



Citation: Katafiasz, K., (2026). Death-Cries and Strips of Foam: Indexing the *Other* in Edward Bond's Later Work. *Aisthesis* 21(5): 103-121. doi: 10.7413/2035-8466082

Copyright: © 2026 – The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC-BY-4.0).

Death-Cries and Strips of Foam: Indexing the *Other* in Edward Bond's Later Work

KATE KATAFIASZ

Independent Researcher
k.katafiasz@gmail.com

Abstract. This article proposes that Edward Bond's play for young people *The Under Room* (2006) reformulates ancient, progressive, practices of identification, for our times. The article uses Lacan's three registers to analyze how the boundaries instituted at the theatre of Dionysus disrupt *mirror stage* identifications. It explores the strange response of a Birmingham schoolboy following the staged murder of an illegal immigrant in *The Under Room* (2006), to suggest that unsettling *mirror stage* identifications releases the energetic search for unity with the *other* that Lacan terms desire. The paper applies its findings to a letter Bond wrote to German theatre director Antje Lenkheit as he began his work for young people in 1997. In the letter Bond explains how drama can index things that society disavows. He takes as his example the stadia that Hitler built for his ceremonies, and shows how drama can reveal their metonymic connection to the death camps.

Keywords. Drama, political performance practice, *skene*, Theatre of Dionysus.

Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* aims to distance us from what is familiar in our culture so that we can see its absurdity. This paper posits Edward Bond's radically different approach to drama's

political function: one which attracts us to the *other*. Instead of creating a binary between the strange and the familiar, this approach shows how drama – if we know how to use its boundaries – acknowledges and even embraces difference. For Donna Haraway it is imperative for postcolonial societies to take difference seriously:

How can people rooted in different knowledge practices «get on together», especially when an all-too-easy cultural relativism is not an option, either politically, epistemologically, or morally? How can general knowledge be nurtured in postcolonial worlds committed to *taking difference seriously*? Answers to these questions can only be put together in emergent practices; i.e., in vulnerable, on-the-ground work that cobbles together non-harmonious agencies and ways of living that are accountable both to their disparate inherited histories and to their barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures. For me, that is what *significant otherness* signifies. (Haraway [2003]: 7; my emphasis)

If we read Haraway in semiotic terms this means bringing *other* experience, that resists signification, into the social frame. We might consider this a tall order for drama which, according to Aristotle, rests on *mimesis*. What use to postcolonial living is an art form that does not take us beyond recognizing things we already know?

Theatre's Boundaries

If we take a closer look at drama however, we can see that there was always more to it than *mimesis*. The theatre of Dionysus, where the first dramas were staged, is a space whose boundaries were carefully calibrated. The wooden *skene* divided the stage into visible and invisible sections; and the first dramatists wrote for the play's action to take place both in front of and behind it. Classicist John Gould tells us:

The dramatic weight of comings and goings is proportional to the openness of the space that the Greek theatre presented to the playwright, who was also the producer, for exploitation. In its function as part of the scene of imagined action, the *skene* is the place where those dramatic events that occur, as we should say, «off stage» are imagined as happening. [...] violent death characteristically occurs within, that is inside the *skene*, and has its dramatic impact through the death-cries of the victim and the controlled passion of the messenger-speech. (Gould [1999]: 13)

The ancient *skene* is both impermeable and porous; its dark side excludes images, but as a wooden wall it is penetrable by the sound of death-cries. According to Mladen Dolar (2006), «the visible can establish the distance, the nature, and the source of the voice, and thus neutralize it. The acousmatic voice is so powerful because it cannot be neutralized with the framework of the visible» (Dolar [2006]: 79). In other words, hearing voices when we cannot identify their source

can make it difficult for us to differentiate ourselves from them; difficult to establish where the boundary between interiority and exteriority lies. If *mimesis* produces copies of things we recognize on the visible side of the *skene*, its invisible side is clearly doing something *other*.

The other significant boundary at the theatre of Dionysus would seem to be between the visible part of the stage, and auditorium. Unlike the *skene*, which presents us with a physical boundary, this boundary operates using conventions. But like the *skene*, these conventions generate a porous, yet at the same time restrictive, boundary. The audience gaze crosses onto the stage, and the staged voice crosses into the auditorium. But the stage may not return the gaze as in Lehmann's «direct audience address» (Lehmann [2006]: 31); nor may the audience return the voice as we can if we heckle at stand-up comedy. This is because if either side acknowledges the other, our focus on the fictional world of the drama is compromised.

When we view theatre architecture in this light, we can see it as a series of spaces that produce the differentiation we experience when we identify things, but also spaces whose porous boundaries assimilate us in interesting ways. Writers, actors, and production team work out of sight to construct a fictional society that the actors and the play's audience will imagine during the performance, in front of, and behind the *skene*. Each space – auditorium, visible, and invisible aspects of the stage, is differentiated from the others by physical and conventional boundaries. But each boundary has been constructed in such a way as to allow certain intersubjective criss-crossings of gaze and voice, the carefully choreographed projections and introjections that constitute the system as a whole. It is a system that conjoins participating individuals because they share the seeing, speaking, imagining, modalities of a single, unified, body.

So, we can say that *part* of the traditional theatrical model operates mimetically, as Aristotle thought. But that is far from the whole story. Semiotician Charles Peirce isolates three types of sign which can help us grasp how spaces and modalities intersect in the theatrical model as a whole. *Iconic* signifiers resemble the things they represent mimetically, and *symbolic* or linguistic signifiers substitute, or stand in, for the things they represent. The action of *indices* on the other hand «depends on association by contiguity, and not upon association by resemblance or upon intellectual operations» (Chandler [2000]: 42). *Icons* and *symbols* both depend on recognition for meaning; to understand a word or an image you have to have seen or heard something like it before. But *indices* are not retroactive in this way. *Indices* are active in the sense that their meaning has to be personally assembled out of the physicality of a situation. Icons and symbols key us into *a-priori*, or pre-existing, culturally-established patterns. But we make sense of indices bodily, metonymically, *a-posteriori*; that is to say we piece indices together for ourselves, out of our lived experience of the event.

So, there may be a metonymic process at work in the Theatre of Dionysus model that has not yet been properly understood. One aspect of the *skene* resists penetration; we cannot see through it. But the *skene* is also permeable: the obscene death-cry for instance, permeates it. Semiotically we can say instead of resembling the things they represent mimetically, death-cries *index*, or point towards the dying person behind the *skene*. In this case, meaning has to be actively constructed *a-posteriori* (afterwards) by onlookers. In consequence, and perhaps more importantly, the *skene* mediates between the preexisting or retroactive *a-priori* temporality of recognition, and the active *a-posteriori* temporality of meaning that is personally and only subsequently put together. It is these two different, forward and backward-facing temporalities that make culture and corporeality incompatible or irreducible. But we can pin the *skene* here as a mechanism that *cobbles together* – to use Haraway’s term – retroactive, and active meaning-making to generate a creative mechanism; one which has the potential to put the future together differently.

The skene in practice

How does this look in practice? Before we explore these boundaries in greater theoretical depth it may be helpful to consider a concrete example of the dramatic model in hand. When I first began observing Edward Bond’s rehearsals with Big Brum Theatre in Education company in 1997, the company was steeped in Brechtian practices (Finney [1996]). In addition to this, like many agit prop, education, and community theatres in the UK at the time, they operated with very sparse resources. For both of these reasons Big Brum’s productions often had minimal sets, sometimes with no *skene*. But the plays Bond wrote for the company make a point of detailing the room in which the play is set, with its exits and entrances, windows, and furniture clearly stipulated, which may be why his plays are often (quite wrongly in my opinion) seen as *kitchen sink* dramas. Following several rehearsals with Bond however, it became apparent that far from being realist plays, these dramas needed a *skene* for the same reasons that ancient tragedy at the theatre of Dionysus needed one. I remember during an open rehearsal in the early days, in which a wall was represented using a low rope, that Bond said his plays did not really work without an actual wall. And when rehearsing *At the Inland Sea* (1995) Bond spent time with the actors establishing the difference between being inside or outside of a gas chamber¹. The Bondian *skene* seemed to be about differentiating between internality and externality; a way of articulating between the person and the logic imposed by the social world they inhabit. The company responded

1 This refers to an email sent by Bobby Colvill to the author on 22 September 2011.

by employing Ceri Townsend to design wooden sets that fitted together and could be easily assembled and dismantled by the actors for use in school halls. And it is from those sets that we can see Bond modernizing or mobilizing the ancient *skene*. A character makes her entrance from a bed in *At the Inland Sea* (1995); while another hides under floorboards in *The Balancing Act* (2003). *The Under Room* (2005) was set in a cellar so that all of the entrances and exits were made down a flight of steps, which put the *skene* almost in the ceiling.

But this strangely positioned *skene* is only part of *The Under Room*'s extraordinary, and defiantly unrealistic, dramaturgy. The play is about an illegal immigrant, hiding in the cellar of a young woman, Joan in 2077. Joan is initially very suspicious of the immigrant, but then tries to help. She, and the other character in the play – a people smuggler called Jack, behave as if the immigrant was represented by an actor in the usual way: but he is not. The immigrant is represented using a Dummy, with a Dummy actor who speaks for the Dummy, and «usually stands upstage left» (Bond [2006]: 170). When my students were doing a production of the play during the pandemic in 2021, Bond (who was helping us via zoom and email) described Adam Bethenfalvy's performance of the Dummy actor in Big Brum's original production as being «really very good»; it was «almost as if he was a waiter. The waiter isn't enjoying the meal and doesn't have expressions»². We learn later in the play that the immigrant has been a child soldier in his own country and forced to kill his mother, which helps us make sense (*a-posteriori*) of his strangely split, dissociated state, which may have been troubling us hitherto. By Scene Six Joan has been betrayed by Jack, who says he will have to pimp her out to pay 'his costs'. We hear her rationalize her predicament by blaming the immigrant as she eviscerates the Dummy in a prolonged knife attack. The Dummy's foam stuffing explodes onto the stage. Not yet aware he has died, the Dummy actor encounters his own foam entrails; he speaks three words in a strange language – then the play ends.

After one of Big Brum's performances at Bartley Green Secondary School in 2006 I observed a strange event that I want to consider in relation to the retroactive, and the active meaning making processes under discussion here. Bartley Green is a deprived area of Birmingham that often fields far right candidates in local elections – despite Birmingham being one of the UK's most diverse cities. A class of thirty or so teenagers had just watched the play and were filing out to go and get their school dinner. One young man left his classmates and unobtrusively made his way onto the stage – an oilcloth on the floor of the school hall. He walked slowly across the stage, head down, contemplating the strips of foam rubber that had stuffed the Dummy, deep in thought. He noticed me looking at him, smiled shyly, and then continued across the stage, treading carefully to avoid the strips. When he had finished, he went off to rejoin his classmates quite cheerfully. I was struck by the

2 Zoom call to the author and her students on 25 February 2021.

boy's focus on the foam strips, and the care he took not to tread on them. What had attracted him to the stage? Why did he need to associate directly with the play's objects instead of discussing it later with his friends in class?

Sign and Psyche

We might begin our analysis by thinking about the Dummy, who begins the play as a barely *iconic* human figure suggesting «stuffed white pillowslips or bolsters» (Bond [2006]: 170). When it is eviscerated the Dummy loses any semblance of the human form; instead the foam strips *index* the Dummy actor by association. In addition to this, because the words he speaks after he has died are in a language we cannot understand, the symbolic dimension of his performance is similarly poleaxed. As with the ancient death cry, we can only derive meaning from his vocal tone and the situation in which he finds himself. The Dummy transitions from icon and symbol to index to bring *other* experience into the social frame of the theatre space. We see the boy responding to it as though he too were indexed by the foam strips after the performance has ended.

To understand what might have been going on for the boy who was fixated by the foam strips, it may help to read Charles Peirce's 1930s work on the three types of sign alongside Jacques Lacan's later rapprochement between psychoanalysis and linguistics. Lacan's 1957 *Graph of Desire* (Lacan [1957]: 671-701) remodels Saussure's version the linguistic sign. Saussure had fixed the linguistic signifier to its signified meaning using a single, impermeable, bar. But because he was bringing psychoanalysis into the picture, Lacan needed a semiotic model that accounted for the sliding (condensing and displacing) polysemic flux that Freud had identified in dream analysis. He needed to demonstrate how a single signifier can cover multiple meanings in metaphor, and a single signified can attach to multiple signifiers in metonymy. Interestingly, Lacan is explicit that his thinking in relation to the graph relates to comedy, particularly «the structure of jokes» (Ibid.: 671) – perhaps because their punchline hits us belatedly, *a-posteriori*. And also, that he wants «to accurately formulate Freud's dramatism» (Ibid.: 676).

In Lacan's hands Saussure's inflexible bar, mediating between signifier and signified, transforms into an upholsterer's stitch. Here a needle creates four holes, through which we can thread together the disparate entities of culture and corporeality; these two entities are inclined to move in different directions, and can only be stabilized by the third, which holds them in loose connection with each other. Although Lacan is not explicit about this, the graph represents the structural instability between culture and corporality we identified earlier in this paper. We can see this in the way the graph contrasts between the *a-priori* temporality of icons and symbols, and the *a-posteriori* movement of indices.

Retroactive movements left on the graph show how, to appreciate how pattern repeats, we need to look back; while active movements right show how sensation constructs meaning more personally (this in itself may help us grasp the difference for the boy between discussing the drama, and investigating the foam viscera for himself). Movements up and down on Lacan's graph show externality and internality – the psychic projections and introjections that take place in normal two-way conversation. These movements also allow us to grasp the impact of the very particular restrictions placed on actors and audiences in theatres; on the audience's projecting eyes, but their receptive ears; and on the actors' projecting voices, while their bodies receive the audience gaze. The complete graph gives us a fascinating, if highly complex, model of the potential ways that words, images, and bodies can interact.

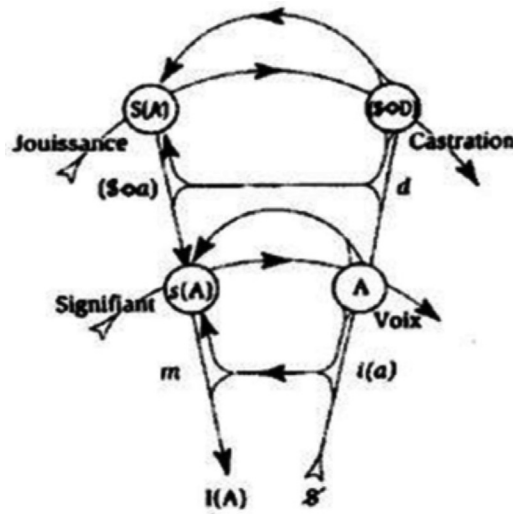


Figure 1: The Graph of Desire. From Jacques Lacan 2006: "The subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire" in *Ecrits* p. 692. London: Norton.

As I understand the lower part of the graph, movements left denote desire in search of iconic and symbolic patterns, whose *a-priori* repeating structure is recognisable retroactively. Movements right denote desire in its sensate, embodied, state; here *a-posteriori* meaning is constructed actively and personally, in the Real. Movements up denote projections, while movements down denote assimilations.

Thus on the Signifier-Voice line desire moves up and left to take meaning from the spoken word; or right and down to construct meaning from the speaker's tone of voice. Dramatic irony is often to be found in the flux between word and voice. I suggest the instability figured in the graph as a whole both defines drama and demonstrates its extraordinary political radicalism.

Following the *Graph of Desire*, Lacan's life's work involved exploring each of his three registers in turn; beginning with the Imaginary, moving on to the Symbolic, and finishing with the Real (Mellard [2006]: 49). Before he died, Lacan used the model of Borromean Knots to take up where his graph had left off in exploring how each register relates to the others. A Borromean knot is a chain formed of three distinct, yet equivalent, rings, linked together to form an interdependent unity. The defining particularity of the Borromean knot so that it holds together only as a triad; each pair of rings is held together solely by the third, so that if any single ring is cut, the other two also fall apart. Lacan's Borromean model of the psyche demonstrates how failure in one register can release the entire structure into psychotic collapse. When this happens corporeality and culture, self and *other*, go their separate ways to lose touch with each other completely.

My own twenty-first century reading of Lacan, takes the novel synchronic and structural approach of mapping Lacan's three registers, with Freud's topology, back onto Peirce's three types of sign. For some, particularly clinicians more concerned with psychoanalysis than semiotics, this may seem like a retrograde move; after all, poststructuralist thought left semiotics behind after Roland Barthes died in 1980, moving beyond the repetitions of *logos* in search of the energetics of desire. But my return to semiotics takes the Borromean model to heart – because it emphasizes the equal importance and interdependence of all three registers. I offer it here as a straightforward way into the structural practicalities of drama's profound political radicalism; an example of Haraway's «vulnerable, on-the-ground work that cobbles together non-harmonious agencies». This seems more important than ever now that *othering* is gaining such dangerous populist political traction.

Thus: semblance governs Peirce's *icon*, Freud's *ego*, and Lacan's Imaginary register. Whereas Peirce's *symbol*, Freud's *super-ego*, and Lacan's Symbolic register are controlled not by semblance, but by substitution – the arbitrary, yet rule-governed names we give to things that give them social recognition and legitimacy. These two types of sign, that make up Lacan's Imaginary and Symbolic registers, are socially sanctioned, and have to be internalized or *learned* to give people access to the *a-priori* cultural world of *logos* that began before we were born and will continue after we die. These are the registers of Artificial Intelligence. The corporeal *index* on the other hand, in common with Freud's *id* and the Lacanian Real, requires the presence of an actual body; it is structurally governed by our *a-posteriori*, unmediated, sensory association with the *other*. If we think of the Real relation to the Symbolic and Imaginary registers in Lacan's Borromean knot, we see it resisting translation into words and images or anything we might recognize; yet it holds those registers in loose association with each other and itself. In this way it impacts the other two registers – indicating its

physical presence as indices do – not visually, or linguistically, but existentially, directly, and actively. I'm fairly sure the boy stepping carefully amongst the foam strips could not have told you what he was doing – he just needed to do it.

Interrupting the Mirror

Perhaps we can understand what is happening to the boy in relation to Lacan's famous mirror stage, when the child's *ego* is formed (Lacan [1949]: 75). This is a transitional phase for the child from a world of fragmented bodily sensations into the wider social framework of symbolic identification: the *always-already a priori* world of socially-mediated meaning. For Lacan, this happens via misrecognition in the Imaginary register. The child is still in a state of «motor impotence and nursing dependence» (Ibid.: 76), but the imaginary register seems to promise a more coherent future. The mirror stage allows the child to anticipate moving from their immobile and chaotic «fragmented image of the body to what [Lacan] will call an “orthopaedic” form of its totality» (Ibid.: 78). Unifying their body will bring the child agency and mobility. The child uses their mirror image, or the idealized imago of a caregiver, as «the statue onto which man [sic] projects himself» (Ibid.: 76). This establishes an *ego*, or identity, that is founded in the gaze of the other. Lacan tells us that the child assumes this specular persona as though they were putting on a suit of armor: «the finally donned armour of an alienating identity that will mark his [sic] entire mental development with its rigid structure» (Ibid.: 78). But introducing a symbolic framework structured by the *other*, mediating between the child and their environment, disrupts the connected immediacy of indexical experience. According to Lacan its outcome is to break the harmonious loop between inner and outer worlds – shattering the «*innenwelt* to *umwelt* circle» (Ibid.).

Lacan's mirror stage has been criticized for its speculative and philosophical emphasis; it is far from being an empirically-sound, clinically-tested study. But if we read it in connection with the spaces the ancients constructed at the theatre of Dionysus when they invented their dazzling new art form, we can understand the political function of drama in a completely new way. The mirror stage babe-in-arms cannot, as yet, either move independently, or speak. This is a situation that the ancients seem to have replicated when they created the auditorium at the theatre of Dionysus. This seated space immobilizes the audience and focusses their gaze away from each other and onto the stage; during the performance the audience can make sounds that index their bodies – clap, stamp, cough, whisper, weep, laugh – but not speak. I am arguing that the theatre's careful curation of Lacan's metonymies of desire, giving the voice to the stage and the gaze to the auditorium,

allowing the stage to act while keeping the audience seated and immobile, echoes the modality of the pre-speech babe-in-arms to a remarkable degree.

What might be the effect of this replication? Perhaps the ancients felt that by seating their audience and removing the social gaze from them, they might release the desire for unity with the *other* experienced by the baby; who is as yet fragmented, unaffected by the social gaze, and so unencumbered by the identity it endows. Freud protected both himself and his patients from the social gaze; he positioned himself and his patient out of each other's direct line of sight by sitting behind his famous couch and perpendicular to it. The theatre of Dionysus too, splits the audience gaze from the staged voice, disrupting the *a-priori* stabilizing illusions of the Imaginary and Symbolic registers. If we think of these arrangements in relation to Lacan's Borromean knot, we can see how the auditorium at the theatre of Dionysus and Freud's couch are both positioned so that the Imaginary and Symbolic registers are only held together by the body in the *a-posteriori* Real. Only when the body is in a certain position can the Borromean interdependent unity be held in place. If Freud's patients wanted to look at Freud, they had to sit up and turn around to see him. Audiences in theatres form the gazing-and-speaking unity of a single person only when their gaze is held by the spectacle before them onstage; a gaze that intensifies into imaginative insight when the play's action moves behind the *skene*.

Of course, drama cannot change who we are. Unless we lose our memories (and even if we do) our identities, Haraway's «disparate inherited histories», are an unchangeable part of us. For Lacan the mirror stage is irreversible; it is a structural moment that marks our entry into subjectivity; and like the Borromean knot, our subjectivity operates triadically, or we fall apart. But perhaps what drama does (what the boy in Bartley Green was doing), is allow us to try on the position of the *other* for size. As audiences, we know perfectly well that we are sitting in the auditorium of a theatre, that the action is fictional, and that we are free to get up and go for our school dinner as it were, any time we like. But the way the drama splits the modalities of gaze, voice, and action, seems to allow us to flip the Borromean knot imaginatively, so that we can experience the way its three registers are configured in reverse. The boy literally crosses onto the stage to perform this reversal; but perhaps imaginatively crossing the boundary to engage with the *skene* is sufficient. Dramatized experience does seem to – temporarily, while we are engaged by the performance – subvert the alienation from the *other* that characterizes the mirror stage. And while it cannot reinstate the shattered «*innenwelt* to *umwelt* circle», drama does seem to enhance the connected, monadic, immediacy of our embodied collectivity. These things are evidenced by the extemporaneous expressions of laughter, pity, and fear, the embodied intelligences that audiences experience during dramatic performances. Were the ancient Greeks deliberately flipping, as if reversing, the mirror?

Aristotle understood *peripety*, or reversal, to be a crucial component of tragic drama; but it is as if he only grasped half the story, because he saw reversal in terms of plot rather than spatiality: «[a] reversal is a change to the opposite in actions being performed [...] for instance in Oedipus someone came to give Oedipus good news and free him from fear with regard to his mother, but by disclosing Oedipus' identity he brought about the opposite result» (Aristotle [1996]: 18).

On the other hand, Aristophanes the older, comic, dramatist offers a far more knowing account. At his *Symposium* Plato records Aristophanes' story telling «how, long ago, the innate desire of human beings for each other started» (Plato [1999]: 29). Aristophanes' model has archaic humans split apart by a jealous Zeus «as they cut hard-boiled eggs with hairs»: «[s]ince their original nature had been cut in two, each one longed for its own other half and stayed with it. They threw their arms round each other, weaving themselves together, wanting to form a single living thing» (Ibid.: 28).

Aristophanes is usually taken to be talking about sexual attraction because the agreed topic for discussion at the symposium was «in praise of love» (Ibid.: 9). But the symposium was also held in celebration of tragedian Agathon's victory at the Dionysia, and the participants were his fellow dramatists and philosophers. So perhaps we can read drama as sub-textually related to what Aristophanes has to say here; particularly the notion of drama's unifying split between auditorium and stage.

I am proposing that the boy in Bartley Green's attraction to the stage gives us some idea what interrupting the mirror stage looks like. It is not something we normally see in theatre settings; we usually cross the boundary between stage and auditorium with our eyes and thoughts – not our bodies as the boy did. Perhaps this is because of the convention that makes bodies onstage public and bodies in the auditorium anonymous – audiences do not sign up to be looked-at as actors do. The boy may not have seen live theatre before and may not have known the convention. In any case, the stage was not raised to make him conspicuous and his agenda seemed private not exhibitionist. Nobody was interested in what he was doing; and although he acknowledged me looking at him, the boy was clearly thinking about something else.

A unifying split

I want to get into the compulsion behind the theatrical attraction I'm uncovering here. A series of splits were taking place during the play's performance. First, the Dummy was split from the Dummy actor, so the immigrant's voice was split from his body. The Dummy initially faces the audience: one speechless Dummy faces the others. Each member of the audience experiences a split between their

eyes and their ears, because they cannot see what they hear or hear what they see. The Dummy actor is too far away from the Dummy to ventriloquize it; so, to unify the immigrant the audience must engage physically with the fictional situation, by shifting their gaze from Dummy to Dummy actor and back.

This split is particularly interesting. Bond seems to be adapting and enhancing the way the *skene* operated at the theatre of Dionysus. In classical tragedy, when the action of the drama moved out of the public sphere and into the domestic space behind the *skene* the audience could no longer coordinate what they saw with what they could hear. According to Dolar (2006), the voice «hits us from the inside, it pours directly into the interior, without protection». Dolar goes on to describe the difference between seeing and hearing: «[t]here is a stark opposition between the visible and the audible: the visible world presents relative stability, permanence, distinctiveness, and a location at a distance; the audible presents fluidity, passing, a certain inchoate, amorphous character, and a lack of distance» (Ibid.: 79).

It would seem the ear immerses us physically with our surroundings, while the eye separates us from them; when eye grounds ear and *vice versa* we can orientate our bodies in space-and-time. But when they are split apart we are de-centered; the mechanism unsettles the armorial coherence of the *ego*; and while it cannot restore Lacan's «*innenwelt* to *umwelt* circle», when we interrupt lip-synch in a gaze-voice split, we do seem to be able to momentarily return to a pre-subjective embodied immediacy. We can understand this using Lacan's example of Möbius topology (Lacan [1959-1960]: 139), whereby a surface appears to be two-sided, but in fact has only one side. The model takes us from subject to object without crossing any boundary, to locate the subject outside itself; but it also puts the strangeness of the other at the heart of our subjectivity. Thus, in spite of their physical distance from the stage, audiences can become as imaginatively immersed in the dramatic situation as actors – as the boy in Bartley Green seems to indicate.

Gottfried Leibniz characterized this decentered state as «monadic». In his *Monadology* [1714] he describes monads as «simple substances» which have «no extension or shape and are not divisible». Monads represent «a plurality within a unity» for whom «perception is the basic state» (Leibniz [1714]: 34-5). That is to say they function perceptually, not conceptually, putting them firmly in an *a-posteriori* rather than *a-priori* temporality. While we cannot literally reverse the mirror stage, audio-visual disturbance does seem to put audiences into a temporarily monadic state. Topologically it can be represented as a move from two discrete circles, (a) and (b), to one discrete circle split in half with a single mutable boundary between (a) on one side, and (b) on the other (Lewin [1936]: 176). We might usually understand monadic relationality in terms of spatial collapse; such as the skin-on-skin intimacy we experience during breast feeding or

sexual intercourse. But when we consider what Dolar has to say about the penetrative nature of sound, and my own observation that stage and auditorium share the gaze and voice of a single body, we can characterize the relationality of stage and auditorium, which is not literally skin-on-skin but is penetrative, as monadic.

Edward Bond's split immigrant then, echoes the split between gaze and voice experienced between stage and auditorium. In this sense the Dummy, with his motor impotence and projecting gaze, occupies the same *nurseling* position as his audience: one Dummy gazes at the others. With his *prosopon façade* center stage and his voice upstage left, Bond's immigrant stretches monadic relationality to an unusual extreme. What is interesting is that the audience has to fill the gap by shifting their gaze; because if they do not they cannot ground what they see with what they hear; the Imaginary and Symbolic registers fall apart without this physical effort in the Real. This means they too are indexed by – or roped into – the arrangement, as the boy was. It positions the audience between the front of the *skene*, which tends to house icons resembling the things they represent like the Dummy, and the back of the *skene* which often deals with indices – his voice, his foam entrails. It is worth noticing and exploring the metonymic structure of the index here. For Peirce, an index is like «a fragment, torn away from the object»; indices «direct attention to their objects by blind compulsion» (Chandler [2000]: 41). We can perhaps associate Peirce's interrupting split, or «tearing», with the trauma that precedes and escapes desire in the Lacanian Real. Perhaps it was this split that generated the boy's attraction to – temporary unity with – the strips of foam. This is the energy that sends Desire out into the Symbolic register, searching for the signifiers – words, bodies, or objects – that can *stand in* for, but never fully satisfy, or cover, the lack. The index has an energy, an *a-posteriori* incompleteness, that points to the Real, indicating a trace of something which resists symbolization entirely. This sense of incompleteness characterizes several key life events; such as when the child has to come to terms with being separated from their mother; when we are compulsively attracted to the 'other' sexually; and when we suffer grief and loss when someone dies. Drama replicates these subjective life events structurally, as well as in its content. Because, when we understand its boundaries, drama unsettles or complicates our identity by inviting the subject into fragmented, affectively charged, positions.

But Bond does not stop at prizing the immigrant from his body. Having split his gaze from his voice, Bond goes on to divest the Dummy of any resemblance to the human form at all. When the Dummy is eviscerated his body disintegrates into strips of foam rubber. No attempt is made at verisimilitude – Bond was emphatic in rehearsal there should be no blood or any attempt to make the yellow strips resemble actual viscera. These are not icons and this is not *mimesis*. As we have already observed, drama cannot undo the structural misrecognition on which our subjectivity depends; but when it uses indices it does seem to evoke

a trace of Lacan's Möbius «*Innenwelt* to *Umwelt* circle». By destabilizing and decentering our affective positioning, Bond's foam strips move us from *a-priori* to *a-posteriori* functioning. They draw us inside the play's fictional action and release the energy we see attracting the boy in Bartley Green to the foam detritus – the *other* that held his fascination so strongly for a short while. Peirce characterizes this energy as compulsion, while Lacan terms it Desire. Indices are I propose, the semiotic engines of both comic and tragic embodiment; the muscular response, the *jouissance*, that for Haraway *cobbles* us to what is *other*.

It would seem that for Bond, drama is a matter of stripping things down. In *The Under Room* he enhances the split made by the ancients between auditorial gaze and staged voice, by splitting the immigrant so that his voice and his body are in different locations onstage. Then he strips even the Dummy so that any formal resemblance to the human form is lost in the foam strips that litter the floor. As we have seen, the capacity for audience engagement with the *other* grows with each move; shifting the gaze from Dummy to Dummy Actor during the performance appears to develop, for the young man in Bartley Green, into a need to connect himself personally with the objects left onstage, even after the play had ended.

Bond's rules of creativity

Writing to German theatre director Antje Lenkheit³ less than a decade before he wrote *The Under Room*, Bond discusses several «rules for creativity». These provide us with a useful insight into his thinking as he began his work for young people towards the end of the millennium. Lenkheit has asked to direct a production of Bond's 1973 play *The Sea* in Germany, and she is proposing various theatrical «effects»; one of which is painting the actor's faces green. «The first rule of understanding, of creativity», Bond tells her firmly, «is take away. Instead, people always add». We have seen Bond *taking away* in *The Under Room*; his immigrant seems to echo the ex-centricity of splitting gaze from voice at the theatre of Dionysus. And eviscerating the Dummy disrupts the apparent coherence and wholeness which typifies Lacanian Imaginary identification. It is a move that resembles the way the ancient Greeks staged violent action behind the *skene* in their tragedies. For Bond the German theatre of the late twentieth century is empty – but not productively so: «I see many photographs of German productions. The sets are spacious and symbolic. They all remind me of the same thing: the stadia Hitler built for his ceremonies. And they all seem empty, even when the actors are on them» (Letter to Lenkheit dated 16 July 1997: 1).

3 My thanks to David Tuallion for sharing this.

Clearly, for Bond the specter of Adolf Hitler still stalked the German stage. Perhaps because a stadium without a *skene* makes it difficult to form the ex-centric identifications we have been exploring, that challenge monoculturalism. It is difficult to make the *other* significant as Haraway would put it, because the *other* behaves like an indexical sign. Because of their different *a-posteriori* temporality, indices are irreducible to, and resist, *a-priori* symbolization or imagery. Bringing the *other* into focus in the way the boy focused on the foam strips requires some sort of mechanism or boundary. We may think that in a stadium nothing can be hidden because everything is visible; but under such circumstances the crimes a society perpetrates on the *other* remain obscure. It was Brecht in 1948 who famously advocated, «the theatre must acquire *qua* theatre the same fascinating reality as a sporting arena during a boxing match» (Brecht [1948]: 233). But we are unlikely to focus on detritus during a sporting event in a stadium or an arena; the foam strips would just get trodden underfoot. They could not be used imaginatively in the way the boy in Bartley Green used them.

Three years after writing to Lenkheit, as he worked to divest Big Brum of their Brechtian methodology, Bond put it unequivocally: «[a]lienation [*Verfremdungseffekt*] is the Theatre of Auschwitz» (Bond [2000]: 187). This was of course, a deeply counterintuitive statement – something Bond clearly understood: «[o]bviously I did not mean this in the simple sense. In the simple sense it is the opposite of true. The Nazis at Auschwitz would have exterminated Brecht not staged him» (Ibid.: 171). There is much that is counterintuitive when we think of drama: how can a *skene* reveal things? How can the humans Zeus split in half be more united than ever? In a similar vein Bond addresses the emptiness in the stadium by counterintuitively taking things away. His letter to Lenkheit goes on to describe how to make Hitler's stadia *work* – in the sense they would become «a revelation».

The index as centre

Bond's first «rule of creativity» is to cut the «noise»: «shouting, music, rhetoric, choruses»; but «the sound of the feet would be useful [...] you take away the rest and you get to the bodies». By «noise» here, he seems to mean the words and emotive music and rhetoric rather than the sounds that index physicality, such as feet hitting the ground. In this way he suggests a director can help actors cut through ephemera to find the indices operating in the Lacanian Real at what he terms the play's «centre». It is a process that takes us «from the dressing up for parades in the stadia, to the stripping of the dead in the camps». This work would have been done by the *skene* in ancient drama; a *skene* cuts out the *a-priori* iconic *dressing up* we recognize, and makes us piece together the sounds

a-posteriori that penetrate its semi-permeable boundary. In the same way, the boy from Bartley Geen seemed to be piecing something together for himself *a-posteriori* from the obscene strips of foam left onstage after the play had ended. When we remove iconic structures from the stage audiences are no longer faced with an *other* they can ignore, because the monadic structure of indices draws us into their space to share their boundary with them. Bond says «I take away the rhetoric and listen to the centre – which speaks for itself». The «centre» Bond tells Lenkheit, «hides in normality – just as in the stadia the dead hide in the show of energetic life» (Letter to Lenkheit: 2).

In his plays for young people, which were written in the years immediately following this letter to Lenkheit, Bond seems to have developed the notion of the «centre». The way the Dummy is indexed by the Dummy Actor in *The Under Room* makes the immigrant's childhood trauma immediately noticeable to its audience – even if they cannot make logical sense of it straight away and have to do this *a-posteriori* like the Bartley Green boy. As Bond tells Lenkheit: «when you see a photograph of the deserted ruined stadia – years after the last parades – you cannot take away the bodies: they haunt the empty space» (Ibid.). Finding the «centre» then is a movement away from what is said and towards the voice that speaks; away from what is seen or recognized and towards the detail that troubles us. To use Roland Barthes' terminology, Bond's «centre» moves us from «studium» to «punctum» (Barthes [1980]: 25). Thinking about the «centre» of a play is about honing our sensitivity to those commonplace indices that hide in plain sight; about cutting out the iconic and symbolic signifiers that drown them out. «The centre is simple and particular, not complex and abstract» (Letter to Lenkheit: 2). What Bond seems to be doing here is taking one of the lesser understood metonymic processes set up by the ancients at the theatre of Dionysus, and making its political radicalism accessible in post-structural, extra-theatrical, applied settings.

Internalizing the Signifier

The next *rule* of creativity Bond shares with Lenkheit, is to focus not on the play's characters, but on the *a-priori* logic their situation imposes on them. «What will happen to the soldier or young woman in the stadia is of interest because it will be logical. That they kill and will be killed is the logic of their situation» (Letter to Lenkheit: 2). The logic of the situation takes us back to think about the Symbolic register, which contains the social law; as well as the *super-ego* which operates as an internalized voice of enjoyment and demand, that can be punishing and contradictory. Once you have understood the play's social logic as something that each person internalizes, «you can take a soldier from the

stadium and place him on the street – and the logic of the death camps will still be revealed» (Ibid.). In *The Under Room* the characters exist in a claustrophobic cellar insulated visually from the social world upstairs. Because society exists behind the ceiling *skene* as it were, it is not visible – at least in the sense that it is not represented iconically. But rehearsing the play with my students in 2021, we soon realized that the state of martial law outside governs every move in space that the characters in the cellar make, like a strategic chess game, regardless of the strength or weakness of their personalities. Bond tells Lenkheit «your letter talks of the actor playing the character. But first everyone involved must play the play – actors, directors, designers, and so forth. I am shocked that this is often not done because then there is no logic» (Ibid.). We realized that actors needed to think about how their character lived in the external society beyond the *skene*; but also, how the society beyond the *skene* lived internally, in them. This was the logic that meant the criminal Jack who was used to breaking rules could defy the army and help the immigrant; while good citizen Joan wanted to help, but eventually murdered him.

Telling the difference

Having prized indexical and symbolic structures apart and looked at each, Bond addresses the contrast, or *gap*, between them. He gives the example of the gap between a puppeteer and their puppet, and the gap between the smart SS uniforms in the stadia and the rags of the prisoners in the camps. These are the connections between the civilized and the obscene that society needs to make if it is to be human. Bond tells us: «We must not supply their strings that is the work of their audience» (Ibid.). We can see how that works in the case of the Dummy and Dummy Actor whose audience have to shift their gaze between them and in doing so are themselves indexed, and so affected, by the immigrant's state of disassociation. Bond gives the following example of an index crossing the gap from obscenity into the social sphere: «You may remember the story about the spec of brain that landed on Himmler's cheek – this had jumped across the gap. These are small things: a cheek, a journey of some meters, a fleck of brain tissue – but they illuminate history and responsibility» (Letter to Lenkheit: 3).

Bond says we need to measure this gap. «Macbeth wonders if he will kill the king. He could discuss this (and does) – but it remains theoretical. And then he sees a dagger in the air». Bond observes that the «the play's centre is full of apparitions. Whenever they appear Macbeth talks to them». But it is when he tries to touch the dagger that Macbeth takes an icon for an index and enters his own illusory *trompe l'oeil* hall of mirrors: «unborn apparitions in a looking-glass: his doom» (Ibid.). It is at this point that the Borromean structure holding the

flexible boundary between representation and the Real – between *a-priori* and *a-posteriori* structures – disintegrates, so that Macbeth cannot tell which is which. Bond suggests he gets stuck in the *a-priori* repeating temporality of the mirrors: «much of the play will talk about this moment (tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow...) because he will be trapped in it» (Ibid.). Crossing the gap can take us into madness or into creativity, depending if we focus on the *a-priori* iconic reflection or the *a-posteriori* index we might prefer to disavow and brush off – the speck on Himmler's cheek.

It is a demanding thing to enter the gap: but if we don't enter the gap there is no creativity. Instead, we lend ourselves to an illusion, not to the reality of drama. That is as immoral as the stadia (Letter to Lenkheit: 4).

Drama is sometimes vilified in poststructuralist performance circles because it involves fiction instead of real life. To call drama «reality» as Bond does one has to shift one's understanding, in a way I argue Lacan's three registers help us to do. It is about going beyond the *simple sense* of the reality-fiction binary; not in the sense that we try to immerse ourselves in hallucination like Macbeth. Instead of lending ourselves to the mimetic illusions we see on the front of our screens in the Imaginary register, dramatic reality draws our attention to the *other* beyond the social frame, in the Real. So, from our position in the auditorium, we look at the Dummy and other actors, their *prosopon* masks, faces, and characters, we listen to the things they tell each other, the music, rhetoric – all representing the future as an *a-priori*, retroactive, repeating, reflection of the past like Macbeth's hall of mirrors. The point for Bond, is to contrast these icons and symbols with the ancient death-cries, flecks of human tissue, and the foam strips that index, or indicate, the unseen presence of trauma, death camps, murder. What goes on behind the theatrical *skene* may be fictional; but indices release energy whether they come from the hidden reality of the death camps, or from Macbeth's imagined kingdom. They are true in that they go through us physically by evoking the Lacanian Real. In the Real we are confronted with fragments or affects that resist integration – yet in responding to them, we may retroactively reframe their symbolic reality. In doing this drama does not change our identity, but it does change how we relate to our social being.

Bond's reformulation of ancient dramatic technique would seem to be connected with the way he liberates the index from behind the *skene*. Bond brings the obscene center stage; but not in the sense he drenches the stage in blood, because the minute you stage *in-yer-face* blood, sex, or violence you are back in the land of representation... or pornography. Bond brings the obscene center stage in the sense that the foam strips are visible but do not operate iconically. Bond's move takes the stage beyond *mimesis*, into the Lacanian Real where, as Haraway puts it, difference can be taken seriously. The boy in Bartley Green can

show us what taking difference seriously looks like; not like Macbeth clutching at his hallucination; or like someone turning himself into an icon like a *selfie* to attract the social gaze. But someone doing the private, ontological, activity that Bond calls the «work of the audience»; that is, making *a-posteriori* personal connections between symbol and index – for themselves.

References

- Aristotle, 1996: *The Poetics*, transl. by M. Heath, Penguin, London.
- Barthes, R., 1980: *Camera Lucida*, Vintage, London, 2000.
- Bond, E., 1997: *At the Inland Sea*, Methuen, London.
- Bond, E., 2006: *The Under Room*, in *Bond: Plays 8*, Methuen, London, pp. 169-205.
- Bond, E., 2011: *The Balancing Act*, in *Bond: Plays: 9*, Methuen, London, pp. 103-151.
- Brecht, B., 1948: *Stage Design for the Epic Theatre*, in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. by J. Willett, Methuen, London, 1987, pp. 230-233.
- Chandler, D., 2002: *Semiotics: the basics*, Routledge, London.
- Finney, M., 1996: *Creating Theatre for Knowing*, “SCYPT Journal” 31, pp. 18-36.
- Dolar, M., 2006: *A Voice and Nothing More*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Gould, J., 1999: *Tragedy in Performance*, in *Greek Drama*, Vol. 1, Part 2, ed. by P.E. Easterling and Bernard M.W. Knox, CUP, Cambridge, pp. 6-29.
- Haraway, D., 2003: *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, people, and significant otherness*, Prickly Paradigm, Chicago.
- Lacan, J., 1959-1960: *The Seminar book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-60*, Routledge, London, 1992.
- Lacan, J., 1949: *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I function*, in *Écrits*, Norton, London, 2006, pp. 75-82.
- Lacan, J., 1957: *The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire*, in *Écrits*, Norton, London, 2006, pp. 671-703.
- Lehmann, H.-T., 2006: *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, London.
- Leibniz, G.W., 1714: *Leibniz's Monadology: a new translation and Guide*, ed. by L. Strickland, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2014.
- Lewin, K., 1936: *Principles of Topological Psychology*, transl. by F. and G. Heider, McGraw-Hill, New York.
- Mellard, J., 2006: *Beyond Lacan*, SUNY Press, New York.
- Plato, 1999: *The Symposium*, Penguin, London.