

'Ceremonious Ape!': Creaturely Poetics and Anthropomorphic Acts

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Samuel Beckett's woebegone creature Vladimir calls his companion Estragon a 'Ceremonious ape!' in the 1953 play Waiting for Godot. 'Punctilious pig!' comes the reply (Beckett 2006: 67). Following the pair's niceties 'no, no, after you' and 'no, no, you first', this bout of puerile name-calling makes a mockery of civilised propriety. The caustic remarks imply that prim and proper human behaviours are superficial routines pasted over repressed animality. Vladimir's and Estragon's phrases bear a far-reaching criticism of human identity, particularly bourgeois ideals of humanity, as a delicate façade performed to gain distance from animal cousins. Similarly but more literally, a ceremonious ape appears in Franz Kafka's 1917 short story 'A Report to an Academy' and is embodied by Kathryn Hunter in Colin Teevan's 2009 adaptation Kafka's Monkey for the Young Vic. The primate Red Peter effectively reports on his anthropomorphic transformation from an animal to a human-aping creature under his captor's tutelage. Given that he refers to his ape life in the past tense and claims to have 'reached the cultural level of an average European' (Teevan 2009: 53), it is noticeable that Red Peter's transformation challenges the supposition that humanity is an exalted, exclusive and innate category. On the contrary, humans perform humanity according to the script bestowed to them, much like the imitating ape. Red Peter clearly recognises this affinity between teacher and pupil: 'we were on the same side, fighting against our ape-like natures' (Teevan 2009: 45). These examples imply that human behaviour has an anthropomorphic slant to it inasmuch as the animal undersigns the human performance.

In this essay I will trace the double process of dehumanisation and re-humanisation manifest in Beckett's Waiting for Godot, his short 1982 play Catastrophe, Teevan's Kafka's Monkey and Vesturport's 2006 adaptation of Kafka's Metamorphosis. These plays enact the destabilisation of the human and enter 'creaturely' territory only to convey anthropomorphic performances of the human model. The concept of the creature, theorised variously by Julia

Luton, Eric Santner and Anat Pick, describes the being that arises when the human is denuded and life persists beyond supposedly constitutive human values and normative structures. In these Beckett plays and adaptations of Kafka in particular, however, uncanny creatures echo the human through what Beckett scholar Shane Weller calls 'forms of weakness', or ruined versions of the paradigm: 'a negatively determined being (or 'un-' being) [...], that is defined principally by its inabilities (in motion and speech), its suffering and its status as an object of revulsion' (Weller 2013: 20). In effect, the audience witness deanthropomorphised creatures that proceed to carry out anthropomorphic acts. As human specificity dissolves into the vulnerable material conditions of organic life in general, the resulting creatures continue to play up to the idea of humanity, which only serves to disclose the constructed nature of the category itself.

Creaturely Poetics in Performance

Charles Darwin insisted that human biology discloses the basic parity between human and non-human animals: 'man with all his noble qualities [...] still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin' (Darwin 2008: 333). In theatrical performances, however, it is the human body that inevitably lends an anthropomorphic status to whatever appears on stage. Although actors may endeavour to represent non-human beings and objects, logically speaking, the depiction cannot escape the human form altogether. The literary critic Martin Puchner recognises that for 'antitheatrical' playwrights and practitioners such as Maurice Maeterlinck, Gordon Craig, W. B. Yeats and Beckett, human bodies impose mimetic and character-driven theatre. Puchner adds Kafka to this list, noting that like 'other turn-of-the-century theater reformers, Kafka is both intrigued and appalled by the anthropomorphization or personification that is the inevitable consequence of the presence of human actors on a stage' (Puchner 2003: 182). Despite Kafka's fascination with Yiddish theatre and his exploration of performance modes in his prose fiction, he resists the 'insufferable humanization' of drama (Kafka 1989: 92) by employing filmic techniques that magnify gestures and

dissociate intimate details from the human body. In light of Kafka's style, Puchner writes: 'film can be understood in an antitheatrical sense: it does away with live actors, decomposing them through cuts, close-ups, and framing' (Puchner 2003: 192). Kafka's prose writing therefore counters theatre's anthropomorphism by revealing the distortions of mimesis and drawing on the intense fragmentation of film to elicit defamiliarized creatures.

It is telling that cinema is Anat Pick's medium of choice in her explication of 'creaturely poetics', a term that describes a kind of anti-anthropocentric aesthetic that bridges the human-animal divide and conveys the shared conditions of living creatures. Pick acknowledges that '[a]nimals have traditionally been perceived as pure necessity, material bodies pitted against human mindfulness and soulfulness' (Pick 2011: 4), which underplays the physical aspect of human being. But Pick reasserts that human and non-human animals are 'creaturely' in that both are 'first and foremost a living body - material, temporal, and vulnerable' (Pick 2011: 5). Creaturely life partly refers to the shared bodily conditions of living beings and, in response, creaturely poetics is concerned with ways of composing the body and accentuating its susceptibility.

Giorgio Agamben's coinage 'bare life' and the 'powerful violations' to which biopolitical victims are exposed inform Pick's understanding of vulnerability (Pick 2011: 15). She follows previous scholars on creaturely life in this evocation of 'bare life', such as Julia Lupton, who perceives the creature as 'pure vitality denuded of symbolic significance and political capacity and then sequestered within the domain of civilization as its disavowed core' (Lupton 2000: 2). Eric Santner also recognises creaturely life as a detachment from established and standardised orders of meaning, describing the condition as an exposure not 'simply to the elements or to the fragility and precariousness of our mortal, finite lives, but rather to an ultimate lack of foundation for the historical forms of life that distinguish human community' (Santner 2011: 5). Pick finds a formidable expression of this bare life in Armenian-Russian film director Artur Arystakisyan's 1993 graduation film Palms, which includes footage of vagabonds on the outskirts of Moldova's capital Kishinev. Besides being 'attuned to material and temporal' dimensions

and avoiding people's faces to challenge 'reciprocity', the film articulates the dehumanisation of its subjects: 'for the system we are not people. [...] There's only the law that exists for us, the law of blood, of fine matter' (Pick 2011: 130, 129). Both creaturely humans and wild animals are consigned to a performative survival and subsist as matter beyond socio-politically meaningful life.

The creature's resulting proximity with non-human animals, and its potential at least to regain or receive the human status, reveals the human as a provisional condition. As Pick acknowledges: 'In its doing and undoing, the human is shown to be a tenuous, fragile construct' (Pick 2011: 27). The creature is therefore neither particularly human nor animal exactly. Unlike anthropomorphic beings that consist of human properties added to the non-human, such as Red Peter the ceremonious ape, the creature acts as a lens with which to view equivocal species relations and further disrupt the human/non-human binary. Creatureliness is not fixated on applying stable human characteristics to others, but rather intent on exploring areas of kinship or equivalences. Pick draws on Vladimir Tyulkin's 2005 film About Love and the tale of a woman whose home is overrun with the many abandoned dogs she keeps, to exemplify this relatedness. In one scene, a cross-dissolve gestures towards the parallels between two crowded spaces, one with humans and the other with animals: 'People and dogs are shown in their impinging physicality; both clamor for protection and love' (118). As this perceptive example indicates, vulnerability is the insignia of the creaturely grey area, or better still, mutual condition.

Although Pick explores creaturely poetics in literature initially, it is clear that she finds cinema a particularly suitable form to redress anthropomorphic insolence and anthropocentric habits. With reference to film theorist André Bazin's thinking on realist cinema, Pick pays attention to 'cinema as a zoo: cinema as a zoomorphic stage that transforms all living beings - including humans - into creatures' (106). Through a profoundly realist cinema that would deploy photographic machinery as the most indiscriminating of witnesses to its least interfering capacity, Pick reckons on the ability to eschew species divisions in favour of capturing the shared experience of

temporality and contingency. As a depersonalizing form, such cinema can supposedly behold beings as 'subject to exposure, the transience and finitude of matter' (114). In doing so, Pick champions 'a mark of cinema's immediacy and materiality - its corporeal zoomorphic quality or creatureliness' (106). The near self-effacing observation of the camera lens apprehends all beings occupying space in time whilst they are concurrently subject to the transient flicker of film, which evokes the 'life-turning' of the zoetrope and its simultaneously arrested and animated beings.

Pick's analysis of creaturely cinema is persuasive but it is curious that theatre is absent from her thesis, given that the temporality, contingency, immediacy and materiality she identifies in cinema find their greatest expression in live performance. If creaturely poetics is understood as an aesthetic that captures the vulnerability of the living body, theatre is an exemplary form owing to the prominence of the physical on stage. As Simon Shepherd recognises: 'Theatre is an art of body and an art grounded in body' (Shepherd 2006: 7). As a semiotic system, theatre generates significance through the performer and *mise-en-scène* as objects and images in a manner broadly comparable to cinema. In contrast to cinema, however, live performance conveys the ubiquity of vulnerability as it showcases concrete specimens present in real time in a space shared with the spectator, which forges a tacit connection between the bodies on and off stage, as the same basic physical conditions apply to both. Disregarding the representative function of narrative drama for a moment, it is notable that the actors are co-present with the audience as tangible, proximal beings and that the materiality of the spectacle bonds the play world and the extratheatrical world. This intimacy with the performance in both spatial and temporal senses, which can be exploited and accentuated in the play text, constitutes the unique tension and impact of live theatre as a creaturely form.

Live performance as a medium prompts the recognition of the body as subject to time and space to foreground its actual precariousness. Yet theatre can also flirt with its own status as imitation, as a site of meaning and article of hermeneutic attention. The fictional value of theatrical performance is a diaphanous veil thrown over the pure materiality of the performers. Its

pretence exists as an agreement between actor and audience to suspend disbelief. It is a fragile dynamic, though, as the stubborn reality of the human body constantly threatens to discredit the fiction. The incumbent danger most pronounced in theatre is that the illusion of the signified other or represented thing fails and that the human signifier is recognised, thus reinstating the anthropocentric orientation. Beckett's plays and adaptations of Kafka, on the other hand, expose the human as a feeble designation by diminishing the characters' claims to human characteristics and unveiling the mechanisms by which meaning is made to such a degree that a virtually denuded bodily reality is highlighted, which in turn evokes the creaturely dimension applicable to living beings in general. This change relates to the sense of 'becoming-animal' that Gilles Deleuze describes as a 'zone of indiscernibility or undecidability between man and animal' (Deleuze 2003: 21). Whether this is taken as a dangerous exclusion or a glorious release from categorisation and signification, the salient point is that, as Vladimir and Estragon, Protagonist, Red Peter and Gregor Samsa all experience scenarios that uncover ways in which human meaning is imperilled, each slips into a creaturely state of becoming, as aberrant, itinerant, destitute beings.

One outcome of creaturely indeterminacy is that the theatre audience's attention can shift to the actors as things ricocheting between conceptual signification and the bare fact of earthly existence. The liveness of performance makes the tension between abstract meaning and materiality keenly felt, on both the fictional level, as actors ward off their own and the audience's reality to conjure an invented world, and in the sense that the matter of the theatrical performance, realised by an acute awareness of performance qua performance, is never entirely neutral. There is always friction between pure existence and the signification presence attracts in the theatre. This correlates with a most creaturely dynamic that Julia Lupton describes: the creature is 'impelled by idealism yet forever earthbound by the weight of corporeality, at once sullen angel and pensive dog' (Lupton 2000: 5). The pull between brute existence and philosophical idealism in which meaning is dependent on the mind is compelling in the live context of theatre where the ordinary contract of losing oneself in another world wrestles with

the actual space and time of performance. Theatrical performance parallels the creaturely position between earthly life and sacred, transcendental life; they share the simultaneous experience of the here and the beyond. The creaturely poetics inherent to the theatre accentuate the fragility of notional human meanings and function as a reminder of the physical vulnerability of the bare life fixated on these former or potential meanings.

Attending to the Body: The Metatheatrical Spectrum in Beckett and Kafka

Beckett's plays and adaptations of Kafka's prose foreground the creaturely materiality of performance by experimenting with theatre's representative function. Beckett's protagonists in Waiting for Godot make metatheatrical gestures to the spectacle taking place, apparently mocking the audience, for example, when Estragon faces the auditorium and concludes 'Inspiring prospects' (Beckett 2006: 6), or anticipating the reception to the play when Vladimir asserts 'This is becoming really insignificant' (60). More subtly, however, several productions of Waiting for Godot immerse the audience in a state of bored captivation, at once tense and tedious, which stresses the endurance of time. Reviews of the productions directed by Roger Blin and Peter Hall separately in the 1950s attest to the play's divisive quality and pervasive ambivalence, as Lawrence Graver writes: 'The reactions of the audience on the first night and in the following weeks set the pattern for responses that were later repeated in cities around the world. Some people were baffled, bored, irritated. [...]. But dozens of other playgoers were exhilarated and by word of mouth or in print conveyed their enthusiasm' (Graver 2004: 10). This pattern of competing impressions is discernible at once in contemporary productions according to Patrick Duggan: 'I'm sitting in a theatre in London watching a play that seems to have gone on interminably and in which, as far as I'm concerned, everything has happened. I'm bored and captivated in the same moment' (Duggan). Indeed, the audience members are included in the characters' waiting for Godot and consequently participate in the protracted experience of non-action. The excruciating

silences that Beckett inscribes, and directs in his 1975 production at the Schiller Theatre in Berlin through wartestellen (fixed points of waiting) (Bradby 2001: 116), promote the possibility that words will cease altogether. This instigates waves of palpable tension in the audience and an awareness of both self and other in a commanding phenomenological sense. In the following exchange, Beckett underlines the physical level that persists when the distractions of language falter:

Vladimir: Silence!

Estragon: I hear something.

Pozzo: Where?

Vladimir: It's the heart. (Beckett 2006: 39)

In the later short play Catastrophe, Beckett disturbs mimetic theatre further as the audience witness a cigar-smoking Director arranging and instructing a frail Protagonist on stage through the mediation of his female Assistant. Beckett's play reflects on the manipulation of actors in the theatre and the intimation is that Protagonist is being prepared for the present audience. Although the exposition states that the scene is a 'rehearsal' (Beckett 2009: 143), the live audience and the space they occupy are invoked three times, as the Director refers to the view from the stalls (143,146) and 'how it looks from the house' (145). In conjunction with these allusions to the audience as part of the spectacle, Beckett casts the audience as an active and complicit member in the performance event by identifying his characters through their creative roles. It follows that the audience members satisfy the 'Audience' role, despite vacillating between passive spectators to the performance and silent participants within the play.

Similarly, Kafka's Monkey employs the direct mode of address effected in Kafka's first-person narrative, with Red Peter's account taking the form of an oratory display to the live audience to blur the boundaries of fiction and fact. He describes his capture on the Gold Coast at the hands of the Hagenbeck hunting party who shot him in two places and taught him to imitate the sailors' behaviours on the voyage back to Western civilisation. Audience members

may be receptive to the humanised ape before them, but they are nevertheless denied the shelter of remote observation owing to Kathryn Hunter's interaction with the front row and improvisations that demand their participation, such as the receipt of a banana. Although Hunter remains in character throughout and the entire audience is invited to enter fully into the fictional tale as members of the Academy, the play's preoccupation with imitation suffuses into the interpretive community so that pretence itself is under scrutiny. When Red Peter proudly claims that 'Such a student of humanity no teacher ever found upon this Earth' (Teevan 2009: 42), he not only alerts the viewer to his convincing mimicry of humans, but also makes the audience privy to Hunter's achievements in portraying the movements and mannerisms of the vestigial ape. The play's willingness to have the audience's attention torn between Red Peter's human performance and Hunter's ape performance effectively perforates theatre's fourth wall.

David Farr and Gisli Örn Gardarsson's adaptation of Metamorphosis takes the appreciation of the actor's skill to new heights as part of their portrayal of the insect creature. Without prosthetics or costume, the Vesturport production relies on Gardarsson's contortions and acrobatics to transform Gregor from a workaday man to a grotesque thing. The actor is clearly adept at scaling Borkur Jonsson's topsy-turvy split-level set and performing peculiar, defamiliarizing movements as he 'flies around', 'whizzes' (Farr and Gardarsson 2006: 29), 'swings' (30) and 'swoops' (32). In performance, it is difficult not to marvel at the actor's talent in executing these manoeuvres. As David Rooney's review attests, the spectators are divided between respect for the physical feat and engagement with Gregor's plight:

As Mr. Gardarsson, a former gymnast, scrambles around his cell, over furniture and down the banister into the unwelcoming room below, his dexterity and control are mesmerizing. But there's real pathos beneath the physical stunts. Seeing him pinned into a high corner gives a wrenching sense of a terrified creature being drained of life. (Rooney 2010)

This acknowledgement of the actor's skill distracts from the narrative and yet also coincides with the recognition of a convincing and affecting performance. Whilst not strictly metatheatrical, then, the impressive physical representation shares metatheatre's severance from the fiction but is, at the same time, oddly captivating. The result is an increased awareness of the real physical being involved in the play to enhance the vulnerability of the character within it. This spectrum of metatheatrical elements discernible in Beckett's plays and adaptations of Kafka deny the audience complete immersion in a fictional narrative and instead make it known that the performance is not before them, discrete and abstract, but with them. The disenchanting self-consciousness and self-reflexive layering of performance frames render signified meaning at-risk and demand that the show occupies the same space and time as the audience. Metatheatre exposes performance and makes it immediate, which in turn emphasises the physical conditions to which semiotic meaning is applied.

Mere Humans Reciting the Human in Beckett

The portrayals of dehumanisation in these plays deliver a view of the 'human' as provisional or retractable and revert to indispensable corporal conditions to incarnate the interspecies materiality of creaturely life. In Waiting for Godot, Beckett's two tramp-like protagonists retain only vague attachments to the praxis of life, civic existence or cultural engagement, and therefore exist outside validating, humanising structures. In a desperate bid to save their purpose as human beings, Vladimir and Estragon pin their hopes on the elusive Godot, an equivocal figure who represents a source of authentication, without endorsing social, political, ethical, religious or spiritual value specifically. Tethered to the promise of Godot, the duo's opportunity for progress or change is restricted to the extent that all human properties grow unproductive and virtually exhausted. Language capitulates into inane chatter; reason generates aporetic nonsense; memory is erratic and fallible. As a result, Paul Davies argues that 'Beckett records the discovery that human

behaviour according to western European humanist codifications can be exposed as a farcical display, whether elaborate or simple, brutal or gentle, noble or pathetic' (Davies 2000: 4). The consequence of undermining this dominant conception of humanity is threefold: the human appears multifarious and dynamic; the characters' endurance and atrophy causes the physicality of creaturely existence to emerge; and anachronistic notions of human properties are preserved through anthropomorphic performances.

Beckett's reduction of back-story, plot, action and motivation increases the play's autonomy and places emphasis on material reality. In his famous remarks on Waiting for Godot, the French novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet alludes to the Heideggerian notion of 'thereness', or being in the world, as he describes how Vladimir and Estragon 'will be there again the next day, and the next, and the day after that — "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" — standing alone on the stage, superfluous, without future, without past, irremediably there' (Robbe-Grillet 1965: 113). Beckett stimulates Robbe-Grillet's observation through his attention to the body as a record of everyday wear and tear, from Estragon's sore feet and exhaustion to Pozzo's blindness and Lucky's goitre. Crucially, it is physical vulnerability that opens the play, as Estragon announces 'Beat me, certainly they beat me' (Beckett 2006: 1). Although this violence is not visible on stage, the exposure to physical affliction precedes the character's metaphysical suffering and in turn pervades the play. For instance, as Pozzo and Lucky enter, Beckett describes Vladimir and Estragon 'Huddled together, shoulders hunched, cringing away from the menace, they wait' (14). Beckett's stage directions clearly accentuate the duo's fragility, and yet, more subtly, body language takes precedence over discursive language as a consequence of the play's vacuous dialogue and stagnant narrative. Beckett's minimisation of the paraphernalia of narrative theatre delivers the characters into the more objective realm of somatic existence or 'thereness', which constitutes a form of creaturely poetics that returns theatre to its basic embodiment and adjoins the descriptive and active aesthetics of exteriority that Pick describes.

However, to mitigate the autotelic life of pure physicality, the characters in Waiting for Godot continue to simulate dilapidated actions and outlooks to

recreate their humanity. Hence, the humanist image of the human is perennially evoked and defeated through anthropomorphic acts as dehumanised characters succumb to vain repetitions of the human as a received idea. Lucky is the exemplar of this rendition of the fossilized human that reveals the hallmarks of the species as empty tokens. Subject to his master Pozzo, Lucky is a subordinated beast of burden but he is also intermittently impelled to perform the outward motions of human civilisation. Pozzo asks: 'What do you prefer? Shall we have him dance, or sing or recite, or think, or –' (32). Beckett lists the power of thought alongside other common forms of performance in this line, which implies that cogitation is a mode of display. Acting is therefore a strategy to resurrect the human's cerebral quality and deflect creaturely materiality. Pozzo's command 'Think, pig!' (35) before Lucky's tirade reinforces the anthropomorphic valence of the performance. The instruction is akin to 'ceremonious ape' as it defines a non-human creature (pig/ape) with a human activity (thought/ceremony). Lucky's perplexing remnants of philosophical and religious discourse mark a similar hybridity as the debased creature conducts a performance of the relics of humanity. Hence, Eric Levy avers that "'This" is Beckettian Man, with nothing of his own save resemblance to his species' (Levy 1980: 62). Lucky's speech and appearance are souvenirs of the species that belie his invisibility to human community; the patina of the human replaces the vital substance.

Beckett's creaturely poetics show that the inevitable anthropomorphism of the human body does not necessarily ensure the presence of the human per se. On the contrary, Beckett deconstructs and re-presents the human so that the void in the wake of essentialism undercuts the surface appearance. This process of dismantling and reassembling is repeated more explicitly in Beckett's Catastrophe, in which Protagonist appears on stage, dressed in black, with whitened hands and head, exposed feet and concealed face at the behest of Director. Protagonist's hands, according to one exchange, are 'crippled' and 'claw-like' from 'fibrous degeneration' (Beckett 2009: 144). The undoing of the human being is placed in the spotlight in the name of theatre as the gradual and rather nonchalant formation of the uncanny, wraith-like character on stage corrupts his humanity. Protagonist is anonymised,

contrived, maltreated, objectified and exhibited. He recalls a kind of Frankenstein's creature constructed by the Director creator; indeed, 'catastrophe' is the word Mary Shelley used for the birth of the wretch (Shelley 1992: 58). Although Protagonist appears as a dehumanised puppet creation, it can nevertheless be claimed that the human body still encodes an anthropomorphic level. Furthermore, the final resistant gesture as Protagonist raises his head to silence the taped applause arguably restores his independence. Yet it remains true that Beckett elicits the political substrate inherent to theatre as he exposes theatre's ability to interfere with and effectively defamiliarize human beings. The manipulation of the Protagonist on the stage demonstrates that the body is an object with which to overlay meaning. The slippage between the biological fact of the human anatomy and the human as a conceptualised status discloses that the body is not necessarily a coherent entity synonymous with the human. Despite the indefatigable echo of the human that apparently rears its head, it is patent that Protagonist's humanity is extricable and therefore tenuous. The presumably human recalcitrance that concludes Beckett's play, then, is always and irrevocably marked by the easy dehumanisation of the preceding context, which realigns the resistant gesture with the more general self-preservation of living creatures.

Humans Playing Creatures Playing Humans in Kafka

The tension between the character's non-human status and actor's human appearance that Beckett explores is the prevailing substance of the performance adaptations of Kafka's stories. These plays are proponents of creaturely poetics in that they evoke the continuity that exists between human and non-human animals to disrupt the simple anthropomorphic definition of the non-human with human characteristics. Red Peter in Kafka's Monkey 'creates an analogy between his own change from ape and the evolution of human beings' (Harel 2010: 60). When he reflects on the spectacle of two trapeze artists, for instance, Red Peter scorns the display: "So this is human freedom?" I said to myself. "A self-satisfied routine? What a mockery of

mother nature!” (Teevan 2009: 31-32). According to this portrait, the smug show of human self-determination parallels the performing ape as it desperately conceals a straining animality. As Red Peter effectively presents ‘human mannerisms laid over the still visible tics and odd screeches of the ape’ (Coveney 2009), the implication is that the human race shares a comparable mixture of affected appearances and instinctive actions.

However, the ontological blurring is more complex in live performance than the correlation with human evolution suggests, as a human actor plays an ape playing a human. Teevan knowingly alludes to the physicality of Hunter’s task in the line ‘I’d have to flay the flesh from my bones to return to what I once was’ (Teevan 2009: 15). It conveys the idea that Red Peter’s anthropomorphism has been reified; his psychological and behavioural humanisation is also embodied. Even so, for the most part, Kafka’s Monkey pursues the anomalous product of humanisation, not the human. Michael Coveney suggests as much when he writes: ‘Hunter’s physicality on stage is a challenge to what we take to be a human being anyway. She breaks all the conventional rules of appearance and sexuality and is unique in combining an external grotesquery with an inner pulsating humanity’ (Coveney 2009). Although ostensibly the play is about the anthropomorphic process, it explores creaturely mutuality as the theme of humanisation meets the actor’s task of dehumanisation to produce a discordant being that throws binaries into disarray. The creaturely aspect of Kafka’s Monkey is in the interrogation of the fixity of the human, even if based purely on the anatomical form, and the non-human-human amalgamation already secreted as an evolutionary trace in the human being.

In a reversal of the anthropomorphic trajectory, Kafka’s Metamorphosis relates Gregor’s transformation from human to insect creature. Steven Berkoff was attracted to Kafka’s novella in the late 1960s as he aspired to theatre that ‘penetrated beneath the surface of human activity with its simple human conflict and ego-bound convention’ (Berkoff 1995: xv). Gardarsson’s portrayal of Gregor, however, attempts to distort rather than penetrate or conceal the human appearance so that the image of humanity remains involved and present to an extent, despite the transformation. Without access to the

interiority of Kafka's prose, Vesturport's Metamorphosis nominates the body as the sole site of contest between the non-human and the human. Rather than eradicating the human semblance to leave the creature, the play recognises that it is this material form that subsists when one is alienated from normative structures. In this way, Gregor's body evidences the non-human that resides as potential in the human and which straitens the difference between human, creature and animal. The play thus posits an ambitious challenge to the inevitable anthropomorphism of the human form in the intimation that the human encompasses the negation of its irreducibility. Gregor's dehumanisation does not result in a fundamentally 'human' body or a non-human animal. He is thrown into the creaturely realm of materiality and immediacy that archives the human's mutability whilst evoking animality.

On a discursive level, Metamorphosis imparts Gregor's deracination through his exclusion from the family and dismissal from work. The vulnerability of the human in the play is intimately connected to the body as Gregor ceases to be a valuable source of labour, suffers neglect and degenerates into infirmity. Although the play concentrates on the home environment, Gregor's debased domestic status is emblematic of his standing in wider society. His sister Grete makes his subordination explicit:

'Understand that your position in the house has changed. You no longer have the rights of an individual family member' (Farr and Gardarsson 2006: 38).

Without rights, Gregor is effectively severed from the protection of the polis and, as an abandoned being, inherits the precarious life of a creature. This degradation in fact triggers an anthropomorphic gravitation in that Gregor is a recognizable anthropoid form devoid of human dignity and thus compelled to regain humanity. Gregor's story is one of anthropomorphic desire as he attempts to re-assimilate into domestic, social and vocational life. In turn, his alienation inspires reflections on human culture from a peripheral, less insular viewpoint. Pick argues that reassessing ways of life from this more biocentric vantage is a requisite of creaturely poetics: 'Reading through a creaturely prism consigns culture to contexts that are not exclusively human, contexts beyond an anthropocentric perspective' (Pick 2011: 5). Through the enlarged

empathy of this 'creaturely prism', humans assume a less privileged place in the anthrozoological continuum.

It is the means of creaturely poetics at theatre's disposal – namely the materiality, temporality and contingency of performance – that suggests it is the artistic form to genuinely evince the coincidence of others. This 'being with' is intensified by Metamorphosis' attentiveness to the vulnerability and affliction that unites living creatures. Lyn Gardner's review of the play captures precisely this quality:

As Gregor's family increasingly fail to recognise the humanity beneath his outward appearance, we too look with skewed eyes, and immediately understand his confusion and isolation – something emphasised by Gardarsson's own desperate athleticism in the lead role. (Gardner 2013)

Gardner is possibly thinking of the sequence where 'Gregor starts to crawl insensibly over the whole room like a wounded animal, crying, shrieking, reeling, turning...' (Farr and Gardarsson 2006: 34). Although human kinship is diminished in this example, the audience's comprehension of Gregor's plight is accomplished through this manifest, animalistic reaction. The sensitivity to this other-than-human being achieved through the impact of immediate and affecting physical performance attests to the creaturely poetics employed in the play and analogous theatre.

The irony of the creaturely poetics evident in Beckett's plays and adaptations of Kafka is that it means partially dispelling the pretence of theatre to reveal the activity of performance and the conditions that actors and spectators share. This antitheatrical sensibility complements the various degrees of thematic content and effects that remain in the plays and that draw attention to the impermanence of human meaning. Having indicated the theatrical and socio-political mechanisms that ascribe meaning to the body, the flesh and blood materiality of organic life becomes prominent in performance and yet is deflected by anthropomorphic acts that summon apparitions of the human.

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