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UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Somaticatica

embodied adventures in and out of the Irish countryside

Wild Geese
You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.

Mary Oliver



Prelude

This chapter weaves the embodied voices of three of the four women who make up the *Somaticats*[1]- four women who meet regularly in the southern Irish city of Cork to

[1] See the Somaticats blog at: http://somaticats.wordpress.com/

muse about our embodiment with no agenda, much playfulness and some Nina Simone. Beginning in the Autumn of 2012 we spent the better part of a year in an open-ended research framework focused on the somatic perceptions underpinning performance practices. For reasons we've now forgotten we started researching the pelvis. We traced its various structures, paying attention to its movements, intensities, histories, songs and voices. We somaticats – Bernadette Cronin, Regina Crowley, Jools Gilson and Roisin O'Gorman – weave our shared somatic practice with the charged Irish context in which we are embodied, with the space and place of our own and historical femininities. We are always haunted by the gorgeous interplay of our listening, resistant bodies and our verbal, voicing, articulate selves. Perhaps not surprisingly, the tapestry we weave here is haunted by a mother-thread that persistently re-emerges in one context and/or embodiment or another. This essay then is a glimpse of a year-long pelvic meditation which marked a commitment to get off our knees and connect with the soft animal body and its loves. Here we offer a fragmented conversational snapshot of the threads of our motivations, explorations and tangents as they interweave with our lives and loves as well as a particular case study where the subtleties of somatic practices merge and emerge through performance. We splice our voices at the paper's start, to meet musically the sense in which we braid our embodiments in the studio.

First Movement

Bernadette: Out of the Somatics and Performance Workshop, University College Cork, organized by Róisín O'Gorman in August 2012, *Somaticats* is born. We resolve to continue to meet throughout the year ahead to foster that sense of a nurturing connection that emerged from the three-day workshop.

Jools: I make seedy bars, fruit bettys, figgy coconut balls and fruit cake for a gaggle of dancers from all over Ireland and the UK who come to Cork when the blackberries should have been in season in 2012. We come to listen to the insides of ourselves altogether. I melt peanut butter with honey and vanilla essence, and stir this into a pile of seeds, so that we might grin together over elevenses. And then, we didn't want it to stop.

Róisín : In August 2012 we held a Somatics and Performance workshop at University College Cork attended by 14 practitioners from across somatic fields in the aim of sharing practice, making connections, offering sessions of each other's work and seeing what would happen. After three revitalizing days we thought – 'let's keep a thread going here and see what happens.' And so we become *Somaticats*. The name is intended to be playful and open, yet it marks a space, a cellular alliance across institutional and disciplinary divides. These 'cats' prowl for the possibilities for what somatics can perform, what an embodied approach can 'do' in the particular socio-cultural setting, which is Ireland in 2012. At this time of global contraction, they are forging potential openings in a conservative culture, which historically severely limited the available or acceptable range of bodily expressivity. They are on the hunt for a language and vocabulary that moves, for the rooted connectivity that gives succulence to voice, power to ideas and surprises us with its creative force.

Jools: Elderflowers: Watching my small daughter playing Camogie (Irish hockey for girls) at the local field, my eyes wander to the small trees and shrubbery that borders the Gaelic Athletics pitch in Ballymacoda, in East Cork, an area people even a few miles west of here call 'real country.' I've spied elderflowers, lots of them. It's late June, and every time I look at elders I get hungry for the cordial I'm longing to tempt from their blooms. And so I nip back to the car for a bag, and sidle towards the unruly hedgerow, between bouts of cheery encouragement to my daughter on the pitch. I begin to break off creamy umbels of elderflowers. Their fragrance crushes on my fingers, as I drop them one by one into the bag. I know half the village are giving me side glances, wondering what I'm doing raiding the greenery whilst there's a match on, but I'm greedy for what I know these tiny pastures of blossoms will give me. I smile, acknowledge the nods of greeting, and carry on filling my bag. My daughter, adopted from Guatemala eight years ago, is a hearty warrior on the camogie field. There she is below me in her helmet and shin guards, tackling tenaciously with her wide wooden hurley (a sort of Irish hockey stick), battling for pleasure between the pale skins and freckled faces of Father O'Neill's Under-9s. I smile at her, and the musky sweet smell of elderflowers engulfs me.

Bernadette: Four teachers, practitioners, researchers, mothers, wives, partners, daughters… women, each with a long history of doing, preparing, planning, doing,

structuring, nurturing, doing, come together and consider non-doing as a possibility for discovery. For a time it is almost as though we have to keep giving ourselves permission *not* to do, to resist asking the question, what are we *doing*, to afford ourselves the 'guilty pleasure' of booking a studio space in the middle of a hectic working week to engage in nothing particularly planned, and work from intuition.

Róisín : We then begin to gather together, through the winter, through rains and accidents, high temperatures, shifts and separations, growth, forgetting, aging, loss, going on even when we can't go on.
Tea and cake: crucial.
Laughter: as necessary as deodorant.
We share touch and listening, languages of sounds, sighing--breathing--opening, singing together we learn, re-member-if we keep on dancing we'll never ever ever grow old.

Jools: As soon as we're home, we go into production. Water is boiled in great pots by the gallon load, and once the boil is rolling, they are lifted carefully onto the floor (for safety), where we slowly stir in a shocking amount of sugar. We watch melting white crystals turn water into syrup. Bowls of picked-over elderflower heads, thirty in each, with the zest and sliced up flesh of two lemons stand on the table. We move them to the floor, and carefully drench their contents with hot syrup. Then we cover them with clean cotton cloths and leave them to steep overnight in the laundry room. They smell divine, and whilst our hands are sticky and the children running wild, we are glad. In our bodies, we're grinning. The next day after work, we retrieve the steeping buckets and bowls, and strain them through muslin, before bottling them. They stand in elegant groups on the kitchen table, and we taste some – best with cold sparkling water, and it is heavenly - like drinking summer.

Bernadette: And in spite of myriad obstacles, busy work schedules, impromptu meetings, car accidents on icy roads, sick children and hospitalized parents, distressed au pairs, in short, the vicissitudes of life multiplied by four, we manage somehow to keep it going.

Jools: When the somaticats come to my house for our summer adventure in July, I greet them with cordial. I give them cordiality, gathered from the ditches of Ireland, spun with sugar and lemons, diluted with bubbly water. They grin, as I have grinned over these elderflowers. And we set about our astonishing feat – to give ourselves time and space to wonder and wander about embodiment. We giggle down the boreen (little Irish lane) in the sunshine. I've packed hard-boiled eggs and salad. We picnic and cat nap and chat ourselves into the Irish sea. We curve and squeal. I am writing this in September beside the same boreen, and hundreds of starlings are up to no good in the trees beside me.

Róisín : We go to the seaside...



Low tide low theory: What happens as the tide goes out and the gurgling dredge gives up its dead but fecund secrets? What can we sniff out, reach for in the sucking ooze—and why would we want to?

Bernadette: What is 'it'? Space to play, to explore, to share elements of the complex of somatic or psychophysical practices that through years of engagement have become part of who we are and how we make work – bodymind centering, tai chi,

Linklater voice work, yoga, Alexander technique, reiki, singing, chanting to sound the chakras... space to just be.

Róisín : Other forms of being emerge at low tide. Those in the half wet and half land world. I think I've always liked those edge zones, and much has been written and discussed on the liminal nature of performance as a site. The tidal zone is a betwixt and between zone too, but unlike the liminal threshold which might promise to take us to another level, the only thing the tide promises is to return and ebb again, a circular undulating that results in an ultimate kind of flatness maybe, an oozing out? What of it? We go for a swim...and then the tide also comes in...

Jools: Elderflowers matter because they connect my body to this place. The alchemy of making them into cordial enchants me. They matter because they are a cypher for embodiment. Think of the word 'umbel', a term, which means the gathering of tiny flowers to make a greater flower. I long for the taste of this word in my mouth only a little less than I long for cordial on summer days. And this is a story about four women who had been working with performance and somatics for more summers than they can remember. Four women who found each other because one of them made it happen. Another one made cake. A third brought her heart, and the fourth her voice. And after that we brought whatever we had.

Bernadette: Four women, breathing, sensing, moving together in time and space, dancing to Nina Simone singing 'Feeling Good' on a dark, damp winter's morning, exploring each other's sacrums on a frosty spring morning, tracing the sacroiliac joint, where the sacrum joins with the large bone of the pelvis known as the ileum, toying with ideas over tea and scones that could lead to a performance project, whilst also knowing that that would not in fact be possible in the short-term, sitting together in a country kitchen consuming sumptuous homemade cake and elderflower cordial, swimming in the sea together on a gloriously sunny day in July, scurrying to get our shoes and bags from the rocks as the tide comes in, and laughing, sharing an old rug with an interesting history on a pebbly beach to picnic in the sun, and laughing, and

bunching up together in a city garden with a spectacular view to take a group-photo, and laughing, and laughing, and occasionally also crying.

Jools: We joined curiosities. We tangled and entwined. We were absent through illness, elderly parents, black ice, sick children and very important meetings. We were present though. O, we were present. We stole mornings from weeks that exhausted us. We danced to Nina Simone, shared packed lunches, voyaged about our sacrum, became continents and FELT GLAD. Sometimes there are two or three of us, but we work anyway, with what we have, from where we're at. We work deeply. We move, and are moved. There is movement, and it astounds us.

Róisín : We return to the sea--a maybe mother, but I think more of the multitude it offers, the noise, the relentless horizon. This sounding, breathing, --what--creature, creaturely energy-- not exactly formless yet not exactly formed--offers another beginning, a quiet space, solitude, dropping in and away...

Second Movement

Bernadette: One might ask, so what? And the answer, I find, is that through duration in time and a sharing in precious snatched hours of these bodymind-centered activities, through the mindful[2] decision to persist in spite of so many obstacles and 'reasons' not to persist, a heart connection has been established: 'heart Hebrew *leba*, centre of courage, intelligence, feeling – the breast, the mind, pith, marrow, centre, or best part of anything' (Tuffnell and Crickmay, p.254). This together with an awareness arising out of the somatic or psychophysical practices that free us from a dualistic thinking that separates the body from the mind, and learning to give ourselves permission to trust our intuition, make, in my experience, for a rich seed-bed for creative collaboration.

[2] On page 4, Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994) teaches us about mindfulness meditation for everyday life, how it "wakes us up to the fact that our lives unfold only in moments" and that "if we are not fully present for many of those moments, we may not only miss what is most valuable in our lives but also fail to realize the richness and the depth of our possibilities for growth and transformation".

Róisín : We work slowly, finding the gentle body. I write after an early session: "Today we mapped and traced and danced the pelvic joints and wondered at the poetry in motion and the mystery of twists suspending us in and with gravity. Tonight I sit and find two poems from Mary Oliver that remind me about what it means to take time, to say no to some things which might also be as necessary as finding how the ilium can really roll around the head of the femur, how the acetabulum (which means small cup), can hold and move at the same time, like the call out on the moving line of geese throbbing through the winter, somehow finding their way again and again." [3]

Jools: Writing, like the playful labour of somaticatting, happens best if it's wrought from the lived memory and presence of flesh. Writers who are able to capture our embodied struggles and pleasures are the ones who move us most. And so *being moved*, that understated description of powerful emotional moment, can come from writing, but only insomuch as it captures the sweat and ache of living, moving bodies. (I'm talking about writing in books here - novels or poetry). *Being moved* is always connected to moving, even and perhaps often, in stillness. Somaticatical writing is writing that brings us to our bodies, provocations found in print that leads us astray or keeps us close, but always moves us. But it is also writing that comes from our body wondering, captured by loosely held and swiftly moving pencils.

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[3] The open secret of the approximately 12 women who each day travel outside of Ireland for abortion also somehow find their way again and again. There is no space in this essay to elaborate on the "12 A Day Project" which I directed in February 2013 which created a performance from testimonial accounts of women's journey's from Ireland to the UK for abortion. However, I must acknowledge it as another rhizome of the pelvic projects of 2013, where the somatic explorations grounded me through the politically and emotionally fraught terrain of this work. This project aimed to give voice to the direct experience of the abortion journey faced by women, their partners and families in Ireland and to open a space to witness the complexity of their choices rather than to rehearse the painful shaming and reductionist politics of the abortion debate. The impetus for the theatre project happened alongside a video based project which has since been launched on Youtube, see: http://www.youtube.com/user/NoMoreShameIrelandSee also: https://www.facebook.com/pages/No-More-Shame/394506053931205



Bernadette: Our collective intuition takes us for some reason quite often to the sacrum as our site of inquiry. *Os sacrum* from the Latin means holy or sacred bone, so-called, anecdotally, because it was the part of an animal offered in sacrifice, being the seat of the organs of procreation, or because the soul resides there. Other translations of *sacrum* from the Latin include: holy thing, sacred vessel, shrine, keystone, offering, victim, rite (Collins Latin Dictionary & Grammar). And in the plural, *sacra* can mean mysteries, secrets, or poems (sacred to the muse). The holy or sacred connotation persists in other modern languages, for example 'osso sacro' in Italian or 'heiligbeen' in Dutch. In the chakra system - the seven main energy centres that control the flow of energy to a living being - the first, root or base chakra is located at the sacrum, and here in this lowest energy centre, the kundalini or cosmic energy lies sleeping coiled like a serpent. No wonder the holy, sacred, secret, mysterious connections persist…

Róisín : Saucing singing sacra . . . pelvic pluralities. Weeks later, we find, we are still lingering in the pelvis, the lure of the sacrum and her cohort of singing bones is too strong. We weave together the vocal and physical playfulness of our various experiences.

Jools: Here there are sacrums that grow great roots, dark pools within hips, cellular support the size of yoga balls. Print to corpuscle to pencil, and back again. We write out of embodied experience, as many do. But we do it better if I have drugged the cats with cordial first. I'm telling stories. Believe me.

Bernadette: Given that we allow ourselves to work intuitively, it seems appropriate that we are drawn to the sacrum again and again. A junction between upper and lower body, it is at the top of the body when we drop down through the spine and let the head off the hook of that particular responsibility. Jerzy Grotowski used the word 'croix' in referring in French to the sacrum, not the official term 'sacrum'. In German the sacrum is 'Kreuzbein', cross-bone, a sacred crossroads between the upper and the lower body,

Róisín : OED online: SACRUM
Pronunciation: /ˈseɪkrəm/
Forms: Pl. sacrums, sacra.
Etymology: Subst. use of neuter singular of Latin *sacer* sacred

A composite, symmetrical, triangular bone which articulates laterally with the ilia, forming the dorsal wall of the pelvis and resulting from the ankylosis of two or more vertebræ between the lumbar and coccygeal regions of the spinal column.

We find sacral fans and eagle flight.[4]



Bernadette: A few days after a *Somaticats* session where we explored the sacrum I write the following in a poetry workshop led by poet Matthew Sweeney:

Sacrum-Making

After working with the
Sacrum for an
Hour and a half we
Scatter to find objects to
Assemble something:

A blue umbrella,

[4] Following Eric Franklin's *Dynamic Alignment Through Imagery* (1996)
[4]

A spineless collected works
of Shakespeare, standing
upright, fanned out like a daisy,
a rear bicycle light flashing,
a front bicycle light not flashing,
a broken vase,
a brown velvet cap,
a sequined top,
a biscuit pierced
by two lollipops,
a glass shard,
a shiny black boot,
a silver cycle helmet
its straps spread-eagled on the floor,
some crumbs;

After panning and zooming
To place our objects,
we lie belly down
and gaze
at what the sacrum
moved us
to make.

Róisín : We add Linklater pelvic dances, saucy stirring and butterfly patterns. From the floor with peel and tip and let our voices drop out from our floors through the mouth. We add some Roy Hart puppy panting and then finally, forming a head-belly laughing chain: release, release, release, together, release. Write--we must write ourselves...

> "With even more violence than fiction, theatre, which is built according to the dictates of male fantasy, repeats and intensifies the horror of the murder scene which is at the origin of all cultural productions. It is always necessary for a woman to die in order for the play to begin. Only when she has disappeared can the curtain go up; she is relegated to repression, to the grave, the asylum, oblivion and silence. When she does make an appearance, she is doomed, ostracized or in a waiting-room. She is loved only when absent or abused, a

phantom or a fascinating abyss. Outside and also beside herself. " (Cixous, 1984 :546)

Bernadette: Guy Claxton (1999) identifies intuition as "a kind of knowing which is essentially indirect, sideways, allusive and symbolic; which hints and evokes, touches and moves, in ways that resist explication. And it is accessed not through earnest manipulation of abstraction, but through leisurely contemplation of the particular".

Jools: And there is another thing. It isn't writing, but it is to do with what the *writing into* somaticats and *writing out of* somaticats, and that is the voice that leads an exercise, if there is one. And what that voice has to do with how we meet the invitation to explore internal worlds. Regina teaches Kristin Linklater's voice practice, and she does so by conjuring caverns and depths, pools and waterfalls within our pelvis. (If we searched this internal woodland, I'm sure we'd find elderflowers). Just as the body is moved by poetry outside itself, so we are led by a poetic language rehearsed through training, but improvised in the moment to an internal architecture, and it is this poetic language that makes possible all manner of openings and releases, as we re-imagine what embodiment could be. Our bodies become enchanted spaces of possibility, where we play with possibility through the invitation of voiced suggestion. And we like it. Us somaticats. We do.

Róisín : Sometimes we talk about Ireland. The Celtic Tiger has departed. We talk of laundries where women were sent and their babies taken away, of endemic abuse, of convents and hope and emigration, of the way the push of these bodies shapes the silences in the relentless chatter and detail of cups of tea and children's clothes and birthdays and funerals and all of that while the abortion debate in Ireland and the lack of action by successive governments and their citizenry in the twenty years since the so-called X-case[5] ramps up again.

[5] The "X Case" refers to a pivotal moment in Irish abortion law in 1992 when the Supreme Court ruled that the threat to a woman's life (not health) meant she could terminate her pregnancy. The case appealed a High court injunction granted to the Attorney General to prevent a 14-year-old rape victim from travelling to the UK to have an abortion. Although the X Case ruling technically made abortion legal in Ireland when the mother's life was at risk, including the risk of suicide, it was July 2013 before the Irish government finally passed legislation (called the "Protection of

Jools: I'm the blow-in of 17 years, out in the countryside stirring blackberries. This Ireland buffets me between enchantment and its underbelly.

Róisín : I could tell you now of the anti-abortion posters on the street where I live, that deface and defame the city I now call home, but I don't want to repeat any more of their nonsense and propaganda. I just want the simple sovereignty of dignity, of choice and voice, the right to decide what happens to my body. We voice these ideas as we share time and tea. We move and sound to shed the impact, the shapes that silenced bodies, ours and our ancestors, there are patterns that need expression, lineages that need some dusting off and re-animating, but we work quietly, gently...

Bernadette: I find this *Somaticats* club, or coven, or pack has become a sort of rhizome, a subterranean stem that builds up and stores important nutrients. I like rhizomes, like ginger and turmeric, they are warming and healing, have numerous medicinal properties. A yoga teacher told me recently that his Indian grandmother used to make a milky drink with turmeric and honey every day to keep the doctor away, in fact, on principle she never went to a doctor, but used turmeric in all different kinds of blends and pastes to heal her body on the outside and the inside. A rhizome sends out new shoots from its nodes, and if it is separated into different pieces, each piece can individually give rise to new plants. We somaticats decided that it would not be possible to plan a *Somaticats* performance project in the short term. A project I was involved in last April, as part of another collective, involved a series of site-specific performances of Beckett's *Footfalls* and I would like to reflect here on this process, contextualizing within the work we had been doing in

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Life during Pregnancy Act") that legalizes abortion under very limited circumstances. This bill was passed in part as a result of the international attention following the death of Savita Halappanavar (who was refused a termination that may have saved her life) and the result of the European Court of Human Rights case--*ABC v Ireland*- which ruled that Ireland had breached Human Rights Conventions in its sustained ambiguity around the right to an abortion in Ireland. See http://www.ifpa.ie/Hot-Topics/Abortion/ABC-v-Ireland

Somaticats, and the theme of attending to movement in the context of the psychophysical practices I have been engaging with over many years. I would like also to consider it in the light of a piece of the rhizome that broke away giving rise to a new plant.

Third Movement

Bernadette's case study

Attending to the *Footfalls*

M: Mother. [*Pause, no louder*.] Mother
V: Yes, May.
M: Were you asleep?
V: Deep asleep. [*Pause.*] I heard you in my deep sleep. [*Pause.*] There is no sleep so deep I would not hear you there.
(from *Footfalls*, by Samuel Beckett)

My 85-year-old mother has recently been ill, a heart problem. Somehow life has ordained that of her six offspring I am the one who spends most time with her in this late phase of her life – a precious gift, at times a strain. Sometimes my shoulders are full of tension, my diaphragm is constricted, and my sacrum aches. As my feet hurry to and from hospitals I find myself leaning forward, efforting, hollowing my upper body – an old defense mechanism – trapping my worries in that hollow of my heart centre and my solar plexus, being absent from many moments. In *Philosophy of Hatha Yoga* (p. 13) Swami Veda Bharati writes, "when a person actually places his body in a certain position, what he is doing is making the mind experience that position […] the mind experiences that shape in thought". Bharati is referring to hatha yoga positions and training the mind through the body in a beneficial way, but equally we can apply this to training the mind through the body in positions that are not beneficial, habitual positions that keep us trapped in thought/behavioural patterns. Or

as Abbot John Daido Loori expresses it, “how you posture your body creates a state of consciousness”.

And somewhere between choice and ordinance, in the midst of this phase of worry and deep connection with my mother, I find myself performing *Footfalls* – in an attic room of the deserted upper floors of a pub called Mr Bradley’s on Barrack Street in Cork city. When clearing the room, we find a walking stick and a wooden cross with the name of the elderly woman engraved on it who had lived in the house until her death. Presumably, the cross had stood on her grave until the headstone was erected. She was also a mother. Across the hallway in the other attic room of this building the actress playing ‘V’, whom I address as ‘Mother’, sits at her microphone surrounded by a dusty jumble of the residue of family life, toys, blankets, crockery, posters of football teams, rugs, hairbrushes… Mairin is also a mother. I too am a mother. I pushed through my mother’s sacro-illiac complex to come into the world and my daughters pushed through mine. The birth of my first daughter takes two days: my sacro-illiac joints cannot seem to give way; perhaps I am holding something in my holy bone that I do not know how to release. I wonder does my baby girl sense that her mother’s sacro-illiac complex resists shifting to let her out. Does she feel trapped? I know she’s a girl because the midwife tells me my baby’s so strong she must be a girl. I accept inducement and an epidural to help me give birth. Sometimes now, many years later, my sacrum still aches, especially when I don’t attend to my learned habit of leaning forward, when I don’t remember to re-pattern, allow my spine to straighten and become erect, the muscles in my shoulders relax, my shoulder blades drop, my sternum rest gently in the vertical, rather than tilt down and inwards compressing my diaphragm, when I don’t let my skeleton do the walking, from my centre. When I don’t remember…to let go.

Samuel Beckett was recorded as having said there was only one theme in his life: “To and fro in shadow, from outer shadow to inner shadow. To and fro between unattainable self and unattainable non-self” (Knowlson (1997), p. 631). Beckett explores his theme in the inexorable pacing to and fro in shadow of May / Amy in *Footfalls*. May obsessively paces to and fro on her strip of floor revolving some indeterminate “it all” in her “poor mind”, “it all […] it all”. We learn from Freud that

we address repetition to what we cannot comprehend – the repetition compulsion. For Beckett the most important element of the piece is the movement, the walk: "if it is full of repetitions, then it is because of these life-long stretches of walking. The walk is the centre of the play, everything else is secondary" (Ibid, p. 628). He apparently spent much time in rehearsal with Billie Whitelaw for the first production getting May's posture "exactly right": "a stooping, twisted figure, her hands clutching her upper arms across her body. As the lights fade from section to section, so the figure stoops lower and lower" (Ibid, p. 628). For Beckett the trauma externalized in May's stooping, twisted figure went back to his experience of being in utero, as Martin Esslin tells us: (Knowlson, J., E., 2007, p. 151)

> "Sam told me that he remembers being in his mother's womb at a dinner party, where, under the table, he could remember the voices talking. And when I asked him once, 'What motivates you to write?' he said. 'The only obligation I feel is towards that enclosed poor embryo […] That is the most terrible situation you can imagine, because you know you're in distress but you don't know that there is anything outside this distress or any possibility of getting out of that distress'."

Esslin observes that we find confirmed over and over again in Beckett's work what he calls Beckett's "mystical obligation towards that poor, suffering, enclosed being that doesn't know there is a way out". "[H]e had this terrific imagination or dream or reality of this memory of being enclosed. And that self is self-enclosed. You can't really get to the others."

May's inexorable pacing is not just a reflection of the psychologically disturbed young women Beckett had encountered in his life, such as Lucia Joyce, or of himself and his "complex and highly emotional relationship" with his mother, whom he had nursed before she died and who was called May, but rather it assumes mythic status "harking back to Ixion on his wheel, Tantalus tortured by hunger and thirst, or Sisyphus pushing his stone forever uphill" (Knowlson,1997, p. 616). As Julie Salverson (1996, p. 182) writes, "personal narratives of crisis are never merely personal".





Pacing

In the stage directions to *Footfalls* May (M) is seen pacing towards the left of the performing area as the lights fade up on the strip. The pattern for the figure's pacing is as follows:

Pacing: starting with right foot (r), from right (R) to left (L), with left foot (l) from L to R.

Turn: rightabout at L, leftabout at R.

Steps: clearly audible rhythmic tread.

For my first production of *Footfalls* I was directed by Phillip Zarrilli as part of "The Beckett Project in Ireland" at the Granary Theatre, Cork, in 2004. I had trained in Zarrilli's pre-performative actor training method, which encompasses a combination of the Indian marital art form kalarippayattu, taiqiquan, and yoga. Of his training method Zarrilli writes the following (p. 63):

> "The practice of yoga, kalarippayattu, and taiqiquan is one means by which the primary empirical, material elements of the psychophysical actor's art are discovered and then attuned. The psychophysical exercises begin with the body and move both inward toward subtle realms of experience and feeling, and outward to meet the environment. They are a form of empirical as well as (meta)physical (re)search. This (re)search is not undertaken by the side of our brain which engages propositional, analytical thought, but by the bodymind together as they become one in and through daily practice."

The kind of directions I was given by Zarrilli in rehearsing *Footfalls* had nothing to do with psychological motivation or character work. According to Zarrilli, a different kind of dramaturgical approach is required for the theatre of Samuel Beckett: as in much of his work, in this piece Beckett is exploring a particular state of being or condition as opposed to delivering meaning. The question, therefore, for the actor is how to embody May/Amy's state of abjection and afford the audience an experience of it. In rehearsal Zarrilli focused on aspects such as the connecting of one moment to the next psychophysically rather than motivationally. For instance, just as May endlessly revolves an indeterminate "it all" in her "poor mind", after taking nine steps in each direction her feet "revolve" at each end of her strip as her stooping twisted figure paces to and fro. I was instructed to maintain a residual awareness of my last point of focus as I shifted to the next, so my back awareness extends as a line of energy in one direction as my front awareness extends as another in the opposite

direction. He encouraged me to work on the relationship of my feet to the floor using the practice of lion steps from the kalarippayattu martial art form to cultivate this relationship. When practicing lion steps Zarrilli instructs the performer, apart from sensing into the feet and their relationship with the floor, to also maintain a sense of energy in the palms of the hands, out through the top of the head, and a sense of awareness out through the back of the head and the body when going forward and through the front of the body when going backwards. He uses the translation of the malayalam phrase "making the body all eyes" as an image to work with to cultivate an activation of energy awareness in the actor's entire *bodymind*. This gives the actor rehearsing May/Amy a great deal to work with for the very slow walk, for the sculptural quality of the shaping of the hands clutching her twisted upper body and maintaining an aliveness in the hands, for the purposes of establishing a relationship with the space and the audience in the space.

As described above, the practice of kalarippayattu, like yoga and taiqichuan, cultivates our awareness of energy circulating in the body and how to direct that energy in performance, in order to create and inhabit in the moment the particular environment and experience that is being described in the text. Since I first performed *Footfalls* in 2004, in the intervening period I have also been practicing zazen – a seated meditation practice – along with the kinhin walk as part of this meditation practice, and have found that this work further builds on the pre-performative psychophysical training and rehearsal work I experienced with Zarrilli. Coordinating breath with movement, this very slow kinhin walking meditation teaches us to attend to each step in the moment, as Anzan Roshi (1996) writes:

> "When we step forward, present in this moment, feeling the left foot lift from the floor, feeling this change in the temperature as the skin of the foot is raised higher from the floor, as we notice the knee joint bending and the space around the bones, as we feel the breath rising and falling, as the foot steps forward and the air rushes between the toes, as we feel the contact of the heel on the floor about half to three quarters of the way down the length of the other foot, as we feel the heat of the skin of the left foot reaching out to the skin of the right foot, we are feeling into this moment. [[…]It is not mindfulness of walking, stepping, or even of a step. It is mindfulness of this step, and this step, and this step."

What taiqi allows the individual to achieve, as discussed by Zarrilli (p. 74), is also in part applicable to the zen (walking) meditation practice:

> "Yuasa Yasuo explains that this state of "no-mind" (Japanese mushin) is "a state of self-forgetfulness, in which consciousness of oneself as the subject of bodily movement disappears and becomes the movement itself."

The practice of kinhin assists me the actor in transcending duality and thus me the walker in becoming the walk.

Finally, in kinhin the posture is similar to the seated zazen posture in that the spine is erect, shoulders relaxed and down, chin slightly tucked under to maximize the lengthening of the spine as the head pulls away from the sacrum, which, as we Somaticats read in *A Widening Field* (Tuffnell and Crickmay) is ideal as, "[t]o find the essential length of the spine, sacrum and head must be able to move away from each other." In this position the *bodymind* is balanced, in alignment in relation to the world and other living beings, a minimum of muscular tension is required to sustain this posture. May/Amy in *Footfalls*, on the other hand, "a stooping, twisted figure, her hands clutching her upper arms across her body" is out of balance in herself and with the world around her, literally holding herself and her trauma, addressing repetition to what she cannot comprehend, as V asks her, "will you never have done ... revolving it all?" As I am working psychophysically and not motivationally I can use the awareness I have around my sacrum, the interconnectedness to the upper spine and shoulders, which the *Somaticats* work gave me space and a supportive environment to explore, to choose a physicalisation to embody May's abject state - to create a state of consciousness that will communicate to the audience - while also working with awareness of circulation of energy in my body and attentiveness to the breath rather than with muscular tension.

Coda

Somaticats on the prowl for a performance project…

Along the way we somaticats got interested in old well saints and traditions, which took us westwards one misty autumn day to St. Gobnait's holy well in Ballyvourney. As the story goes, Gobnait fled a family feud to one of the Aran Islands only to be told by an angel who appeared to her there that she should go to a place where she would find nine white deer grazing. Here she built her monastery, kept bees and

healed the local people with her honey. Celtic lore has it that the soul leaves the body as a bee or a butterfly. The cats are on to something and they want to know what kind of dance the bees and butterflies will lead them on...

Gathering mists, October 14, 2013

The mist is down for the day but we head out along the western roadways to places of honeyed secrets and mossy circles, graveyard maintenance means dipping plastic angels in rusty buckets and strimming in the rain. Even Shelia na Gig is well dressed here. We wander and wonder and know there's more to it. Off track, we know something else now.



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