

THE HIDDEN REALITIES OF THE EVERYDAY  
LIFE-WORLD IN BECKETT'S *WAITING FOR GODOT*  
AND GENET'S *THE BALCONY*

INTRODUCTION

The social phenomenologist Alfred Schutz applied Husserlian methodology to the study of the everyday life-world. Schutz described the eidetic structures of the everyday (the paramount reality of the life-world), e.g. social interaction, direct and indirect social observation, Other-orientation, contemporaries, predecessors and successors, etc., which manifest as the necessary *a priori* parameters that hold for any historico-cultural contents that by circumstance fill in the everyday reality. This paper presents an analysis of a structural transformation whereby certain components comprising usually non-thematic structures of the everyday life-world are uncovered and manifest existentially (within the lived-experience of the everyday rather than through theoretical meaning-contexts). These particular structures are a fabric in the "structural weave" of the everyday horizon, but remain hidden from the cognitive style of everyday experience unless a crisis emerges that brings a structure out of the horizon and into everyday experience. The structural horizon of the everyday provides the conditions for the limits of everyday cognition. Under most circumstances everyday cognition remains unaware of its own structural horizon, and that is what is meant here by "hidden."

An individual experience, the death of a significant other, for example, can make evident horizontal structures that are usually non-thematic. Only through *idiographical conditions*, which are the particularizing determinants of a historical time, will the unconcealment of a horizontal structure characterize an epoch.<sup>1</sup>

Two very famous twentieth-century plays, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Genet's *The Balcony*, illuminate eidetic, horizontal structures that almost always remain hidden from everyday experience and cognition, but nevertheless form objective parameters of the everyday life-world. Through the existential modalities constituted in the themes of these plays (Beckett/elevated waiting, Genet/simulacra producing activities), certain of these structures are exhibited as having become manifest in everyday reality.

These plays document historico-cultural idiographs of the European world in the twentieth century. Beckett's play of 1953 describes the disillusionment in the European world-view that was the culminating consequence of the events in the first half of the century, which revealed to everyday experience a usually hidden structure: the fundamental intransparency of the life-world. Genet's play of 1955 portends the postmodern milieu of the late twentieth century (through the conflation of appearance and reality, i.e., the simulacrum), which reveals, within everyday existence, the social construction of reality.

Provinces of meaning which transcend the everyday context, such as religion and philosophy, provide knowledge that transcends everyday cognition, e.g. the meaning of death or the cause of volcanic eruption. For example, the phenomenon of a catastrophic flood can reveal the usually hidden fragile basis for the taken-for-granted component of everyday experience. Everyday cognition looks to the superordinate realms of meaning to explain the crisis, and the response allows the revealed structural fragility to once again become horizontal, which again provides the conditions for the taken-for-granted.

As playwrights, Beckett and Genet transcend the everyday through their artistic province, but their genius involves the dramatization of *the feel of the exposed hidden* that had become manifest in the existential experience within a particular historico-cultural situation.<sup>2</sup> The idiograph of felt experience, i.e., existential history, which resulted from the usually hidden structures that issued forth into a specific everyday world, is thematic in the plays.<sup>3</sup>

My thesis transcends Schutz's descriptions of life-world structures, but only through orienting this study to his work and building upon it. The strategy is to show how hidden, distantly horizontal (*fringe*) existential dimensions of the everyday have come to emerge in the *core* of everyday experience.<sup>4</sup> The transformation of horizontal structures into a thematic core of lived experience seems to be an unpredictable existential "ether" that permeates the character of a particular life-world epoch. The profundity of the two plays rests on the fact that they address eidetic structures (through existential situations) which capture historico-cultural contingencies of certain milieus. The purpose of this paper is to explicate those specific hidden realities of the everyday life-world that become exposed within the historico-cultural situations presented in each of the two plays.

I. BECKETT'S *WAITING FOR GODOT*a) *Temporality and the Hidden-Exposure Thematic of the Play*

An obvious departure for the study of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* concerns the phenomenon of waiting, which is revelatory of the overall temporal structuring of the everyday life-world. The several *intersecting modalities of time*: world, biological, social, and subjective time, and their interrelations will be examined in light of the way in which Beckett manipulates these structures around the situation of waiting. Inner-time consciousness (*durée*), i.e., the temporal form of subjective experience, intersects with the bodily rhythms of biological time, with natural world time in such cyclical phenomena as the seasons and day/night, and with the calendar of socially constructed time. These various temporal currents are *incongruent* with one another, which forms the basis of a fundamental temporal character of conscious experience, *the phenomenon of waiting*.<sup>5</sup> One must wait for the water to boil in order to steep the tea. One must wait to reach the next road stand before one can obtain food. One must rest and wait until morning regardless of the amount of work still to be accomplished. In waiting, one experiences the objective imposition of various modalities of time in the temporal arrangement of one's situation. A situation (and one is always situated) is at once temporal, spatial, and social. Both the spatial (environing zones built around the lived-body as absolute here) and the social (orientations towards and relations with Others) stratifications of the life-world are permeated by temporal dimensions. Temporality, spatiality, and sociality are the basic moments (*non-independent contents*) of the life-world structure.<sup>6</sup> It is also necessary to investigate the mutual determination of the stock of knowledge (what the characters in the play constitute as their meaning-contents) and the situational boundedness (the objective limitations imposed on the characters).

Our goal is to exhibit how Beckett's play reveals *the fundamental intransparency of the life-world*.<sup>7</sup> This *a priori* structure of the life-world is characteristically hidden from everyday cognitive awareness (the natural attitude) and existential felt experience, but it can be revealed in situations of deep crisis. A crisis experience strongly motivates or even disturbingly shocks one into another province of meaning (a superordinate perspective, which, by definition, transcends the explicatory limits of the everyday), from which this fundamental intransparency of the life-world can be explained. Crises are not easily mastered within the everyday experience, and this is the motivation to engage a superordinate province of meaning. The superordinate explanation

makes the intransparency transparent, shrouds it in metaphysical mystery or in some way explicates it in a manner beyond the limits of everyday meaning-contexts.

We can describe the fundamental intransparency in existential terms as the fundamental question concerning the *meaning of life*, which is intransparent to everyday being-in-the-world. Everydayness does not “bump” into this question, but when it does, it pushes it aside or calls on another superordinate province to come to the rescue. Picture yourself as a Jew in Auschwitz. The question “how can this happen?” cannot be answered by the mundane answer that the Nazis practice ethnic cleansing. The horrific events are profoundly incomprehensible. These events permeate existential life with the fundamental intransparency of its meaning, which is the structure that usually hides from everyday reality, but in these situations, it emerges within everyday existence.

The genius of Beckett is to show that the fundamental opacity has been dealt with, not in a superordinate cognition, but through *elevating* the everyday experience of waiting.<sup>8</sup> This form of waiting reveals the hidden structure of the everyday life-world from within the standpoint of the everyday experience. The elevated form of waiting has to do with the fact that crises lead to the need for superordinate explanations. But, in this epoch, the European superordinate paradigms were in crisis as well. So until new paradigms of superordinate reality might possibly emerge that could provide explanation, the usually hidden fundamental intransparency of the life-world remained manifest to everyday experience in the form of waiting for an adequate superordinate explanation (Godot). This elevated form of waiting had been *existentially felt* and lived by many European intellectuals after two devastating wars and harsh economic realities, which were dialectically related to a deep experience of disillusionment concerning the fundamental beliefs of Western culture. Many no longer accepted religious explanations and the sciences too were being shaken in their foundations. Technology had led to instruments of destruction. Beckett captures perhaps not a widely felt experience of the general populace, but one that characterizes the experience of those who could recognize the deep problematic of European reality.

#### *b) A Brief Existential Phenomenological Description of Waiting*

Every activity takes time. Waiting is a moment of activity, but it need not be thematic within the core of conscious experience. But this means that waiting, at the least, lurks in the fringes of experience. I must wait to type onto the screen this sentence that expresses a certain phase of my description

prior to typing into the computer further phases that will complete in writing my already formed thought. My thought, which is ahead of my actual work of typing, must then wait for its objectivation in this document. In this type of circumstances, I can live in the succession of doings, but at any time I can become aware that the projected phases of my activities and my actual doings do not coincide, which alters the experience of successive doings into the experience of waiting. Standing around, or being put on hold, are only more obvious species of the phenomenon. When I become aware of having to wait, a temporal feature that was only present in the fringes of experience is introduced into the attentive core of consciousness. This temporal component is characterized as *being-ahead-of-oneself*. When I am consciously aware of being-ahead-of-myself, I am temporally distanced from the present. I am not "where" I want to be. This makes sense even when it is said that, "all I can do now is to remain here and wait." For the where has to do with the situation, and I am distanced from my "situational here/now" because it is incongruent with how I want to be situated, a temporal distancing inscribed in place. Waiting injects a fundamental temporal alienation into one's situation. Waiting introduces *non-being into being-present*, and *projected-being into the future-not-yet*. *Becoming* is a dynamic presence, whereas waiting hypostatizes subjective time and objectivates consciousness as a static state in future objective time. This objectivated future state then enters into the meaning-context of the present "running-off" of subjective time and permeates its contents. But since waiting is horizontal for every activity, waiting is an *existentiale* of being-in-the-world, i.e., a structure of existence.<sup>9</sup> Psychologically (in everyday experience), however, one can attend to the doing or one can attend to the waiting in the same experience.

The farmer has to plant and wait to see if the year's weather conditions will allow his survival. The scientist must wait to see if the experiment that is taking up two years of her life will yield results worthy of a grant renewal. These tenuous situations bring the phenomenon of waiting into one's experience as a major psychological factor. No longer horizontal, waiting permeates the overall significance of the meaning-context. And, since the situations are important enough, the waiting affects not only the present but also modifies the significance of one's whole life, the meaning of the past and the future as well. If there is a bad year, the farmer might suffer foreclosure. If the scientific experiment yields no worthy results, no grant renewal is awarded. In this type of example, the total context of experience, which consists of meanings across the temporal horizon of one's entire life, is

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