, further, the performance of Pozzo as a Nazi indicated the perpetrator of the trauma.

Beckett was part of this "collective" in Paris after the war. When he returned to Paris after years of interminable waiting, Beckett found his beloved city and his relationships with friends and colleagues irrevocably changed by the war (Bair 1978: 373). As a text, *Waiting for Godot* was born out of Beckett's personal trauma and the mood of collective trauma in Paris following the war. However, as discussed previously, Beckett explicitly includes neither the war nor any other referent in his play. In addition to lacking a referent, literary scholars have argued that Beckett revolutionized the narrative logic of drama. As I discussed previously, *Godot* resists standard plot progression; the play presents an experience of waiting and time rather than being "about" anything. Godot's arrival, what is expected to "happen" in a standard sense, is denied to the characters and the audience. However, from the first performance, audiences and directors undermined Beckett's intentions to stage a "meaningless" play defying definitions and interpretation. Against the grain of Beckett's narrative logic, audiences and producers insert meanings into the play by specifying victims, perpetrators, and the nature of their trauma.

The central contribution of cultural trauma is the insistence that occurrences are not automatically traumatic; events must become traumatic. Groups must construct and narrate events and their aftermath as threatening or damaging to the meaning structures which underpin, and indeed constitute, the collective. Individuals and groups construct and contest the meaning of events in institutions such as courts, parliaments and the media (Alexander 2004: 15-20). The media play a crucial role as journalists and intellectuals report and interpret the construction and contestation of trauma narratives in other institutional realms. In addition to reporting strict "facts" such as numbers of the dead, the cost of destruction, and the transcripts of judicial and legislative hearings, journalists and writers may "expressively dramatize" traumas in the mass media (Alexander 2004: 18).

The capacity of the media to convey, interpret, and judge constructions and narrations of trauma is critical in the social performance of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo and New Orleans. The media constitutes an audience to the social performance along with the audience which was physically present at the performances of the play in those cities. Valentin Rauer argues that the presence of multiple layers of audience is an essential feature of social performance (2006: 260). Social performances require actors to creatively perform and audiences to interpret the performance. Further, the audience does not consist only in Goffman's dichotomous front stage and back stage (2006: 259). In societies with mass media, there are layers of audiences who witness, describe, interpret, and judge social performances: there is an in-person audience, the media audience that encodes the performance, and the media consumers who hear or read about their reports (Rauer 2006: 260).

Rauer identifies these three layers of audience in his case study of the performative act of German Chancellor Willy Brandt's *kniefall* at the monument to those who suffered and died in the Warsaw Ghetto (2006). Rauer disaggregates the audience of social performance analytically to understand the different ways audiences contribute to the social performance or diffuse it through their actions and interpretations. In other words, social performance requires fusion with all layers of audience to become a salient performance. However, Rauer does not discuss the ability of social actors to shape how the audience, including the journalistic audience, receives and perceives the social performance. Using Rauer's three layers of audience is useful for analyzing the interpretations of meaning by the various audiences for the productions of *Waiting for Godot*. Further, I will show that analytically disaggregating the layers of audience illuminates different performative strategies of the social actors who produced and directed *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo and New Orleans.

The first-order audience consists of the spectators who are present for the performance (Rauer 260). Social performances always entail action rather than description, and an audience, usually one that is physically present, must witness the act (Rauer 2006: 259). The in-person audience reacts in real time to an action happening in their physical space. Journalists and critics, the second-order audience, must report and interpret an occurrence for it to achieve social and cultural importance, for an *occurrence* to become a salient social *event* (Mast 2006: 118). There is often overlap in the layers of audience (Rauer 2006: 260); indeed, some of the journalists who reported on the productions of *Waiting for Godot* in New Orleans and in Sarajevo physically attended a performance. Journalists report on the performative act, recounting what happened and by whom. Journalists and critics also encode the meaning of the event, interpreting the actions and declaring their consequence. Journalists and critics pronounce a performance a "success" or a "failure." A social performance is a "success" on a theoretical level when the audience, the mise-en-scene, script, and the actors achieve "re-fusion" (Alexander 2006) To achieve re-fusion, a social performance must be perceived as spontaneous rather than calculated, authentic not manufactured (Rauer 2006: 275). Journalists and critics indicate the success or failure of a performance using these criteria, and by citing and interpreting the reactions of the in-person audience. When the reactions—laughter, gasps, comments, silence, and tears—of the first-order audience are encoded and conveyed by journalists, those who are present are simultaneously audience and actors in the social performance (Rauer 2006: 260).

Journalists and critics encode the meanings of the performance for the third-order audience, media consumers. The third-order audience reads reports in newspapers and blogs, hears about the performance on the radio, and sees visual representations of it on television and the internet. An occurrence becomes an event, and action becomes social performance, in part

through the sheer dissemination to a wide third-order audience. The third-order audience "more or less depend" upon the interpretations of the journalists and critics and their assessment of performative success or failure (Rauer 2006: 260). However, the third-order audience is not populated by passive consumers; they will also interpret the meaning of the performance and form their own opinions of its authenticity and consequence. Nevertheless, their reactions are notoriously difficult for social analysts to capture. It is the meanings as they are actively received by the third-order audience that they will mobilize in future decisions and actions such as in opinion polls and political action.

In Sarajevo during the siege and in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina social actors—directors, producers, and stage actors—appealed to all three layers of audience in their social performance of trauma through the theatrical production of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot.* In these locations, the play expresses the mood of collective trauma in Erickson's sense. However, the metaphor of waiting does not speak for itself. The social actors make claims to trauma by inserting references to the nature of the trauma, the vicitims, and the perpetrators into Beckett's referent-free avant-garde play. These references specify and construct the trauma for the individuals who are living through the traumatic occurrence as well for the wider public from whom those claiming trauma seek recognition and solidarity.

Sarajevo

Susan Sontag, the American writer and public intellectual, traveled to Sarajevo in 1993 to direct *Waiting for Godot* as the city's residents were being ravaged by indiscriminate violence, power outages, and widespread hunger. Sontag's production featured a local producer, Haris Pasovic, and local theater actors. Sontag appealed to three layers of audience through her performative project: those who attended the performances in the Youth Theater in Sarajevo in

August 1993, the journalists who wrote about the production, and the individuals who heard and read those accounts. The production made claims to trauma through the production of the play that resonated and appealed to each level. I will discuss how Sontag and the other social actors involved in the production appealed to each layer of audience and the ways in which the play achieved, or was said to achieve, re-fusion. Of course there was overlap in strategies of appealing to and interpretation by the layers of audience: what the production of *Waiting for Godot* meant, or was said to mean, to the people of Sarajevo affects what it means, or what it is said to mean, to the audiences beyond the city.

How was the production of *Godot* experienced and interpreted by the people in Sarajevo during the summer of 1993? To analyze the first-order audience almost two decades after the performance without having been present at the performance, I must rely on the accounts of the social actor's involved: principally what Sontag wrote about her production and on comments by residents of Sarajevo as they are quoted by journalists. Artistic culture, European identity, and feeling abandoned by their fellow Europeans were very much related for residents of Sarajevo in the summer of 1993. Sarajevo's residents who had sustained a vibrant intellectual and cultural life based in European artistic traditions were now living without electricity or proper food and were in constant fear for their lives. Many of them felt that their European neighbors allowed them to suffer by their reticence to intervene in the violence. Under ongoing attack, residents bitterly recognized that cultural solidarity with Europe did not extend to political solidarity. The intellectuals and artists with whom many residents of the city felt an affiliation largely abandoned the cause of the Sarajevans. Boujan Zec, a Sarajevan journalist, was quoted in *The Guardian*: "Writers like Hemingway risked their lives for liberty in Spain. Now all that Europe

can do is send us a few packets of aid."[69] By participating in the production of *Godot*, the actors, theater support staff, and first-order audience members reinforced for themselves their collective identity as civil, cultured Europeans worthy of being saved from "savage" violence. The actor Velibor Topic, who played one of the Estragons, was also quoted in *The Guardian*: "There is not only fighting on the front line. We must tell the world that we are not animals. We are cultured, we have ideas and dreams."[70] The production of *Waiting for Godot* and the media attention it generated was a way to showcase that culture and civility persevered in Sarajevo. As Velibor indicates, the production of *Waiting for Godot*, a well-known and respected play, articulated their collective identity as civilized Europeans to the residents of Sarajevo. The production was intended to articulate the same collective identity to audiences outside the city.

The residents of Sarajevo were also widely quoted by journalists and by Sontag saying that *Waiting for Godot* made sense to perform in their historical moment because they, too, were waiting. They were waiting for in intervention by the United States, President Clinton, the United Nations, and their European neighbors. John Pomfret includes one of the actor's reflections on the figure of Godot in his article for the *Washington Post*: "You never know when something is going to come crashing down and blow your head apart… That's my own personal Godot."[71] Using the same sort of language as the academic David Bradby when he identified *Godot's* "special relevance," a British reporter writes, "The play's message has touched a chord among Sarajevans beyond the tiny theatre-going public. 'I hear Ms Sontag is waiting for Godot - we are are waiting for the Europeans and the Americans,' commented Jovan Divjak, a Bosnian

[69] Narayan, Natasha. 1993. "A Candle in the Dark." *The Guardian*, August 20, p. 2.
[70] Narayan. 1993. *The Guardian*, August 20.
[71] Pomfret, John. 1993. "'Godot' Amid the Gunfire; In Bosnia, Sontag's Take on Beckett." *The Washington Post*, August 19, C1.

army chief. 'Did Godot ever show up?'"[72] The residents waited for an uncertain end to the violence, and the production of *Godot* is a way to express their status to those for whom they wait.

The journalists and critics, including Sontag herself, who wrote about the production of *Godot* in Sarajevo largely focused on the desperation in Sarajevo and how apt the metaphor of waiting was for the residents' situation. Soon after returning to the United States in the early fall of 1993, Sontag wrote two similar essays about her experience directing the play in the beleaguered city. Published in the *New York Review of Books* and the *Performing Arts Journal*, Sontag targeted her reflections and interpretations of the performance to an elite, intellectual, and largely American audience. In "Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo," Sontag wrote that she traveled to Sarajevo to direct a production of *Waiting for Godot* in order to "pitch in and do something" (1994: 87). Although Sontag insisted that she could not go to Sarajevo merely to act as a witness to the violence, she is that too. In her essay, she provides details about life in the city that read like an ethnographic account. Sontag describes the emotional tableau of collective trauma, stringing together observations that echo Erikson's fieldwork in Buffalo Creek:

> …many Sarajevans are reluctant to leave their apartments except when it is absolutely necessary…though no one is safe anywhere, they have more fear when they are in the street. And beyond fear, there is depression—most Sarajevans are very depressed—which produces lethargy, exhaustion, apathy. (1994:90)

Further, Sontag reports that the residents are "waiting, hoping, not wanting to hope," and they are "humiliated" (1994: 91). The forces promoting what Erikson called the "prevailing mood and temper" of collective trauma were constant; the real danger had not subsided in Sarajevo. Snipers threatened to kill people on the street and in their homes. Residents lacked electricity,

[72] Tanner, Marcus. 1993. "A Long Wait for Godot." *The Independent*, August 2, p. 1.

and waited in lines to receive daily rations of food and water from the United Nations. Sontag notes that her actors suffered from fatigue and malnutrition; a formerly overweight actress lost more than sixty pounds during the war. The newspaper accounts of the situation in Sarajevo and of the plight of the individuals in the social and professional circle of the theater mention many of the same details that Sontag includes in her essays.

The second-order audience, the journalists, established that *Godot* was, in fact, an apt metaphor in large part by describing the reactions of the actors and the audience in the theater. Many journalists describe what happened and interpret the mood in Youth Theater during the performances by mentioning particular details such as what materials appeared on stage, what the actors wore, and how the house was lit. I quote John Burns of the *New York Times*:

> A charged silence settled over the theater as actors and audience took a long, painful pause, digesting a message of hope deceived that is a defining passage of a new dramatic production performed here for the first time on Tuesday. To hear the silence of the packed house in the small theater in the city center was to feel the grief and disappointment that weigh on Sarajevo as it nears the end of its second summer under siege.[73]

By declaring a match between the situation "on the ground" and the play using the stunned, silent, pensive, and emotional reaction of the in-person audience as evidence, the journalists declared *Waiting for Godot* a performative "success." The journalists indicated to their reading and listening audience that *Godot* re-fused the setting, script, audience, and actors into a shared experience of meaning. They conveyed that everyone in Sarajevo understand exactly what *Godot* meant and why it was important to perform in Sarajevo at that moment. And, importantly, during the performance of the play, performed around the world so many times before, the Sarajevan audience saw not only a classic dramatic work; they saw themselves.

The journalists and critics who described and interpreted the production of *Waiting for Godot* conveyed to their listening and reading audience how apt the metaphor was for waiting, uncertainty, and anxiety in Sarajevo. Many journalists repeated variations on the statement "The metaphor of waiting for intervention was well understood."[74] Often, they established the resonance of *Godot* by describing that the in-person audience was riveted by the performance, collectively understanding its significance in their place and time. However, Beckett's script and the metaphor of waiting did not speak unaided for the trauma of the Sarajevans. Sontag and the actors changed significant elements of Beckett's play including the set, the characters, and the length of the play to signify their circumstance and to narrate their trauma for the audience beyond the besieged city. Such changes would be notable in almost any dramatic performance, but insertions into the play to establish the meaning of the situation is additionally surprising in *Godot*. Beckett and his estate are (in)famously inflexible, rarely allowing productions to deviate from Beckett's authorial intentions for the staging of his plays.[75] More importantly for this study, by specifying the nature and players in a trauma the social actors insert a referent into a play that does not carry one of its own.

Instead of one pair of protagonists, Sontag staged three pairs of Vladimirs and Estragons as "three variations on the theme of the couple" with one mixed gender, one male, and one female couple. She reports she made the decision, at least in part, to "employ"—a symbolic rather than monetary concept—more actors (1994: 92). However, a journalist quotes her explaining to her actors: "Beckett was still thinking in that old way of thinking; that if these

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[73] Burns, John F. 1993. "To Sarajevo, Writer Brings Good Will and 'Godot.'" *The New York Times*, August 19.
[74] Narayan. 1993. *The Guardian*, August 20.
[75] See, for example, 1993. "Waiting for Godette." *The Times*, September 1, Features. This news piece states that Sontag's "real accomplishment" is staging *Godot* with female actresses while the Beckett estate sues other productions for the same substitution.

characters are to be representative then they should be men."[76] In addition to lightening the burden on her exhausted and malnourished actors, Sontag explains that the extra pairs of travelers have the symbolic value of representing both men and women, male and female Sarajevans who wait for Godot alike and together. Pomfret, writing for *The Washington Post*, declares: "This troika succeeds on the stage as each pair -- two women, two men, and a man and a woman -- explore different parts of the waiting game as they inhabit a world garnished with ammo boxes, sandbags and a hospital bed -- part of the spiritual architecture of life in Sarajevo."[77] Here, in addition to declaring the representation of all Sarajevans a success, Pomfret also indicates that the production introduced meanings of trauma into the set of *Godot* which is usually exceedingly sparce. David Bradby argues that the most important aspect of the setting of *Godot* is its "neutrality: it provides an empty space, neither historically conditioned nor socially appropriated" (2001: 34). However, Sontag's actors presented *Waiting for Godot* "on a stage lit by candles, and with Red Cross boxes and UN sandbags as props…"[78] In one of her nods to Beckett in her essay, Sontag comments that her staging was "as minimally furnished, I thought, as Beckett himself could have desired" (1994: 96). She fails to mention the war paraphernalia invoking the Red Cross and The United Nations, material representations of trauma, decorating the stage.

Sontag only staged the first act of the play. In her essay on the production, she points out that the first act is "itself a complete play" without the repetition and the stasis of the second act (1994: 97). She reports that she decided to stage only the first half of the play because her actors and audience could not sustain energy for a longer performance. However, Sontag undermined

[76] Eagar, Charlotte. 1993. "Radical-Chic Sontag Waits for Godot as Shells Shake Theatre of the Absurd." *The Observer*, July 25, p. 13.
[77] Pomfret. 1993. *The Washington Post*, August 19.

her explanation of this as a logistical, value-free decision in comments to the first- and second-order audiences. Pomfret attended a performance in Sarajevo where Sontag announced: "Its correct title, then, is 'Waiting for Godot: Act 1.' We are all waiting for Act 2."[79] Of course, Beckett's Godot never arrives. Sontag's Godot may still arrive in the Act 2 that is yet to unfold. Until he arrives—and perhaps even if he does—he is a guilty party in their trauma.

So far, it sounds very much like all the journalists agree that *Waiting for Godot* was the right play at the right time in Sarajevo and that the residents of Sarajevo responded to this resonance and relevance. This is, actually, largely true. But that is not to say that there were no criticisms of staging *Godot* in Sarajevo. The criticisms, however, did not pertain to whether or not the claims made implicitly and explicitly through the play—that the Sarajevans suffer from deep existential uncertainty and physical decline as they wait for the United States, the United Nations, and their European neighbors to intervene in the violence. Rather, whether or not the play will be taken as a legitimate, successful social performance of trauma hinges on whether the performance was spontaneous and authentic. Specifically, the motivations and actions of Susan Sontag coming to the beleaguered city to direct the play was at issue for the layers of audiences. Simply stated, the critical question is not whether the meanings encoded by the performance are correct; the critical question is whether Sontag should have directed the play.

The most direct and vehement critic, Richard Grenier, wrote that Sontag has resumed her "her position as the artist-moralist of the Western world" in the "limelight" of Sarajevo.[80] Grenier's was the most ardent formulation of what occurred in whispers in other news pieces: did Sontag seek out this high-profile cause to boost her own career or did she seek to bring the

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[78] William, David. 1993. "The Great Provider: Alemko Has it all at a Price Despite the Siege." *The Daily Mail*, August 18, p. 12.
[79] Pomfret. 1993. *The Washington Post*, August 19. .
[80] Grenier, Richard. 1993. "Sarajevo and Susan's Sweet Sensibilities." *The Washington Times*, August 30, p. E3.

world's attention to the situation in Sarajevo? Is it legitimate for an intellectual from the U.S. to travel to a war zone to direct a play? Although these questions were certainly not uniformly answered or resolved, many reporters' accounts assure the third-order audience that Sontag's presence and her work in the embattled Sarajevo theater scene were welcome by the Sarajevans. An editor of a Sarajevo newspaper that continued to publish during the shelling, Kemal Kurspahic, commented on the status of Sontag: "She is not a war tourist…She has really tried to come here and talk to us and understand the situation."[81] The same news story states, as do several other reports, that Sontag declines, out of a sense of equality and solidarity, to wear her flak jacket. Some reporters write that a flak jacket lies nearby the famous intellectual, but, like her actors, she goes without. Weighing in on her authenticity as an artist in Sarajevo, Sontag tells a reporter, "You have to have some reason to be here. I'm not just a voyeur. I was invited to take part in a theatre festival…"[82] Journalists and critics declared Sontag's production of *Waiting for Godot* a performative success. The meanings resonated with the situation and the people. Sontag's changes to Beckett's stage directions were not over-done and those embellishments did not take away from the power of the play's simplicity. Sontag's position and job as director were (largely) authentic and the show's connection with the audience seemed spontaneous and strong. In short, most journalists declared *Waiting for Godot* a successful social performance in Sarajevo.

New Orleans

Graphic and performance artist Paul Chan knew about Sontag's production of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo when he brought a production of Beckett's play to New Orleans in November 2007. Chan considers his production of *Godot* "within the lineage of imagining what it means to

[81] Narayan. 1993 *The Guardian*, August 20.

create art in places where we ought not to have any" which includes Sontag's production. [83] Supported by the public art nonprofit Creative Time, Chan mounted a multifaceted expressive project featuring a whispering campaign and local art practices including Second line brass bands. Like Sontag's production in Sarajevo, Chan dramatizes and communicates the situation of the people living in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina to the city's residents and to the wider world. And like Sontag's production, Chan and the director Christopher McElroen and the stage actors added specific references to their city and their situation to Beckett's austere drama. In a sense, Chan had at his disposal Beckett's script for the play as well as a script written by Sontag's production, the production at San Quentin, in South Africa and elsewhere for how to stage *Waiting for Godot* as a metaphor for trauma. In these instances, though the play is touted as a "perfect" and "apt" metaphor, the nature of the trauma, the perpetrators, and the victims are explicitly referenced via the characters, set, costumes, and other theatrical elements. The second "script" of *Godot* as a social performance of trauma indicates what can be altered in Beckett's play to make it speak for and construct the trauma at hand. Journalists comment on this "lineage" and how Chan uses the script passed down to him from Sontag, the prison productions, and others.[84] Also like the production in Sarajevo, in addition to expressive aptness which is required for the play to express and narrate trauma, the legitimacy of artists who direct and produce the play are at issue for residents and journalists.

Chan's production went beyond Beckett's script and the previous productions from his "lineage" to mount a social performance of community and trauma. To advertise the performances, Chan and his theater group posted signs including only Beckett's first stage

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[82] Narayan. 1993 *The Guardian*, August 20.
[83] Simon, Scott. 2007. "Still Waiting on Repairs, New Orleans Hosts 'Godot.'" Weekend Edition Saturday, National Public Radio, November 3.

directions: "A country road. A tree. Evening." This whispering campaign knew no boundaries of class, race, or hurricane destruction; "good" and "bad" neighborhoods alike were garnished with the signs.[85] A journalist for the *New York Times* describes that they "added up to a visual network, art as a connective tissue for a torn-apart town."[86] He interprets for his readers that the social bonds that were broken through the storm will be restored through art's catharsis. Before the show went up, the producer and others involved with the production hosted theater workshops and attended pot-luck dinners with a variety of New Orleans residents. The *Times-Picayune's* coverage of this multifaceted art project helped to send out a casting call for local actors to audition for the play.[87] Chan cast three actors from the Classical Theater of Harlem production of *Waiting for Godot*, including Wendell Pierce who plays Detective Moreland on the popular television show *The Wire* and is a native son of New Orleans. Chan cast a local actor, Mark McLaughlin, as Lucky, and two young local actors shared the role of the Boy.[88] The local paper also listed phone numbers to call for reservations for the show and issued a call for volunteers to help with various aspects of the production.[89] The *Times-Picayune* advertised that at each of the free performances the audience would share a gumbo dinner before being led into the seating area by Second line bands.[90] The play was performed at a street corner in the Lower Ninth Ward and in front of a destroyed house in Gentilly. In his artist statement, Chan explains that staging the play outside with the brass band "connects with the city's storied tradition of street performance, from Mardi Gras to the Second lines that leisurely snake through streets and

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[84] Simon. 2007. Weekend Edition Saturday, National Public Radio, November 3; Cotter, Holland. 2007. "A Broken City. A Tree. Evening." *The New York Times*, December 2, Section 2, p. 1.
[85] Cotter. 2007. *The New York Times*, December 2.
[86] Cotter. 2007. *The New York Times*, December 2.
[87] Cuthbert, David. 2007. "Katrina 'Godot' a Go: Wendell Pierce Set to Star in Hurricane-Themed Adaptation of Classic Play in New Orleans." *The Times-Picayune*, September 15.
[88] Cuthbert, David. 2007. *The Times-Picayune.* October 26.
[89] Cuthbert. 2007. *The Times-Picayune.* October 26.

neighborhoods."[91] Cotter reported in the *New York Times* that thousands of people attended the shows, and an extra performance was added to accommodate audience demand.[92] The first-order audience did not merely occupy seats in a theater. Local residents, food, and music, were part of the performance in New Orleans. On the day of the first performance, the *Times-Picayune* quoted Pierce exclaiming with a laugh, "We're gonna have a lot of New Orleans in this!"[93] The local flavor surrounding the stage performance expresses to residents and to those outside the city that New Orleans has a unique and vibrant culture that should not languish or disappear.

Much of the journalistic coverage, the comments by the second-order audience, focused on the parallels between the characters, setting, and plot of *Godot* and the residents and their lives in New Orleans. Holland Cotter, writing for *The New York Times*, comments on the apt pairing of the text and the situation in Gentilly and the Lower Ninth Ward: "Under the circumstances, Beckett's words sounded less like an existentialist cri de coeur than like a terse topographic description."[94] Cotter conveys to his reader that the set of *Godot* which seems peculiarly sparce to many audiences is simple description of reality in New Orleans. The text and the landscape merge, but a journalist for the *Times-Picayune* writes that the resonance between the play and the situation is fully expressed only through the performance: "Many lines in the 'Godot' text take on new meaning post-Katrina, but it is not until the actors speak them at the barren intersection in the Lower 9th Ward—both blighted and beautiful—that their full

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[90] Cuthbert, David. 2007. "A Play in the Street: For New Orleanians, 'Waiting for Godot' Hits the Spot." *The Times-Picayune*, November 2.
[91] Chan, Paul. June 2007. "Waiting for Godot in New Orleans: An Artist Statement." Available http://www.creativetime.org/programs/archive/2007/chan/artist_statement.pdf, last accessed 04/29/08.
[92] Cotter. 2007. *The New York Times*, December 2.
[93] Cuthbert. 2007. *The Times-Picayune*, November 2.
[94] Cotter. 2007. *The New York Times*, December 2.

immediacy and import is felt."[95] Another journalist for the *Times-Picayune* illustrates this "immediacy and import" by quoting the woman he sat next to at the performance in the Ninth Ward who lives in the neighborhood. When Estragon sat on a curb on the stage, the woman remarked, "He's sitting there like me sitting on my stoop."[96] Beckett's characters and the characters in the drama of Katrina wait just the same, sitting on the stoop and watching up the road for Godot to arrive.

Like the woman in the Ninth Ward who sits on her stoop, several articles about the production of *Godot* convey that the characters in this social performance have their own experiences of waiting like Beckett's hobos, the stage characters. McLaughlin, who plays Lucky, told a reporter for the *Times-Picayune*, "I see this 'Godot' every single day on my block, where a Baptist church is a clearinghouse for all kinds of people in need."[97] An article in the *Times-Picayune* divulges that Pierce, the famous television and movie actor, is angry about his parents' experiences tangling with government bureaucracy and "politics" to get recovery money after losing their home during Katrina. The reporter writes, "They [Pierce's parents] went down to the office and found themselves playing an absurdist scene right out of "Godot."[98] The characters of the social performance of trauma go beyond the stage actors. Radio and newspaper journalists introduce their third-order audience to Lower Ninth Ward resident Robert Green who lost both his mother and his granddaughter in the storm. Chan gave Green a copy of *Waiting for Godot*. At first he was skeptical of an outsider producing a play on the streets in his neighborhood, but after Green read the play, he left a screaming message on Chan's answer

[95] Cuthbert. 2007. *The Times-Picayune*, November 2.
[96] MacCash, Doug. 2007. "Worth the Wait: Standing-Room Crowds Create Havoc, but 'Godot'-Goers go with the Flow." *The Times-Picayune*, November 6.
[97] Cuthbert. 2007. *The Times-Picayune*, November 2.
[98] Cuthbert. 2007. *The Times-Picayune*, November 2.

machine: he had to be part of the project.[99] A writer for the *Times-Picayune* places Green in his scene on show night. Green welcomed the play's audience, but the journalist hesitates to say "to his neighbhorhood" for Green's neighbors are gone, and he waits for them to come back.[100] Green is Vladimir and Estragon. The stage actors bring Beckett's characters to life on stage, and they are bringing Green's story to life as well.

In Sarajevo, *Godot* was performed concurrently with the violent siege; in New Orleans, more than two years elapsed between the storm and the production of *Godot.* Through the multi-faceted social performance, the *Waiting for Godot* production and project in New Orleans articulated that the people in New Orleans continue to wait for the disaster, and the trauma, to end. One way that the production articulated the residents of New Orleans as "victims" was by casting a mix of African-American and local actors. The Lower Ninth Ward and Gentilly are predominantly black neighborhoods. Flooding in the city and the miserably slow response from the local, state, and federal governments disproportionately affected black neighborhoods and black residents. By casting Beckett's travelers to "look like" the people in New Orleans, the production represented the identity of those who are the victims of an ongoing trauma.

We can also think about the production of *Waiting for Godot* and the other aspects of the art project as a counter-performance to the rhetoric and placations that politicians have offered the residents of New Orleans. New Orleans was the backdrop for John Edwards's entrance into and exit from the 2008 presidential campaign, at the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2008 respectively. Countless other politicians and agency representatives travel to New Orleans to give press conferences assuring the residents and people throughout the United States that New Orleans is on the top of the political agenda. There have been many improvements in the city,

[99] Simon. 2007. Weekend Edition Saturday, National Public Radio, November 3.
[100] DeBerry, Jarvis. 2007. "Waiting, Wondering? We Can Relate." *The Times-Picayune*, November 6.

but years after the hurricane, neighborhoods like the Lower Ninth Ward and Gentilly remain largely in tatters. The counter-performance of the *Waiting for Godot* artistic project expresses and articulates their continuing trauma: the residents of the Lower Ninth Ward and Gentilly are still waiting, uncertain of their fate and abandoned by Godot.

The second-order audience, the journalists, and the residents they interview claim that the play represents the situation of the people of the Crescent City. Like Beckett's hobos, they wait for an object of desire which they only know in a hazy form. Who is Godot? When is relief coming? When will the city return to "normal"? There is no dispute in any of the newspaper or television reports, local or national, which I surveyed that Beckett's play uniquely represents life in New Orleans. Like in Sarajevo, questions about the legitimacy of the play, and the legitimacy of the social performance carried on through and around it, focus on the producers and directors who came to New Orleans from outside the city. Can artists legitimately create a claim to someone else's trauma? We learn from the productions of *Godot* in Sarajevo and in New Orleans that they may if they properly engage the local population by hiring them as actors, costumers, and stage hands. Chan goes beyond this to partner with various community groups; two separate articles in the *Times-Picayune* and an article in *The New York Times* list a long roster of local partners in the *Godot* project including high schools, universities, and community organizations.[101] Writing for the *Times-Picayune*, MacCash and Cuthbert write that Chan made New Orleans his "temporary home" for the duration of the *Godot* project.[102] He's not an insider, of course, but they convey that he is not merely a tourist-artist cashing in on New Orleans's misfortunes either. In fact, they go on to quote an art-world insider who suggests that

[101] Cuthbert. 2007. *The Times-Picayune*, September 15, Cuthbert, David. 2007. "'Godot' Makes the Bean Scene." *The Times-Picayune*, October 27, and Cotter. 2007. *The New York Times*, December 2.
[102] MacCash, Doug and Cuthbert, David. 2007. "Artist Paul Chan Brings his 'Godot' to a Waiting City." *The Times-Picayune*, November 2.

having big-name artists and actors can be a good thing because the "power elites" of the art world will be at New Orleans's "doorstep" thanks to Chan's project. And, indeed, national and international newspaper and radio journalists covered Chan's project and, through this coverage, conveyed the meaning of the play and the meaning of the trauma to a wide third-order audience. David Cuthbert, who covered the production over a span of two months for the *Times-Picayune* summed up the project's success in unifying and representing the broken city and its people for his readers: "The haves and have-nots in New Orleans right now are those who have seen 'Godot' and those who haven't."[103]

Conclusion

Claims to trauma are not always made directly in the trauma process. Of course, they may be. Political leaders deliver speeches to assign guilt and to argue for the veracity of their claims to trauma. Textbooks teach children the "truth" of past conflicts, specifying the aggressor and the victim, the trauma and the triumph. The basic questions which must be answered through the trauma process—"the nature of the pain, the nature of the victim, the relation of the trauma victim and the wider audience, and the attribution of responsiblitity" (Alexander 2004: 13-15)—are, by virtue of the status of guilt and innocence at stake, usually quite contentious. Who is to blame? What is to be blamed for? What should the responsible party do about it? Often, these questions are not posed and the answers are not given directly through straightforward political speech. Claims made during the trauma process have two forms: factual truth and expressivity. The productions of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo and New Orleans are social performances whose "success" is not achieved in the register of factual truth. Their success is achieved in the register of expressive aptness.

[103] Cuthbert, David. 2007. "Audience Completes 'Godot': The Play is Not the Thing if No One is There to Hear it."

Some claims to trauma accuse. Through fact-oriented speech and action, social actors indict a party as guilty or refuse blame. Other claims to trauma reveal. Through expressive performance, social actors represent the elements of trauma. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, though surely performative in some senses (cite Tanya Goodman?), appeal to factual and experiential truth. Participants formally state where they were, what happened to them, and by whom. Victims name perpetrators and their crimes. In contrast, through the case study of *Waiting for Godot*, I argue that social performance of trauma appeals to expressive truth. Individuals in Sarajevo and New Orleans do not literally wait on a road, but the metaphor of waiting for help whose arrival is dubious and whose identity is unknown speaks for and narrates their trauma.

Journalists, critics, and academics declare that *Waiting for Godot* is a metaphor for these situations. The set is a metaphor for the bleakness of landscape following a disaster; waiting for Godot is a metaphor for waiting these situations to end. However, even the most apt metaphors do not speak for themselves. I challenge the notion that the play simply stands for the situation of trauma. Instead, I show that social actors inject the play with meanings in order to express their situation as a trauma. Yet, to speak too explicitly of blame and the status of victims turns metaphor into bald politics. If made explicit, claims to guilt and innocence may be accepted or rejected on the grounds of truth claims. Like so many paintings (Picaso's *Guernica* is perhaps the most famous example) and films (*Roots* is an American example), and other art forms, *Waiting for Godot* narrates the trauma and expresses charges of guilt without making accusations in the political realm or a court of justice.

Productions of *Waiting for Godot*, as I discovered, were not judged according to factually accuracy. Such a rubric simply would not make sense. Instead, the audiences to these

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The Times-Picayune, November 10.

productions of *Waiting for Godot* pronounced the performances a success or failure based on the aptness of the expression for capturing the experiences of the residents in each city. This is not only a separate rubric from other claims to trauma, but of course a different rubric of success than most theatrical performances. The acting, directing, costuming, and stage design were not based exclusively on the logic of the theater, but also on the logic of social performance. Audiences expected the actors to embody Vladimir and Estragon, sure, but there was a simultaneous expectation that they personify the residents of the cities as well. Audiences did not only appreciate *Godot* as a literary masterpiece but as the representation of their plight. Like Austin's speech performatives, social performance cannot be true or false; they are "felicitous or infelicitous." Rauer writes, "The only epistemological doubt that can be raised concerns the pragmatic question of whether the act is infelicitous, inadequate, or fabricated…" (2006: 259). Since performatives and social performance do not merely describe social reality but have the ability to create a new social reality, they can create social reality that other forms of action (e.g. political speeches, court trials, and awareness campaigns relying on facts as evidence) cannot. Questions, therefore, abound on the "*adequacy* of the symbol, not its *truth*" and regarding whether the correct person took the correct action (2006: 259). The success of the social performance is judged in part on the aptness of the play. Is it too intellectual? Is it too dark? Is the play overdone? Two writers for the *Times-Picayune* write that if they were exposed to *Waiting for Godot* in another circumstance they might have thought the text too high-brow, but in New Orleans it is perfectly apt.[104] The writers are not intimidated or bored by the play because it represents life in their city. The success of the social performance also depends on the authenticity and legitimacy of the artists. In both Sarajevo and New Orleans, *Waiting for Godot*

[104] DeBerry. 2007. *The Times-Picayune*, November 6 and Maloney, Ann. 2007. "Wait with Me: N.O. May be the Richest Ravaged City in the World." *The Times-Picayune*, November 9.

was put on only because a famous (more so in the first case) and well-funded (more so in the second) intellectual and artist came to the city to produce the play. Accordingly, the audience asks, what is the status of the imported intellectuals? Are they grabbing attention for themselves? Are they investing in the community or just putting up a production and leaving? Sontag and Chan walk a performative tight-rope. They must be able to create art that fuses with the local audience. Yet to create a social performance making claims to trauma they must be able to reach beyond the city, the site of the collective trauma, to journalists who will convey the social performance to a national and international audience. They must be local and global, speaking to and speaking for both.

In his essay "Notes on Beauty," Peter Schjeldahl writes, "Insensibility to beauty may be an index of misery" (1994: 59). In contradiction to this assertion, actors, directors, producers and audiences seek out and shape Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* to claim and specify trauma. Accounts of these productions indicate an astute sensitivity to and connection with this great work of theater. Social actors have shaped their aesthetic experience to specify and communicate the circumstances, perpetrators and victims of their trauma to themselves and to a wider audience; they have turned theater performance into social performance of trauma. Indeed, I argue that it may be through beauty, through aesthetics and art works, that social actors make a claims to trauma which will not be not be judged based on factual accuracy but on the aptness of the expression of meaning.

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