Between "Play" and "Power": Performing "Waiting" Under Siege.
Susan Sontag's Staging of Waiting For Godot *in Sarajevo*

by

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ABSTRACT

This project considers Susan Sontag's 1993 staging of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* in besieged Sarajevo, staged amid an entanglement of political, ideological, cultural, ethical and epistemological discourses. The production is discussed in the theoretical context of emerging postmodern aesthetic/political praxis, and in the western cultural context of a distanced post cold-war crisis within postmodernity.

An interrogation of existing representations of this theatrical event reveals that Sontag's production has previously been constructed in traditional, inherited terms of aesthetic/political praxis. This study suggests the inadequacy of these representations, and argues for a different way of seeing the political capacity of the production and, therefore, the aesthetic.

In its interrogation of the politics of the aesthetic economy of Beckett's text, amid besieged Sarajevo, this study yields an aesthetic critique of what is at stake in the ambiguous role of the west in relation to contemporary European political and social strife.

Examiners:

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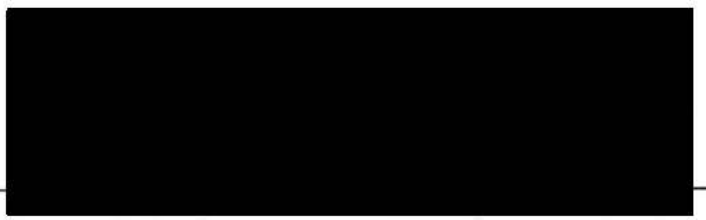

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Geoff and Glenda Taylor, without whom nothing would be complete!

Introduction

"Betwixt-and-Between": Playing Powerfully

New York-based author and sometime director, Susan Sontag, returned to besieged Sarajevo in mid-July 1993 to begin rehearsals for her production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*. Sontag states:

> There was one obvious play for me to direct. Beckett's play written over forty years ago, seems written for and about Sarajevo ("Waiting For Godot in Sarajevo" 88).

Sontag's production of *Waiting For Godot* opened in Sarajevo's Youth Theatre on August 17, 1993. It was performed in Serbo-Croatian by nine professional Sarajevan actors. Sontag chose to produce only the first act of Beckett's play; the choices she made about staging —tripling the parts of Vladimir and Estragon, increasing stage business and silences— meant that Act 1 would run at least ninety minutes. Sontag comments, "Even with a stripped down and speeded-up Act II, the play would run two and a half hours long. And I could not envisage asking people to watch the play from the Youth Theatre's auditorium, whose nine small chandeliers could come crashing down if the building suffered a direct hit" (97). The stage was lit by candlelight. The audience, composed of largely Sarajevan civilians and some foreign journalists sat on a tier of six rows of seats, close to the front of the stage. There were no evening performances, just matinees. The performances were free and played to full houses.

I did not see Sontag's production of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo and am unable to offer a direct critique of the performance. I want to articulate and explain, therefore, the methodological approach I am taking towards this project. And, in addition, I want to identify how my study of this event will contribute to the field of theoretical studies in the theatre, by attempting to bind postmodern aesthetic and political praxis and theory.

1.1. Methodology

The specific information available to me concerning the production largely consists of newspaper reports and journal articles. These newspaper reports and journal articles are written in English and appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Observatory*, *The Nation*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Newsday*, *Performing Arts Journal*, *American Theater* and *Theater*. I qualify this source material as explicitly "representational"; that is, information concerning the production and/or the political situation surrounding the besieged city of Sarajevo, which is always already mediated through the ideological and political predilections of the authors and/or the newspapers or journals that they write for.

I also had a personal interview with Susan Sontag and was given access to her personal files on the production. I have seen photographs of the event and direct footage of one of the performances. This footage forms part of the Sarajevan produced short film, *Sarajevo Ground Zero* (1993).[1] This information is less explicitly "representational." It is, however, unavoidably mediated from particular perspectives which carry particular ideological investments.

I also wish to articulate my own cultural positioning in relation to Sontag's production and the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia. It is important to do so because the "representational" information available to me is "represented" once again in the writing of this project. I am careful to articulate what may seem trite information because I am culturally located on the dominant side of most of the traditional discourses —a white, western, middle-class (and perhaps the exception) female— and throughout this study I refer to these dominant discourses often critically. I, therefore, acknowledge my own complicity with the west in many of the (apparently) critical observations I make of the west in relation to Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo, and the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia. It is particularly important to locate oneself culturally in a study such as this, which involves the analysis of a medium (the theatre) which is enmeshed with numerous discourses which variously represent the concept of identity. And, it is

doubly important in this study as it emerges in the context of a contemporary war, which rightly or wrongly has come to be constructed in terms of identity politics.

Although some of my source material (namely the film, *Sarajevo Ground Zero*, and the article, "Reports from the 21st Century: A Sarajevo Interview," which documents Erika Munk's interview with the Sarajevan actors in Sontag's production) includes information from citizens of the besieged city concerning the crisis in Sarajevo and Sontag's production, most of the information I have available to me is produced by western journalists and theatre critics. Some of these journalists saw Sontag's production, some of them did not. And with the notable exception of three articles written by Erika Munk, these reports on the production do not give a typical critical review of the performance itself.[2] They are not directly concerned with the artistic success or failure of the production. Rather, these articles reveal that their reading(s) of this staging of Beckett's text are significantly informed by specifically western readings of the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia. That is, they tend to read this theatrical event according to their own perspectives concerning whether the west should actively (in terms of aggressive military action) involve themselves in the Bosnian crisis. Significantly, they ideologically locate the west at the centre of the whole situation. They place Sontag's production, therefore, amid the larger, western ideological narrative of the political situation in Sarajevo.

It is in this general context (the western ideological narrative of the political situation in Sarajevo) that my project emerges. My method of approach to Sontag's production, therefore, is not that of the theatre historian, who aims to collect and present as much data about the production as possible.[3] It is not my intention to piece the production together in an attempt to re-create it so that I might somehow determine what effect it produced in Sarajevo and among western observers of the event. In short, despite the obvious desirability and necessity of as much primary and secondary source material as possible when studying a live theatre production, it is essential to remain self-

consciously aware that however thorough the information, the information is always necessarily mediated. The information itself does not constitute the performance, nor its impact upon those actors and spectators who share a particular performance space.[4]

I approach Sontag's production, therefore, as a cultural phenomenon: a production which emerges "betwixt-and-between" a complex entanglement of political, ideological, cultural, ethical and even epistemological discourses. The concept of "production," therefore, in this study is not limited to the live performances of *Waiting For Godot*. Rather, it includes the various available written and spoken representations of the event, and the numerous and conflicting ideological investments that these representations connote. It also includes the historical subtext that surrounds Beckett's play; specifically the debates which circulate the more controversial performances of his work.[5]

I also approach the production from an outside, distanced perspective of a western observer. And, therefore, I approach the production as an event which identifies and challenges specific questions concerning: the western perception of the political situation surrounding besieged Sarajevo, the political involvement of the US and western European governments in the crisis in Sarajevo, the social and political efficacy of theatre amid real crisis, the cultural positioning of a contemporary city under siege in post cold-war Europe, and the moral correctness of Sontag's decision to produce a play amid extreme political and social disruption in a country that was not her own (particularly her choice of Beckett's play, which dramatizes seemingly eternal "waiting" and "hoping" in an apolitical and ahistorical non-context).

I suggest that Sontag's staging of *Waiting For* Godot and its subsequent representation and analysis (approached together as a complex cultural phenomenon) problematizes how such a theatrical event is to be evaluated, specifically in relation to its political potency. I argue that the production itself (including its subsequent theoretical analysis), can be seen to disturb and de-stabilise its own terms of evaluation. Sontag's

production calls into question the very tools of evaluation which appear self-evident in an analysis of an important social, political and cultural event. And in problematizing the concept of evaluation, and by questioning the political potency of the theatrical event, my analysis of this production confronts the contemporary theoretical debate concerning the possibility and/or re-definition(s) of a contemporary political aesthetic in the post cold-war west.

This complex theatrical event, I contend, approached as a cultural phenomenon from a distanced perspective of a western observer, challenges the traditional, inherited terms of aesthetic/political praxis. The relationship between the aesthetic and the political is traditionally represented in two different ways. On the one hand the aesthetic is considered as a politically potent medium, suggesting that effective political art must precipitate some form of action leading to change, the political art form will implicate a right and a wrong political position, will clearly identify an oppressor and an oppressed, and will offer some form of anarchic commentary. And on the other hand, the aesthetic is considered as an essentially apolitical medium, associating the aesthetic with a deep, psychological potency, elevated above political discourse, and/or confirming the redundancy of the aesthetic in matters political. This event, I argue, yields an aesthetic/political praxis which both demonstrates, and incorporates into its aesthetic strategies the complexity and perplexity involved in contemporary ethical politics: it undermines the traditional perspectives from which evaluations have been made concerning the production's political and social efficacy, and its moral correctness. And by incorporating such complexity and perplexity into its aesthetic strategies, the production interrogates what is at stake in this unique ethical and political relationship between the former Yugoslavia and the west, as it emerges in the present historical moment. Such interrogation, I contend, is not available in the various western political discourses which surround the Bosnian crisis.

It is the process of undermining and questioning at work in the aesthetic economy of Beckett's text, as it functions in the specific context of besieged Sarajevo, coupled with its dialogue with the contemporary debate concerning the possibility and/or re-definition(s) of a contemporary political aesthetic, that renders this production such a productive and intriguing event to study, even from a distanced perspective, and despite the largely second-hand evidence available. The information available concerning Sontag's production, coupled with my methodological approach to the event, does not limit this project. Rather, it shapes the direction of this study.

This is a study of the way various and conflicting western representations of the crisis in Bosnia have significantly informed the few existing and available western readings of this specific staging of *Waiting For Godot*. As indicated above, Sontag's production has largely been considered in western political and ideological terms, and consequently this unique theatrical event has been constructed as yet another western political and ideological representation of the Bosnian crisis. I suggest that this is an inadequate account of the aesthetic complexity and political potency of Sontag's Sarajevan production.

These representations of the crisis, of which Sontag's production has been seen as a part, construct and perpetuate abstract versions and narratives of the Bosnian situation, which are available to distanced western observers. And these versions and narratives attempt to account for the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia, and the west's role in it. Abstract versions and narratives of the crisis, available to western observers, tend to reduce the situation to an isolated set of discourses. These isolated discourses may represent ill-conceived, simplified versions of the crisis and/or confuse, mislead and disorient western observers in terms of the historical and political context of the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia. This, coupled with the various shifts in political commitment demonstrated by the US and western European governments throughout the fighting in the Balkans, and the somewhat ill-defined purpose of the United Nations' peace-keeping

mandate and military presence in the former Yugoslavia, have somehow dislocated the many western television images of slaughter and physical atrocities from an actual political and historical context that might involve the west. And in the environment of this uncertain western relationship to the crisis in Bosnia, it becomes particularly challenging for western observers to have any solidified understanding of the situation or their role in it (if, indeed, such a solidified understanding is available). There is, somehow, despite all the western media-coverage of the Bosnian crisis, a lack of a context out of which to react to the war(s) and the siege.

I suggest, therefore, that the Bosnian crisis, for the western observer, is not in Sarajevo. Rather, it resides amid the various and conflicting representations of the crisis. This is not to trivialise, appropriate, or mock the suffering of the Sarajevan people, but to point to the fact that the west lacks a place in which to enter into critical evaluation; the number of issues and conflicting discourses seem overwhelming. And due to the shifting ground of these representations, a crisis of interpretation emerges for the western observer, frustrating their desire for a coherent interpretation of the crisis.

Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo, I argue, if considered within the aesthetic economy of Beckett's text (in the historical and political context of a contemporary European city under siege), rather than another western political and ideological representation of the siege, offers an intriguing and insightful commentary on the west's relationship to the Bosnian crisis, which is not available elsewhere. And in this manner, the production politically reads the ambiguity of the west in relation to this particular complex, political and distant crisis.

The aesthetic economy of the text abstractly enables a western observer some insight into what it is to be under siege, by dramatizing the process of disorientation at work within a siege, both literally in Sarajevo, and metaphorically in the west, in terms of inadequate western representations and interpretations of the situation. In doing this, Sontag's production identifies and paradoxically clarifies the process of disorientation

that occurs among western observers amid conflicting western representations of a complex, cultural, political and ideological distant crisis, rather than adding to that process of disorientation by providing yet another western version of the situation.

Such clarification is paradoxical because Beckett's text, in this specific milieu, articulates the confusing inability to assimilate the process and effect of given disorientation. It does so in its dramatization of Vladimir and Estragon's anxiety amid a disorienting situation in which the surroundings and actions are familiar —the repeated action of waiting for Mr. Godot in the same location— but the outcome is somehow unfamiliar —Mr. Godot's continual non-arrival. Such disorientation parallels that of the relationship between the pre-siege lives and besieged lives of Sarajevan civilians, who are surrounded by the familiar landscape of their home city, yet now view that city against an unfamiliar backdrop of continued destruction. And such disorientation also parallels the relationship between western familiarity with the physical atrocities of the Bosnian crisis and their unfamiliarity with the actuality of those atrocities and the political and historical context of the war(s), and their role in the siege.

The production can be seen to enact, therefore, the shifting, ghost-like abstract qualities of various and conflicting representations of this complex situation, which appear to offer cohesive narratives of the Bosnian crisis. The production tantalises a distanced western audience with the expectation of meaningful interpretation, yet its aesthetic economy simultaneously disturbs and questions the very possibility of meaningful interpretation. In addition to the paradoxical dramatization of disorientation, this particular production of Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* simultaneously dramatizes a paradoxical will-to-interpret, in the apparently futile resolve of Vladimir and Estragon's decision to wait for Mr. Godot. This is paradoxical because *Waiting for Godot* dramatizes a will-to-interpret: Vladimir and Estragon's attempt to account for their situation, when there is no information available to enable them to do so. This

paradoxical will-to-interpret parallels the frustrated desires of distanced western observers to obtain a coherent interpretation of the crisis.

Sontag's production, therefore, both exemplifies and problematizes the west's understanding of its position in relation to the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia. Beckett's acontextual, apolitical and ahistorical theatricalization of indefinite, apparently purposeless actions in *Waiting For Godot*, exemplifies the dislocation from the actuality of happenings —the distance of the western observer from real, felt suffering of the Bosnian people. *Waiting For Godot* also dramatizes that dislocation, while distancing one from the actuality of happenings, simultaneously creates frustrating intimations that something horrible is happening. And these frustrating intimations are all the more disturbing because the horror manifests itself abstractly and does not offer any tangible means of intervening in that horror. Such dislocation, therefore, reduces agency.

Yet Beckett's text simultaneously problematizes this reduction in agency. This reduction or lack of agency (sense of hopelessness) can be seen as a quasi accomplice to the continuation of something horrible. Beckett's text, in this context, exemplifies the complex ethical dilemma at work in the western observer's relationship to distanced post cold-war crisis. However, Beckett's text also problematizes such complex lack of resolve by dramatizing the will-to-act, despite continued disorientation and dashed hope, apparent in Vladimir and Estragon's continued wait for Mr. Godot. Beckett's text dramatizes the suffering involved in the indefinite conflict between the desire to act and the perceived inability to act:

> **VLADIMIR**: Well? Shall we go.
>
> **ESTRAGON**: Yes, let's go.
>
> *They do not move.* *Curtain* (61).

Not having seen Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo, I can only imagine that Sarajevan audience members, having watched the besieged bodies of the Sarajevan actors perform the paradoxical actions of "waiting" and "hoping" in Beckett's play, might leave Sarajevo's Youth Theatre with the tacit understanding that they have just witnessed the entirety of what it is to live under siege in a contemporary European city, which just a decade earlier staged the Winter Olympics. I can, however, suggest that my methodological approach to the study of this event demonstrates that this particular staging of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo offers an aesthetic enactment of the abstract processes experienced by western observers in their "representational" relationship to the political, ideological and ethical narratives which surround the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia. And argue, therefore, that the production, approached as a cultural phenomenon, presents the western observer with a way of "being" in Sarajevo, in the context of their own disoriented relationship to the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia. *Waiting For Godot,* in this particular historical and political context of besieged Sarajevo, I argue, also articulates the perplexity of contemporary post cold-war European crisis. I approach Sontag's production, then, as a means of demonstrating the various and conflicting western representations of the crisis, and as a means of dramatizing the contradictions inherent in those representations.

1.2. Sontag's Production and the Politics of Western Theatre

The relationship of Sontag's production to the current theoretical debate surrounding the politics of western theatre is also a crucial part of this study. As mentioned above, Sontag's production emerges "betwixt-and-between" a complex entanglement of discourses. Sontag's production also emerges at an specific historical moment in which the political and social efficacy of live performance, coupled with its place within contemporary society is subject to rigorous questioning. Significantly, Sontag's production, staged amid actual social and political crisis in Sarajevo, is

historically located against a theoretical backdrop in which the very concepts of social and political theatre in the west are in crisis.

Therefore, in my consideration of the relationship between Sontag's production and the current debate surrounding the politics of western theatre, this study is specifically concerned with how Sontag's production might be theorized in the context of the current theoretical debate questioning the social and political efficacy of western theatre, and challenging and/or redefining the inherited terms of aesthetic/political praxis. That is, how might Sontag's production be theoretically conceived of as a means of staging and as a form of social and political intervention in the west's self-understanding in relation to the siege in Sarajevo, rather than another western, political and ideological representation of the Bosnian crisis and the west's relationship to it? And how might the production identify and critique the position(s) of western observers in relation to the crisis? And, finally, how might Sontag's production redefine or re-examine aesthetic/political praxis in a contemporary theoretical context that challenges the historical, inherited relationship of the terms, "political" and "aesthetic," mentioned above in my brief discussion of the traditional interpretations of the relationship between aesthetics and politics.

I argue, that Sontag's production of *Waiting For Godot* in besieged Sarajevo yields a unique articulation of the complexities at work in a contemporary theorization of social and political theatre in the post cold-war west. However, a strategic theorization of Sontag's production, I argue, offers a contemporary poetics of social and political theatre in the west. This particular production of *Waiting For Godot* offers such a poetics because the performance of Beckett's text in this specific milieu, both *raises* and *stages* the perplexing contradictions inherent within the debate surrounding the possibility of contemporary aesthetic/political praxis and theory, yet simultaneously offers a means of "being" within those contradictions.[6] The staging of the inherent contradictions within this debate produces a means of apprehending these contradictions,

and giving them a (paradoxically) coherent form in which to perceive such complexity more clearly. That is, the hermetic aesthetic form of Beckett's text appears to enable the theoretical contradictions, inherent in the contemporary debate surrounding aesthetic/political praxis and theory, to be resolved. This appears to be the case because these theoretical contradictions are considered within the rigid-textual structure of *Waiting For Godot.* However, once these theoretical contradictions begin to be interrogated at various points of the coherent structure, the hermetic, rigid-textual structure of the text begins to disintegrate. The theoretical contradictions, therefore, lose the more simple appearance they had, prior to the formal investigation of Beckett's text. Therefore, it is important to note that the aesthetic structure of the text is a strategic, rather than absolute, means of apprehending the theoretical contradictions of aesthetic/political praxis and theory.

Beckett's text, therefore, offers a strategic position in which to perhaps respond to these theoretical contradictions critically. This is distinct from being overwhelmed and ultimately submerged beneath them. This theatrical event, therefore, productively contributes to the field of theoretical studies in the theatre, and specifically to the on-going project of redefining and re-examining aesthetic/political praxis and theory, within the cultural context of postmodernity.

1.2.1. Theorizing the Theatre

In order to demonstrate how Sontag's production dialogues with, and is historically located within, the current debate surrounding the politics of western theatre, I will briefly outline significant factors which have historically informed this debate.

The most prevalent debate among theorists and practitioners of modern western theatre, as Marvin Carlson points out in his useful study, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present* (1993), "has been over whether the theatre should be viewed primarily as an engaged social phenomenon or as a

politically indifferent aesthetic artefact (454). This continuing debate is concerned with the way in which the theatre is theorized: how the theatrical event is conceived in relation to its historical, political and cultural moment of production.

In the light of this debate, two clear theorizations of theatrical performance emerge. Firstly, theatrical performance as a material social and cultural event which can be broken down into a series of social, cultural and ideological transactions which occur in a specific social and historical context. And secondly, theatrical performance as a less overtly materialist phenomenon, which momentarily involves the spectator and the performer in shared accidental experiences which are not immediately traceable in their respective social and cultural contexts. This debate, which operates in the form of dialogue and negotiation over whether the aesthetic stoops or rises to the political realm, continues to inform even the most recent theories of the theatre.

This dialogue, which implicitly negotiates the social and political efficacy and role of western theatre presently emerges in the contemporary context of a recent theoretical disillusionment towards, or re-evaluation of, the contemporary art-work's (in)capacity to effect political, social and historical change.[7] This contemporary theoretical disillusionment towards, or re-evaluation of, the contemporary art-work's (in)capacity to effect political social and historical change, specifically relates to a more general western, historical, political and cultural (non)crisis in the contemporary study of western culture.

This contemporary study is struggling to find articulation amid the various cultural debates enacted in the interactive relationship between the categories known as "modernism" and "postmodernism," "modernity" and "postmodernity." It is not the purpose of this study to offer a thorough account of the historical emergence of the complex debates which surround the definitions of these problematic terms. However, these terms do begin to describe the western cultural moment of which this study is a part. These terms also provide a theoretical context and vocabulary in which to frame

and articulate a contemporary understanding of how western theatre might conceive of itself in political and social terms in this current historical and cultural moment. What follows, therefore, is a brief outline of what these terms, as I understand them, involve. I do this in order to determine the theoretical complexities involved in articulating a contemporary western political and social poetics of live performance in the context of postmodernism, and to clarify how Sontag's production might be considered political without reifying traditional terms of aesthetic/political praxis. And how Beckett's text, in the specific context of besieged Sarajevo and the western observers' dislocated relationship to that siege, dramatizes the perplexity involved in the contemporary study of crisis within western culture.

1.2.2. The Postmodern Mode of Cultural Inquiry

I have described the categories of modernism and postmodernism as ironic in the first instance because the two terms relate reciprocally to one another. Neither term is fixed. Each term functions, therefore, as a referent for the others' utterance. The term "postmodernism" connotes, as Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan articulate in their introduction to "Postmodernism" (1992), a focus for much lively and often controversial debate about the nature of contemporary culture... as well as providing a catch-all term for the whole condition of late capitalist society itself" (181).[8] The term describes a contemporary critical mode of cultural inquiry. It distinguishes itself from previous traditional studies of culture as it sets in motion a "heterogeneous interweaving of questions which escape any singular or unified answer" (Easthope and McGowan 181). It seeks to expose and interrogate the contradictions apparently inherent within traditional epistemologies which may have un-critically and unselfconsciously claimed that the chaotic fragmentation enacted in a given society somehow conforms directly to a given universal order.

Simultaneously, however, postmodernist critiques of contemporary culture remain vigilantly aware that their critique itself emerges within the very culture which it is critiquing. A postmodernist critique, therefore, is aware that it gains its basic vocabulary and epistemological position from the culture of which it is a part, despite the fact that it may simultaneously challenge that vocabulary and epistemology. This self-conscious form of critique admits that while it subverts and undermines contemporary culture, it also subverts and undermines itself, and the very notion of objective critique. The mode of postmodernism, therefore, understands that there exists no position outside of culture from which to offer an objective critique. In short, each postmodernist statement concerning culture is a reaction to that culture; each reaction is contingent upon and therefore intimately related to the action (cultural position) which it is reacting against. A postmodernist critique of contemporary culture re-configures the various elements of that culture; it does not claim to revolutionise that culture.

Linda Hutcheon comments in her study, *The Politics of Postmodernism,* "Postmodernism's distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale commitment to doubleness or duplicity. In many ways it is an even-handed process because postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge" (Hutcheon 181).[9] This paradoxical relationship to culture that the postmodernist critique enacts calls for an extremely sophisticated mode of inquiry, be it located in articulating the theory of postmodernism by examining the condition of contemporary western society (postmodernity), or the actual practice of postmodernist aesthetics (theatre, literature and the visual arts). Such a mode of inquiry must, in the process of deconstructing contemporary society, simultaneously enact its own deconstruction. The postmodern mode of inquiry, therefore, becomes both the subject and object of its critique. It is the paradoxical complexity inherent within this postmodern mode of inquiry that much of the

controversy surrounding the terms "modernism/ modernity" and "postmodernism/ postmodernity" lies.

The work of Linda Hutcheon articulates perhaps most clearly what the postmodern mode of inquiry involves.[10] Hutcheon articulates that the concept of originality is antithetical to the postmodern project, as originality seems to demand an objective, extra-relational position: a position which the postmodern critique denies. A postmodern mode of inquiry, therefore, cannot pretend an original style. It must incorporate, yet simultaneously critique, the various styles upon which contemporary western culture is built, be they epistemological (that is, the various manners in which knowledge is perceived and interpreted) or practical (theatre, literature, and the visual arts).

Hutcheon argues that the self-referential forms of pastiche, parody and irony provide the most appropriate explicitly inter-textual styles for a postmodern mode of inquiry. Simultaneously, the traditional hierarchies "between discreet disciplines of cultural investigation or within the cultural debate itself" (Easthope and McGowan "Postmodernism" 182) are collapsed within these ironic modes of postmodern inquiry.

However, it is argued that these kinds of postmodernist inquiries, yield an ahistorical, apolitical mode of critique. If postmodernism is to follow this constantly self-undermining mode of inquiry, it simultaneously loses its sense of historical identity and its political potency, and can often give rise to an "anything goes" celebration of postmodern disillusionment. Without this historical and political perspective, it has been suggested, a postmodern approach to the study of culture cannot ever effect social and political change, and simply reproduces the workings of dominant, western late-capitalist market places.

Fredric Jameson comments in his influential study, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*:

> If the ideas of a ruling class were once the dominant (or hegemonic) ideology of bourgeois society, the advanced capitalist countries today are now a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm. Faceless masters continue to inflect the economic strategies which constrain our existences, but no longer need to impose their speech (or are henceforth unable to); and the postliteracy of the late capitalist world reflects, not only the absence of any great collective project, but also the unavailability of the older national language itself (197).

It seems, then, that a postmodern mode of inquiry which inhabits, dialogues with and exploits the various historic and cultural styles available, begins to simply mimic the consumerism of late-capitalist society. It surrenders the notion of any form of resistance to an exchange economy which reduces everything to, and simultaneously dictates, its market-value. Jameson suggests that such postmodernist critiques give rise to the "problem of micropolitics"(197). That is, they dismantle the "platform of unified struggle" (Jameson 182), in their denial of any cohesive identity, which in turn fragments and disables the plight of the socially, historically and politically oppressed. Perceived in this context, the postmodern mode of inquiry appears to deny historical and political agency.

Interestingly, it is at this point in the debate (that is, the point at which the historical and political potency of the postmodern mode of inquiry is questioned), that the historicity of the term postmodernism becomes explicit. Postmodernism, as its name enacts, is built on the legacy of modernism. The postmodern self-referential forms of pastiche, parody and irony owe much to the mode of modernism.

Very simplistically, the modernist mode of inquiry began to articulate itself largely in response to the developments of the first world war. It began to appropriate non-traditional narrative forms and registers into aesthetic responses in order to radicalise and politicize the aesthetic. Despite its radical and political claims, the modernist mode

of inquiry, however, continued to implicate and refer to certain apparently given constants; that is, certain reals: the artist, subjectivity, time, history and art.

Postmodernism, however, breaks with the referent of the real, perceiving concepts such as the artist, history, time and art, as grounded in ideology and (like everything else) as products of the social and political frameworks which precede and surround them. While postmodernism does acknowledge its indebtedness to previous historical epistemological modes of inquiries it does not demonstrate an uncritical nostalgia towards the past.

The vigilant self-awareness that the term postmodernism connotes, does not allow any critique of the postmodernist mode of inquiry to pass without interrogation. As Easthope and McGowan outline, the objections to postmodernism become even more complex:

> While the disparate struggles of women, gays, blacks, colonials and postcolonials in and of themselves seem encouraged by the unmourned loss of a simplistic 'real', demanding a plural micropolitics of resistance, such activists have often resisted the incorporation of their work within the rubric of postmodernism on the grounds that its resolute undermining of the referent of the real diffuses their very own 'real' political agendas. The contradictions of postmodernism are seen to be both subversive and reconfirming of traditionally oppressive systems of thought and practice (182).

Despite the very real problems with the term postmodernism, as outlined above, the postmodernist mode of inquiry does de-naturalise the relationship between the sign and the referent. That is to say, the apparently given logical relationship between a term and that to which it refers is questioned. This particular effect of the postmodern study of culture has significant repercussions for the bourgeois category of the normal autonomous subject. Through the postmodern insight into the ideological grounding of

what constitutes a social norm in terms of subjectivity, the notion of a fixed immutable universal selfhood is challenged by the multiple and various complexities of subjectivities which emerge within different historical and social contexts. Although this might appear to have destructive effects in terms of social and political potency, it does provide a vigilant critique of the legitimacy of any form of social and ideological meaning; it also opens up the boundaries within the field of thinking, as the seemingly closed, fundamental and non-negotiable systems of knowledge which pertain to the way in which western culture has historically interpreted its relationship to itself, are disturbed.

In this context, postmodernist study ethically operates in direct opposition to a western late capitalist culture which seeks to "normalise the relation between signs and their referents" (Easthope and McGowan 183). Postmodernist study posits the notion that the referent is an effect of its sign, rather than its source, therefore de-stabilising and complicating the relation between signs and there referents. It is clear, however, that the postmodernist mode of inquiry and the social condition of postmodernity operate within and simultaneously enact the economy of debate and critical interrogation which pervades contemporary western cultural critique.

1.2.3. Theatre and Postmodernism

In the context of this contemporary theoretical debate, the traditional theorizations of the theatre as either an "engaged social phenomenon," or a "politically indifferent aesthetic artefact," are both challenged. In the context of postmodernism, it seems that theatre can no longer be uncritically conceived of as an "engaged social phenomenon" which claims to successfully critique is own moment of social and historical production, without understanding that it too has been constructed by the very ideological discourses that it attempts to stand in opposition against. Similarly, contemporary western theatre can not conceive of itself as a "politically indifferent aesthetic artefact," as the

postmodern theoretical context makes explicit that any production clearly emerges within an actual historical and political context, and that context (to a significant extent) constructs a given theatrical live performance.

In the wake of a postmodernist mode of cultural inquiry, the present moment of (critically minded) western theatre praxis and theory, must primarily question the previously supposed immediacy of live performance.[11] That is, it must question the way in which information is perceived and received by the performer and the spectator, rather than construct its theoretical premises on the assumption that information is perceived and received in the same way by all performers and all spectators within the same performance space. Contemporary western theatre praxis and theory must also consider its inability to unselfconsciously-consciously locate itself oppositionally to the culture of which it is a part. The postmodern mode of inquiry, therefore, challenges the traditional terms of aesthetic/political praxis.

In the cultural context of postmodernity, however, the majority of western theatre praxis is perhaps generally perceived as either pure entertainment and/or escapism (a means of relaxation and enjoyment, without questioning or challenging a contemporary social imagination), an expensive indulgence for the culturally elite, or simply an irrelevant medium for the fast paced, consumer-oriented 1990's.[12] In the context of apparently more immediately relevant, fast-moving successful contemporary mediums (Quentin Tarantino's movie, *Pulp Fiction*, or explicitly participatory video games, like *Sonic The Hedgehog* for example), the theatre seems a particularly slow and outdated medium.

As Johannes Birringer comments in his recent study, *Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism* (1993), "Theatre may not have a future anymore, and certainly the idea of a global American postmodernist culture, with Universal Studios and Disneyland as late museums of frontier's end, suggests a profoundly anti-theatrical conception of empty space" ("The Postmodern Scene" 4). Birringer's statement acknowledges both the

uncertain function of contemporary live theatrical performance in the context of postmodernity, and to the potential disappearance of an audience for live theatrical performance in the next century.

In addition, the steady decrease in public funding for theatre in the contemporary west, has meant that contemporary live performance must think particularly seriously about its market, in order to survive financially. Whether productions look to the perceived desires of their potential audiences in order to secure enough box-office returns, or appeal to the public spirit of private corporations for sponsorship in return for advertising space, the majority of contemporary western theatre has certain explicit political agendas to fulfill before the curtain rises. Both the social condition of postmodernity and the postmodern mode of theoretical inquiry have, therefore, significantly influenced contemporary western theatre praxis and theory.

In the context of a contemporary western culture that does not immediately demonstrate any desire or any faith in a theatre which might claim to offer a means of social and political change, and an economic environment which is not particularly favourable to potentially politically innovative productions, politically oriented contemporary western theatre praxis and theory incorporates a continued remembrance of its own threatened existence into its own performance strategies. It does this by rendering a particular production's complicity with the market forces and cultural hegemony which it may attempt to critique, explicit.[13]

It seems that traditional theories of social and political theatre, which posit the theatre as a means of precipitating political and social critique and subsequent change, are being re-configured to include a kind of vigilant self- consciousness of their contemporary political impotency. That is to say, contemporary socially and politically engaged theatre praxis and theory seems to ironically display a sense of its own inadequacy to effect social and political critique and change: it seems the only way western theatre can be politically and socially engaged anymore is to proclaim its

aesthetic nostalgia and flaunt its inability to significantly challenge the contemporary western social imagination.

However, this defeatist and dangerous approach to contemporary theatre praxis and theory, despite the postmodernist assault on traditional concepts of political and social art, I argue still locates those traditional concepts as fixed referents in order to foreground the social and political impotency of contemporary western theatre praxis and theory. That is, this approach implies that successful political and social contemporary theatre praxis and theory must meet the traditional criteria of political art. In this context, therefore, this approach implies that revolutionary change in the west is still possible, while self-consciously mocking the idealisation inherent in conventional categories of social change in the context of postmodernity. This approach seems to neutralise the theatre's ability and desire to be politically active by addressing only the surface aspects of political and cultural problems as they emerge in postmodernity.

It is in the above milieu, in which the following question emerges: how might theatre praxis and theory function politically (without uncritically or unwittingly returning to traditional, inherited conceptions of political art) in an cultural environment which falls under the ironically anonymous rubric of postmodernity? And in how might Sontag's production of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo, be carefully, critically and strategically theorized as contemporary political theatre?

Birringer's introductory essay, "The Postmodern Scene," which prefaces his larger study of contemporary postmodern live performances, gives a brief overview of the various theoretical dilemmas which confront the most recent postmodern, western theatre praxis and theory. Despite Birringer's celebration of the necessary critical rigors inherent within postmodern modes of cultural inquiry, which have brought about much of the ironic historical and political self-consciousness of contemporary western live performance, he is particularly successful at highlighting some of the acute

contradictions of postmodern discourse as they emerge in the specific context of live performance.

Birringer articulates the distance that a postmodern theoretical cultural understanding, which speaks in a "hyperreal" vocabulary of "dead styles and simulated experiences" ("The Postmodern Scene" 20), displays from a western culture which constantly incorporates "the dirty reality of death and of the surveillance technologies installed to control it [which] do not indicate... a collapse of social hierarchies or normative definitions, nor an abstraction of he body as the site on which powerful symbolic inversions of cultural values and roles are acted out" (23). Birringer exposes the rhetorical power of a postmodern discourse which may seductively persuade critical cultural analysis away from the matter in hand: lived cultural experiences. All the postmodern talk of late-capitalist western culture, saturated with images and manufactured desires, often denies that an inhabitant of western culture may sense their own distaste or distance from their daily lives in any meaningful way.

Birringer's exposé is particularly useful in the context of live theatrical performance. His introductory essay, "The Postmodern Scene," therefore, functions as a check against the temptation to construct a contemporary western poetics of theatre praxis and theory which falls under the totalising narratives of a critical discourse, which "having lost historical consciousness and an understanding of art's relationship to politics and the community, proceeds to theatricalize all its surfaces" (Birringer 41). That is, conventional theatrical categories of illusion all too easily modulate into the theatrical, simulated vocabulary of postmodernism. The body of the performer too may easily become the archetypal, ironically hegemonic metaphorical trope of the postmodern-body. And although the postmodern, theatrical, simulated vocabulary can be usefully deployed in the context of theorizing live performance, to construct a contemporary poetics of western theatre praxis and theory which embraces itself as the quintessential hyperreal text of postmodernity, is to critically impoverish the aesthetic and cultural complexities

of live performance. A contemporary poetics of this kind would reductively provide a desolate backdrop against which intellectual late-capitalist society-members might lament their eternal impotency in the context of sheer cultural banality.

Birringer's useful study clearly articulates that the social condition of postmodernity, while it displays the social pervasiveness of consumerism and mediated narratives of reality, it simultaneously incorporates social and political struggles, of which the Bosnian crisis provides a tangible example. Birringer recognises that a contemporary poetics of western theatre praxis and theory that attempts to define itself in the context of a postmodernity which denies its own historical and political context, will misunderstand the potential of postmodern live performance. The conflation of traditional theatrical categories of illusion with the postmodern cultural concept of simulated experience, ignores the historical and political contexts of these traditional theatrical categories and overlook the theatre's contingency on the past.

Philip Auslander, in his study of performance within postmodernity, *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance* (1992), shares a similar critical position to Birringer. Although both acknowledge the usefulness of the pluralist poetics of a postmodernist critique —a critique which encourages rigorous questioning of culturally constructed norms, yet simultaneously evokes a "culture that encodes both artistic discourses and their audiences and that is seemingly capable of absorbing any disruptive action into the economy of its signs" (Auslander "Postmodernism and Cultural Politics" 21)— both also advocate that political theatre praxis and theory must continue to consider whether "theatre can produce perceptions and intervene in the ideological repetition within the relationship of the perceivers and the perceived" (Birringer 29), and both imply that "postmodernist political art [is not] something that must be deferred to an indefinite future, but, rather, an ongoing project" (Auslander 28). Birringer and Auslander, therefore, recognise the on-going process of a potentially political western theatre praxis and theory in the context of

postmodernity, and understand the critical necessity to conceive of aesthetic/political praxis in terms other than inherited ones.

It is in this recent theoretical context —the continuing process of a potentially political western theatre praxis and theory, and the critical necessity to conceive of aesthetic/political praxis in terms other than inherited ones— that Sontag's staging of Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo, and my subsequent analysis of the event, relates to the current debate surrounding the politics of western theatre.

1.2.4. *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo as Postmodern Aesthetic Political Praxis

The theorization of this particular staging of *Waiting For Godot* raises immediate pragmatic questions in dialogue with the debate surrounding postmodern aesthetic political praxis. The way the western media has constructed the event (discussed in detail in Chapter One), I argue, has encouraged reifications of the traditional, inherited terms of aesthetic political praxis, rather than a postmodern interrogation of those terms as they emerge in this unique theatrical event, in the existing readings of the production. Sontag's persona —a somewhat famous US citizen, clearly in favour of western European and US intervention in the Balkan war(s), in the context of non-intervention policies of the Western European and US governments— has largely influenced the ideological and political media constructions of the event.[14] In these media constructions, Sontag is clearly positioned as author of the event and as such the production is or is not condoned according to the journalist's relationship to Sontag's own ideological and political predilections in the context of Bosnia.

Approached from this perspective, either non-useful or unanswerable questions are asked of the production: is it morally correct for Sontag to put on a play during extreme political and social crisis, could Sontag justify coming to Sarajevo, living with the Sarajevan people and putting on a play as an expression of solidarity, only to leave and return to her urban comfort in New York City once the production was over, isn't it

pretentious and unthoughtful to stage despair (Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*) in the context of actual despair, should Sontag's production be re-named *Waiting For Clinton*, what can a play do to help the Sarajevan citizens, or put a stop to the killing?

These kinds of questions are certainly posed by readings of the production which locate Sontag and her personal political persuasions at the centre of their interpretation of the event. And these questions implicitly reconstruct the event purely in terms of western preoccupations. That is, whether or not the fighting in the former Yugoslavia really has anything to do with a postmodern, late-capitalist society such as the US?

It seems that because Sontag's production geographically takes place amid acute political and social distress in the form of ethnic conflict, rather than the apparent culturally sophisticated postmodern west, it is approached from a retrospective theoretical position. And interestingly enough, if the production is approached from this perspective, the conflict in the former Yugoslavia is either implicated as an anachronistic pre-modern society, drenched in the blood of ethnic conflict and hatred, which has no history of peaceful multiculturalism or a sophisticated cultural environment, or the city of Sarajevo is understood as the last bastion of western values of religious tolerance and multi-cultural co-habitation which must be saved because it epitomises the west.

The above questions, therefore, misunderstand or simplify the complex international implications of the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia. These questions also overlook the glaring fact that our apparently politically and socially sophisticated late-capitalist western world, also incorporates as Johannes Birringer indicates, "the dirty reality of death and of the surveillance technologies installed to control it [which] do not indicate a collapse of social hierarchies or normative definitions, nor an abstraction of the body as a site on which powerful symbolic inversions of cultural values and roles are acted out ("The Postmodern Scene" 23). Sontag's production, therefore, clearly calls for a more adequate interrogation of its relationship to the Bosnian crisis and the west's role within it, than the above questions suggest.

How then might Sontag's production be understood and theorized in the context of an emerging postmodern aesthetic/political praxis? That is, how can the production be seen to function politically without theorizing the production in terms of the same kinds of non-useful questions outlined above? In order to understand and theorize Sontag's production in the context of an emerging postmodern aesthetic/political praxis, I argue, it is important to both understand that the production emerges amid two clear contexts, and that the production might usefully be interrogated through the aesthetic workings of Beckett's text.

Firstly, Sontag's production, therefore, emerges "betwixt and between" two contexts. Sontag's production emerges amid the extreme political and social crisis within besieged Sarajevo. And in addition, despite Sontag's claim, that the production would enable her to "[yield] something that would exist only in Sarajevo, [something] that would be made and consumed there" ("Waiting For Godot in Sarajevo" 87), her personal position (a US citizen, with a high public-profile, expressing her solidarity with the Sarajevan people in the context of US and western European government's non-intervention policies) means that the production would not be something that "would exist only in Sarajevo." Clearly, Sontag's production also has a western spectatorship. Sontag's production also emerges, then, in the context of the numerous ideological representations of the Sarajevan siege (which make up the west's narration of the crisis in Bosnia).

Understanding that Sontag's production emerges "betwixt and between" these two contexts —one geographical, and one largely "representational"— demonstrates that a critical theorization of Sontag's production cannot forget that the production simultaneously incorporates the undermining, yet hyperreal discourses of postmodernity, alongside the discourses of death and acute political and social struggle more often associated with earlier stages in cultural history and theoretical cultural inquiry. Additionally, understanding the two contexts in which Sontag's production emerges,

enables one to consider how the production incorporates its western spectatorship into its aesthetic and performance strategies, and thus provides a means of politically interrogating their position.

Secondly, I argue, that alongside an interrogation of the historical and political context of the production, an aesthetic/political postmodern understanding of Sontag's production must also incorporate the abstract, aesthetic workings of the production (in the production's performance of Beckett's text), in order to fully articulate how this aesthetic, live performance offers a unique insight into the west's self-understanding in relation to the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia.

In the context of the numerous and conflicting ideological representations of the Sarajevan siege, *Waiting For Godot* emerges as a relatively available text. That is, Sontag's decision to stage Beckett's modern classic enables the western spectator access to the production, as distinct from the simulated media representations of the event. Beckett's play provides the common ground between the Sarajevan production and a western spectator with some interest in the theatre and some awareness of the crisis in Bosnia.

Postmodern aesthetic/political praxis, I argue, must, therefore, incorporate into its political strategies the aesthetic workings of the performance text within the processes of live performance. A performative re-imagining and re-contextualising of Beckett's text amid the crisis of interpretation which emerges within the conflicting western representations of the crisis in Bosnia, I argue, politically yields an exemplification and problematization of what it is to "be" a western observer amid this crisis of interpretation in relation to the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia. The aesthetic economy of Sontag's production, I argue, makes available a political interrogation of the outside perspective of a western spectator, which is not available within the political discourses which surround the event.

My understanding of the importance of the aesthetic workings of live performance bears an historical relation to the theoretical and practical work of Peter Brook, Richard Schechner and Victor Turner. Their work shares a similar premise that a theatre which might effect social and political change is conditional upon the loosing of the primary psychological power of performance. This psychological power is located, they suggest, in the performance's generation of a constant open-ended flow of raw, ritualistic energies. Building on the metaphysical, visionary poetics of the stage, exemplified in the work of Antonin Artaud, and later, Jerry Grotowski, these more recent theorists pursue a ritualistic, aesthetic approach to the study and practice of Theatre.[15] Challenging the perhaps more explicit socially and politically engaged theatre (exemplified in the Theatre of Brecht) these theorists and practitioners of performance locate the subversive potential of the stage in its ability to enable the spectator to recognise themselves as having shared a communal experience with the other social beings within the same performance space. Peter Brook, for example, in his famous study, *The Empty Space* (1968), theorizes an immediate theatre, which can unite spectator and performance in the minds of its participants. These theorists, therefore, foreground the aesthetic qualities of performance in their understanding of a theatre which might effect social and political change. It is necessary to note, however, that my articulation of the importance and subsequent theorization of the aesthetic workings of Sontag's production, emerges in the wake of postmodern modes of cultural inquiry.

1.2.5. The Contemporary Potency of the Aesthetic Category

Despite the general current disillusionment towards the political potency of the aesthetic artefact, as Terry Eagleton comments in his introduction to his fascinating study, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*(1990), theories of the aesthetic have clearly occupied a prevalent position throughout the history of European philosophy. Even in our own century, Eagleton writes, "Heidegger's esoteric meditations culminate in a kind

of aestheticised ontology, while the legacy of Western Marxism from Lukacs to Adorno allots to art a theoretical privilege surprising at first glance for a materialist current of thought" ("Introduction" 1). The continuing theoretical attention paid to the aesthetic at an historical and cultural moment in the west at which it seems no longer relevant urges, as Eagleton suggests, a thorough and critical (re)investigation into the aesthetic category as it emerges in the contemporary western historical moment.

The historical category of the aesthetic certainly pertains to the traditional ideological concepts of reconciliation and beauty, which as Eagleton, and other contemporary radical cultural critics of the left comment, are concepts inextricably linked to bourgeois political control.[16] Perceived in this manner the aesthetic appears too entrenched in dominant ideology to be considered as a radical mode of contemporary cultural reflection or intervention. However, the category of the aesthetic simultaneously incorporates an historical direct relationship to human everyday experience and specific creative endeavour. This direct relationship presents a potent "irreducible particularity" (Eagleton "Introduction" 2) inherent within the art-object, which disallows the aesthetic category to be reduced to "a direct set of ideological functions"(4), and stripped entirely of its radicality. This "irreducible particularity,"(2) located amidst its undeniable abstract and ideological grounding, suggests that the aesthetic category, as it emerges in the current western historical moment, must enact an ambiguous yet attractive and persuasive theoretical potency.

The political potency of the aesthetic's "irreducible particularity,"(2) however, itself presents something of a paradox. On the one hand it claims the potency of the theoretical value of an art-object which pertains to the specifically human and, therefore, the concrete. On the other, in the very enactment of the articulation of that theoretical potency and value of its art object, it denies the "irreducible particularity"(2) inherent within the art-object which gave it theoretical social and political leverage over alienated cultural discourses. Eagleton suggests:

> Aesthetics is thus always a contradictory, self-undoing sort of project, which in promoting the theoretical value of its object risks emptying it of exactly that specificity or ineffability which was thought to rank among its most precious features. The very language which elevates art offers perpetually to undermine it (2).

Eagleton's statement implicates the apparent enigmatic quality of the "irreducible particularity"(2) inherent within the aesthetic. The aesthetic, therefore, seems to make available something which is non-presentable: something which cannot be reduced to the conceptual system that is language. Something always remains and that remainder serves to problematize and disturb that which can be articulated within theories of the aesthetic. This enigmatic quality attributed to the aesthetic can function either to mystify or de-mystify the theoretical potency that the aesthetic might yield.

The "irreducible particularity"(2) inherent within the aesthetic, then, might cause the aesthetic category to re-emerge as the (overly)mystical, untapped touchstone of politically and socially effective cultural critique. However, the inability of this "irreducible particularity"(2) to be successfully and precisely articulated causes the aesthetic to be mystified and renders it socially and politically ineffective. On the other hand, this "irreducible particularity"(2) might cause the aesthetic category to re-emerge as a politically and socially redundant (overly)de-mystified esoteric project which yields nothing but inherent presumptions about the moral didacticism of high culture: presumptions rooted in bourgeois ideology. It is apparent that the contemporary understanding of the aesthetic should precipitate a critical stance towards both of these vulgar perspectives on the aesthetic.

Clearly the aesthetic emerges differently within different historical contexts; the cultural positions it occupies within a given society provide, as Eagleton argues, certain insights into the manner in which the current political hegemony is perpetuated.

Contemporary aesthetic theory, I would argue however, while acknowledging the political and social ideologies which enable the production of the aesthetic artefact, must vigilantly enact the constant negotiation between the mystifying and de-mystifying implications of the aesthetic's "irreducible particularity"(2). It is within this process of constant negotiation that the contemporary critical deployment of the aesthetic might elicit its most insightful cultural critique and yield a site of cultural intervention.

Placed in this historical context of the aesthetic, the aesthetic workings of Beckett's text in the context of Sontag's production, clearly emerge amid a complex historical and ideological dialogue. Perceived in this manner, it becomes clear that Sontag's production cannot be effectively interrogated by simply locating its relationship to the current de-politicization of the art-work within the economy of binary opposition. That is to say, by suggesting that the event, because it takes place within the context of social and political crisis, demonstrates that the art-work can function politically. Such simplistic interrogation misunderstands the complexity of the historic and cultural relationship between the aesthetic and the political. In addition, this form of interrogation, which simply implies that aesthetic and political theory and praxis are directly interchangeable (that is, art is political, and therefore, politics is art), suggests that aesthetic and political linguistic economies function in identical ways.

The production inhabits an aesthetic position within politics and culture and, therefore, explicitly dramatizes the intensely complex relationships between aesthetic and political theory and, in addition, aesthetic and political praxis. Understood within this locale, the economy of the aesthetic and the economy of the political, certainly inform one another (as they emerge amidst one another), yet simultaneously they maintain a distinct separateness from one another: they are not directly interchangeable. There are certain insights, therefore, made available in one economy at one specific point in their relationship which are not made available in the other. A postmodern theorization of the aesthetic/political praxis that is Sontag's production, therefore, must interrogate the

production at the points at which this complex relationship manifests itself; that is, the points at which the aesthetic implications of the text in performance intersect with the political implications of the siege in Sarajevo in relation to the west's involvement in the crisis.

The aesthetic category, therefore, may gain social and political currency within the social context of postmodernity for two specific reasons. It pertains to the human and the concrete, maintaining an "irreducible particularity"(Eagleton "Introduction" 2), and it therefore resists ideological reduction. And it bears testimony to the actual practice of human energies, therefore suggesting and enacting some form of human subjectivity. Against the backdrop of the disorienting critical vigilance, yet all-encompassing rubric of the postmodern mode of contemporary cultural study, the aesthetic might seem to immediately provide a place of resistance.

The postmodern mode of inquiry, however demands that the components of the aesthetic which appear to yield political and social agency within postmodernity must be subject to its vigilant critique. Firstly, the "irreducible particularity"(2) emerges as a contradictory category within the aesthetic. That is, while it presents concrete particularity, it simultaneously denies the presentation of that concrete particularity. Pertaining as it does to the experiential and physical, the "irreducible particularity"(2) of the aesthetic often yields a veiled, mystical form of linguistic expression in absolute antithesis to the concrete particularity which it is attempting to enact. Secondly, by associating the aesthetic's witness to the actual practice of human energies with some form of human subjectivity, one runs the risk of nostalgically harking back to the notion of the modernist real.

Terry Eagleton argues that the aesthetic's most useful potential with reference to the study of contemporary culture lies in its means "of gaining access to certain questions of modern European thought— to light up, from that particular angle [that of the aesthetic] a range of wider, social, political and ethical issues"("Introduction" 1). While I

am in agreement with Eagleton that the aesthetic might provide a different perspective from which to view the issues which he lists, I would argue that the aesthetic's most intriguing potential, within the context of postmodernism, lies in the manner in which it might intervene in contemporary cultural practice and in the study of that contemporary cultural practice. That is, the aesthetic might be seen to function less as a category (a set of pre-determined criteria) and more as a highly complex and self conscious mode of inquiry into the social condition of postmodernity and the postmodern approach to the study of that postmodernity.

The aesthetic, as it emerges in the contemporary western historical and cultural moment, seems to enact the modern/ postmodern dilemma articulated above. A contemporary understanding of the postmodern function of the aesthetic must, as I suggested earlier, be located within the constant negotiation between its mystifying and de-mystifying implications. The aesthetic, used in this way, provides a means of self-consciously and strategically placing a theoretically, socially and politically complex set of issues within the hermetic structure of the aesthetic.

1.2.6. Playing Powerfully

The postmodern debate makes available, at the point of the insecure contemporary (non)identity of the art-work, the intriguing contemporary relationship between the aesthetic and the political. Sontag's production, residing as it does in the context of real political and social crisis, enacts a unique dramatization of the aesthetic within the political and the political within the aesthetic.

I have entitled this aesthetic mode of political theatrical inquiry, "playing powerfully," as the phrase incorporates the self-conscious awareness that Sontag's production might be understood simply as a play in Sarajevo, while simultaneously alluding to the deconstructionist politically disturbing concept of "play."[17] And finally,

the various implications of the term "play" are situated in a close yet uneasy relationship to the concept of power as political and affirmative action.

Sontag's production, therefore, displays unique ideological and actual confluences between besieged Sarajevo and the west, political praxis and theory, and aesthetic praxis and theory. Understood in this context, Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot* in besieged Sarajevo, offers a unique contribution to the on-going project of re-defining and re-examining postmodern/aesthetic political theatre praxis and theory in the west.

Notes

[1] *Sarajevo Ground Zero* (1993) is a film documentary (produced under siege in 1992/1993). It was co-produced by the Sarajevan based film company, *SAGA* and New York based company, *Global Vision*. Under the direction of Ademir Kenovic (SAGA) and Danny Schechter (Global Vision), *Sarajevo Ground Zero* moves between straight footage of the killings in Sarajevo, interviews with various western journalists, Sarajevan artists, Susan Sontag, and clips from various films which have been made in Sarajevo under siege.

Sarajevo Ground Zero attempts to give an objective first-hand account of the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia. The film was presented to US television networks for general release, but was universally refused.

[2] The specific articles I am referring to are, "Reports from the 21st Century: A Sarajevo Interview," "Notes from a trip to Sarajevo" and "Only the Possible: An interview with Susan Sontag." Each of these articles are authored by Erika Munk and appear in *Theater*, 24 (1993).

[3] In the 1980s, a new body of "pragmatic theory" was developing. Marvin Carlson in his important study, *Theories of the Theatre* (1993), suggests that this new body of theory might be distinguished in two general orientations:

> "One, which we might call empirical, bases its methodology on strategies of data analysis drawn from the sciences and social sciences. The other might be called reception aesthetics, from *Rezeptionaesthetik*, developed in Germany during the 1970s (517).

Carlson suggests that this theatre research was based on the "philosophy and logic of science" (517) and was an attempt to disinfect the discipline of the "hermeneutic and other non-analytical dirt" (517). In his study, Carlson gives a critical overview of this theoretical approach, coupled with the more metaphysical and psychoanalytic approaches to the contemporary study of Theatre.

[4] I qualify primary source material as, for example, information directly from participants in the production, photographs of the production, costumes and the director's notebook. I qualify secondary source material as information which is more clearly given from an external observer's perspective on the production: newspaper reports and journal articles fall into this category.

[5] I refer specifically to Herbert Blau's 1957 staging of *Waiting For Godot* at San Quentin Jail, California, and JoAnne Akalaitis's 1984/5 controversial staging of *Endgame*, set in a subway.

[6] I use the term "being" here to articulate what I conceive of as a process of standing amid a constant flow of information. This constant flow of information is both disorienting and overwhelming. The process of actually standing amid this constant flow of information, however, exposes one to the felt disorientation, yet simultaneously enables one to understand that they are standing in a relatively fixed position. This fixed position does not reduce the constant flow of information, but it does somewhat reduce its disorienting impact, in its memory that there are positions which one can inhabit within this overwhelming mass of information. I use the term "being" here to express both fear and jubilation: fear of the overwhelming constant flow of disembodied information, and jubilation at the remembrance that this flow has not completely submerged the position in which one is standing. My use of the term "being" then incorporates absolute security in the context of the constant threat of annihilation.

[7] Stephen C. Foster suggests in his essay, "Crisis As Event: The Avant Garde, Revolution and Catastrophe as Metaphors," that "this progressive disillusionment must be taken into account alongside the avant garde's original, subversive, revolutionary claims - now commonly recognised as utopian projections onto the historical process and as ideological reactions" (11). Foster's statement suggests that this disillusionment towards the radicality of the art-work, simultaneously deconstructs the conventional terms of social and political revolution or transformation, traditionally used to describe the desired mass social effect of politically oriented art.

[8] Jean-Francois Lyotard, in his study, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984), provides an insightful account of what is meant by "late capitalist society" and how it has historically and philosophically come about. Lyotard uses the term, "grand narrative" as his point of difference between contemporary society and late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century western society. Lyotard's term refers to the various constant that have provided societies with a universal reference point: the ultimate point of value which legitimates the manner in which societies structure themselves. Contemporary society, he demonstrates, enacts the breakdown of these "grand narratives." (See particularly Lyotard's section on "Delegitimation": he writes, "The decline of narrative can be seen as an effect of the blossoming of techniques and technologies since the second world war, which has shifted emphasis from the ends of action to its means; it can also be seen as an effect of the redeployment of advanced liberal capitalism after its retreat under the protection of Keynesianism during the period 1930-60, a renewal that has eliminated the communist alternative and valorized the individual enjoyment of goods and services (189)").

The focus on the here and now, coupled with the attention to the , suggests an age of contingency. Contingency simultaneously and paradoxically connotes flux and dependency on a constant. Very generally, it is this paradox, which informs the postmodern condition.

[9] This quotation from Linda Hutcheon is cited by Anthony Easthope and Kate McGowan in "Postmodernism," *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, 181.

[10] For a detailed account of Hutcheon's view of "postmodernism,", please see her study, *The Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988).

[11] I refer to contemporary western theatre practice and theory which continues to consider (albeit within a self-conscious vocabulary) as Johannes Birringer does in *Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism* (1993), "the question of whether critical, intellectual or aesthetic work can transform or liberate the social imagination in our culture ("The Postmodern Scene" 25). That is, western theatre practice and theory, which attempts to negotiate the complex discourses and ramifications of postmodern western culture, in order to offer a means of aesthetic cultural resistance.

[12] Productions which perhaps fall into the category of pure enjoyment and relaxation are Andrew Lloyd-Webber's hit-musicals like *Cats, Phantom of the Opera* and *Midnight Express*. Such productions tend to be extremely financially successful and tremendously popular.

[13] Philip Ausalnder in his study, *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in contemporary American Performance* (1992), mentions the Performance Art of Laurie Anderson, which attempts to imitate the structure of hegemony of postmodernity form within. Auslander quotes Herman Rapaport's reading of Anderson's performance art:

> In performing the hegemony Anderson is also miming it, and in doing so she is releasing or activating resonances...which understand that hegemony's efficacy as a stable equilibrium...In doing so Anderson "performs" the hegemony's illusory unifications and subtly reveals its dissonances and discrepancies, but without necessarily enacting a critical stance of her own, a stance which would be recovered merely as another ideological or theoretical formation intended to dominate a field of relationships (25).

Anderson's performance art, understood in this way, Auslander suggests, "is enormously useful for the discussion of postmodernist political art" (25). Citing the deconstructive work of Jacques

Derrida, however, Auslander also warns of the dangers of this approach to a potential postmodern political art. He articulates that by attempting to problematize a particular cultural position by repeating what is "implicit in the founding concepts of the original problematic, by using against the edifice the instruments or stones available in the house... Here one risks ceaselessly confirming, or consolidating...at an always more certain depth, that which one allegedly deconstructs (Derrida 25). The danger Auslander signs, within the vocabulary of Derrida, is that of a performance art which does mount a genuine critique of a potentially and theoretically hegemonic culture, risks being subsumed within and reinforcing that hegemonic culture.

[14] In a personal interview with Susan Sontag in March 1995, Sontag made her own political position equally clear.

[15] Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) certainly viewed the theatre as a means of revolution, but he believed that theatre could change humanity psychologically rather than socially. Artaud regarded discursive thought as a barrier to the awakening of the body's inner spirit. Marvin Carlson comments, "in Artaud we see the metaphysical concerns of the symbolist and surrealist theories taken to their most radical extension" ("1930-1950" 393). In the manisfestos Artaud wrote in support of his producing organisation , the Theatre Alfred Jarry, he envisioned a theatre that would show audiences the anguishes and concerns of their real lives, where the spectator would undergo a real operation , involving not only their mind, but their senses and their flesh.

The Polish director, Jerzy Grotowski (b. 1933) in his work during the 1960s attempted, Carlson outlines, "to build a new aesthetic for the Theatre, by restoring something of its original purity by creating a 'modern, secular ritual' " ("1965-1980" 455). Grotowski's approach seemed to have nothing in common with literary theatre, which faithfully stages a text in an attempt to carefully present its author's ideas. Rather, Grotowski was seeking to replace lost religious elements of the Theatre by using images and actions that would force the spectator into an emotional involvement. Carlson cites Grotowski as describing this process as "a 'dialectic of derision and apotheosis,' turned towards a system of 'taboos, conventions and accepted values',

which during the production created a 'multiface mirror' by the constant arousal and destruction of these values and taboos" (455). Growtowski's "autonomous" theatre uses the literary text as one source among many, to be freely adapted and transformed.

Growtowski's actors too, differed from those of literary theatre, in which the actor naturalistically represented the character he or she was playing. Grotowski sought to develop what he called an "archetypal" actor, who would be rigorously physically and vocally trained to produce a physical expressiveness that would force the actors' bodies to transcend natural boundaries.

In the theories of both Artaud and Grotowski, the conventional stage is forsaken for smaller more intimate performance spaces. Confronted with the sheer physicality and presence of the actor present, against the economies of convention, the spectator is hoped to be moved to challenge their conception of social reality and convention.

For more information on the theories of Artaud and Grotowski, please see, Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writings* (1988) and Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968).

[16] Terry Eagleton explains, that while he seeks to guard against conspiracy theories of an "eighteenth century bourgeoisie assembled around a table over their claret to dream up the concept of the aesthetic as a solution to their political dilemmas" ("Introduction" 4), he maintains that "certain theoretical concepts are indeed from time to time put to the uses of political power, and sometimes in quite direct ways" (5). That is to say that traditional thresholds of the aesthetic, such as (for example) the autonomy and originality of the artist, coupled with the ability of the art-work to reconcile the chaotic nature of the empirical world, correspond to the bourgeois notion of autonomous subjectivity: that is, the ability of the individual to control his or her circumstances. Very basically, this bourgeois notion of individuality does not account for the various social and political positionings of each subjectivity, and, therefore, ironically suggests that subjectivity is a universal concept. The political implications of such a suggestion deny the category of

subjectivity or individuality to any one who is apparently unable to control their own circumstances and , therefore, the members of the bourgeoisie maintain their political power.

[17] Jacques Derrida, in his influential 1968 study, *Differance* articulates that, "the concept of *play* keeps itself beyond this opposition [the opposition between the lines of philosophical-logical discourse and its symmetrical and integral inverse, empirical-logical discourse] announcing on the eve of philosophy and beyond it, the unity of chance and necessity in calculations without end" (111). Derrida's comment pertains to my earlier discussion of the opening up of traditional boundaries which enables the field of thinking agency as it emerges in different social and political contexts. The concept of *play*, however, also has ahistorical and apolitical implications as it disturbs the referent of the "real."

Chapter One

Representing Sarajevo: Staging Sontag

> No longer can a writer consider that the imperative task is to bring the news to the outside world. The news is out. Plenty of foreign journalists (most of them in favor of intervention, as I am) have been reporting the lies and the slaughter since the beginning of the siege, while the decision of the western European powers and the United States not to intervene remains firm, thereby giving the victory to Serb fascism. I was not under the illusion that going to Sarajevo to direct a play would make me useful in the way I could be if I were a doctor or a water systems engineer. But it was one of the three things I do... (Sontag "Waiting For Godot in Sarajevo" 87).

> The habit of absolute moral certainty in the face of daunting political complexities dies hard with these writers, even in situations where they are clearly out their depth... But the outcome of the war will not be determined by writers making grand moral gestures or hoping to produce "the finest literature of their time." It will be determined, as such wars always are, by the people on the battlefronts and at the conference tables, who have never heard of Susan Sontag (Hilton Kramer "Sarajevo: False Echoes of Spain").

> As I write, the genocide is all but complete. This result has dashed any hope that a book, or a piece of video-tape, or a public speech on behalf of Bosnia will do any good in the practical sense. It is too late for all of that now... Bosnia will not be put back together again as it was before the fighting started. There will be a Bosnia, of course..., but it will not be the small multiconfessional country made up of ethnic Serbs, Croats, and Muslims that is was before the slaughtering began (David Rieff *Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West* 20).

This chapter is concerned to identify the immediate contexts, both geo-political and "representational," in which Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo

emerges before a western observer.[1] This chapter is particularly interested in how Sontag's production is variously constructed by Sontag's own writings and comments concerning the production (in the context of her position as a western "intellectual"/ "artist" in favour of US and western European military intervention in Sarajevo), the western media, and the film documentary, *Sarajevo Ground Zero* (1993).

In my brief account of the conflicting discourses that surround the historical process of the disintegration of (the former) Yugoslavia, and the possible reasons behind the siege in Sarajevo, I do not explicitly seek to advocate a particular version of the historical, political or ideological genealogy of the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia, or the siege in Sarajevo. Rather, I am concerned to identify the political, ideological and social contexts in which Sontag's production emerges before a western spectatorship. I do this in order to understand in what capacity Sontag went to Sarajevo, how the production was enabled to take place and in what manner the production is represented to its western spectatorship, in the context of the west's ambiguous relationship to the Bosnian situation.

Due to the contemporary nature of the Balkan war(s), cohesive, retrospective historical narratives of the crisis are difficult to locate. And, it is dangerous to uncritically speculate about the causes or reasons for the war(s) without any source material beyond the western media, and a predominantly western conception of the crisis. However, it is important to have a sense of the various political decisions that immediately led up to the beginning of the fighting in (the former) Yugoslavia in mid July 1991, through the beginning of the siege in Sarajevo on April 6 1992, in order to understand the immediate political context in which Sontag's 1993 production emerges.

Much of the following factual information I have obtained from David's Rieff's recently published narrative, *Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and The Failure of the West* (1995). It was Rieff's research for this book that originally brought Susan Sontag, his mother, to Sarajevo in April 1993. Rieff's personal narrative provides a detailed account

of the events leading up to and surrounding the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia, and includes information gathered through interviews with the Bosnian people carried out during his travels in Sarajevo throughout the conflict.

Although Rieff's book certainly offers a very definite reading of the crisis, it is one of the first published longer western narratives to provide an international historical and political context based account of the Balkan crisis. As the title of his book indicates, Rieff's view of the west's (non)involvement in the war(s), is not particularly favourable. Additionally, although Rieff does acknowledge that atrocities have occurred on both the Serbian and the Bosnian Muslim and Croat sides, his narrative explicitly accuses the Serbs of genocide of the Muslim people in Bosnia. His historical-political outline of the crisis, however, is very useful, given the want of detail or historical contextualization in the mass media coverage of the conflict.

In this chapter I also demonstrate that the various representations of the production (manifested in Sontag's commentary on the production, the western media and the Sarajevan film, *Sarajevo Ground Zero*) construct and perpetuate specific ideological narratives that surround the political situation in Sarajevo and particularly, the west's self-understanding in relation to that political situation. I also suggest that the various representations of Sontag's production reify an understanding of the production within the traditional, inherited terms of aesthetic political praxis and theory.

This chapter demonstrates that these representations of the production read Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo politically. They do so, however, in the primary context of the ideological economies that surround the social and political strife in the former Yugoslavia. That is, the majority of the media comments on, or speculates about, the political signification of the actual occurrence of the production in the direct ideological-political context of the crisis in Bosnia —its US director, its full houses, its life-threatening locale, its multi-ethnic cast, US and western European

intervention— rather than the aesthetic/political potency of the production and performance text in the context of post cold-war crisis.

I suggest that these political readings fail to account for their own ideological positionings. They perpetuate, therefore, the unselfconscious-conscious ideologically-based political narratives surrounding besieged Sarajevo and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, that they so often attack. That is to say, the majority of the leftist political commentary on the crisis and the production cites ideological propaganda as the continuing catalyst for Serbian right wing fascist politics. This ideological propaganda, they suggest, continues to destroy the previous tolerant, multi-cultural environment of Sarajevo. And it is a desire to rescue or restore a remnant of this supposed multi-cultural ideal that motivates many in the western artistic and journalistic communities who advocate US and western European military intervention in the former Yugoslavia. The majority of this leftist political commentary, however, fails to account for its own ideological propaganda in its implicit assertion of the moral superiority of "European [western] values: secularism, religious tolerance, and multi-ethnicity" (Sontag "Waiting For Godot in Sarajevo" 90), and its labeling of Serbian politics as "fascist." (I am not suggesting that either so called "modern European values" or "Serbian right wing fascism" are more correct, but I am suggesting that both represent ideological perceptions of behavioural codes and value-systems.

These political readings, I argue, (mis)consider the apposite aesthetic complexity of the production and interpret the event in terms of traditional aesthetic/political praxis. That is, they locate a right and a wrong position, and ideologically locate the production either on the side of the right or the wrong, while implicitly posing the question, "What will the production do for the people of Sarajevo?"

These political readings fail to seriously consider the aesthetic economy of the piece. The majority of the various representations of Sontag's production simplify the complex layers of ideological discourse at work within postmodern political and social

crisis, and its subsequent theorization. These representations reduce the political potency of the production, by overlooking the way in which the production aesthetically stages this complexity. The political potency of the production, I suggest, lies elsewhere than in its rightness or wrongness.

2.1. The Sarajevan Context

> The crucial difference between fiction and real life: fiction must be plausible, real life has no such constraints (Hrvoje Batinic *Sarajevo Ground Zero*).

The city of Sarajevo (at the time of writing) is under siege. This means no telephone, no mail, no water-supply, rationed food, the complete collapse of the city's infra-structure and constant civilian fatalities. The siege has lasted in excess of one thousand days (January 22, 1995 being the one thousandth day of the siege). It is one of the longest most severe sieges in modern European history. Sarajevo is situated in the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Bosnia-Herzegovina, along with Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Slovenia make up the former Yugoslavia. Sarajevo is the major site of the Serb and Croat war against Bosnia.

Batinic's poignant statement (above) effectively articulates a paradoxical relationship to "real life" that many of the Sarajevan people may experience. In the bizarre context of a contemporary, cosmopolitan, European besieged city, Batinic's statement demonstrates the collapse of the traditional categories of fact and fiction as they emerge in daily life in contemporary Sarajevo. Batinic later comments that Sarajevo is a place of "unthinkable futures": "unthinkable" perhaps not just in terms of the horror of daily atrocities, but quite literally, the whole concept of future based upon the present displacement may no longer be imaginable.

Batinic's statement simultaneously relates to a wider problematic. Contemporary besieged Sarajevo lies not simply on the fault line between fact and fiction, but it seems between the east and the west. As the strife in the former Yugoslavia moves into its fourth year, the United States and western European governments (at the time of writing) are maintaining a non-interventionist policy.[2] Within the larger context of late twentieth century wars, in which the United States particularly has played an active political and military role, coupled with the international recognition of Bosnian independence in 1992, a non-interventionist strategy raises significant questions. It may also, I suggest, precipitate certain non-interventionist attitudes among some western observers.[3]

The following factual information (based largely upon Rieff's writings) briefly outlines the various political decisions that solidified the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, and precipitated the siege in Sarajevo. As mentioned above, Rieff's narrative also provides an international political context for the events that led up to the siege.

2.1.1. The Disintegration of Yugoslavia

In June 1991, Croatia and Slovenia declared themselves "sovereign and independent states" (Rieff *Slaughterhouse* 15), despite earlier US and European Community refusal to acknowledge their independence. Two days later, on June 27 1991, JNA (Yugoslav National Army) troops from bases in Croatia, were moving towards Slovenia. This event marked the beginning of the real fighting in Yugoslavia.

The fighting in Slovenia continued for just a few days: the JNA had misjudged the ability of the Slovene territorial defence forces, and the Yugoslav Defence Minister, General Veljko Kadijevic, withdrew JNA troops. Rieff writes, "This was a de facto recognition of Slovenian independence on the part of the authorities in Belgrade" (15). However, due to the significant Serb minority living in Croatia, Rieff suggests —there were, on the other hand, almost no Serbs in Slovenia— the JNA, administered by the

authorities in Belgrade, were not willing to accept Croatian independence. It would seem that it was "in the name of defending these Serbs, rather than in the name of Yugoslavia" (15) that the Yugoslav National Army began offensive operations in Croatia in the middle of July 1991.

The fighting in Croatia continued until the beginning of 1992. Almost a third of Croatia was now in the control of the JNA. Much of the area they controlled ran along the Bosnian border. This area was claimed as the "Serbian Republic of the Krajina" (15), and no longer part of Croatia. At this point the European Community recognised Croatia and Slovenia as independent states. Rieff comments, "Cyrus Vance, who had been negotiating a cease-fire between Serbs and Croats for much of the second half of 1991, warned the German foreign minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, and the then head of the EC, Dutch politician Hans Van Der Broek, that such recognition made war in Bosnia inevitable" (16). The European Community, however, persevered with their decision to recognise the independence of Croatia and Slovenia, and as Vance predicted, fighting began in Bosnia in the spring of 1992.

President of the Bosnian government, Alia Izetbegovic, understanding that Yugoslavia would not be resurrected, had asked for EC recognition and UN peace-keeping troops in December 1991. The EC responded to his call for recognition: they insisted that Bosnian authorities hold a referendum on Bosnian independence, which took place on February 29, 1992. Sixty-three percent of the Bosnian population are Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats, and they, Rieff writes, "voted yes overwhelmingly"(17). The Bosnian Serb leadership, however, told their people to boycott the referendum, and "backed up their demand by preventing poll stations from being established" (17). The Serb boycott was successful.

At the end of March 1992, Serb irregulars were seizing territory all over Bosnia. This was publicly supported by the JNA troops. On April 6, 1992 the siege in Sarajevo

began, and later that month Bosnia's second city, Banja Luka, fell to Serb forces. Slaughter began.

Bosnia was finally recognised by the EC and the United States as an independent state on April 7, 1992, and by the United Nations on May 22, 1992. Izebegovic's 1991 request for UN peace-keeping troops was denied, even though the UN force overseeing the cease-fire in Croatia, were in Sarajevo at that time. Later, however, the UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force) played the role of relieving the effects of the fighting in Bosnia, but did not intervene in the conflict.

2.1.2. The Reaction of the Western European and US Governments

Despite the obvious disgust and sadness of the western European and US governments towards the unquestionable fact of slaughter in Bosnia, and their continued promises to halt the killing in Sarajevo, little to no aggressive political action has taken place. Significantly, this lack of aggressive action, occurs in the context of the US and western European formal recognition of the independent state of Bosnia. That is to say, the state of Bosnia is being destroyed in the face of international recognition of its independence.

Rieff comments that the western European governments implicitly deny that any Serb aggression has taken place, by consistently referring to the situation as "civil war" (27). Additionally, the European governments continue to enforce the arms embargo that the United Nations passed in 1991 as part of a series of sanctions designed to penalise the Serbs for the war they were waging in Croatia. As the war in Croatia has ended, continued enforcement of the arms embargo, it may be argued, serves to further the Serb cause in Bosnia.

Having inherited the arms supplies of the JNA, the Serbs clearly have enough arms. And although the embargo was passed before Bosnia had been formally recognised as an independent state, the fact that it would be the Bosnian government that

would be largely troubled by the embargo, seemed to register to no one in the European authorities:

> British foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd [maintained that] the military imbalance that the embargo perpetuated actually made it all the more important that the embargo remain in force. 'We don't want to level the killing field,' he said more than once (28).

This military imbalance, it seems, might perhaps provide a swifter end to the war, because of the probable inequitable number of arms in the favour of Serbian forces.

During the 1992 US presidential election campaign, candidate Bill Clinton promised to "use American power to bring this Bosnian genocide to a halt, or at least give the Bosnian government the means to fight back" (27). However, Rieff suggests, "absolute reluctance to expend the political capital necessary to rescue Bosnia" was involved in Clinton's failure to meet his campaign promises. At the end of 1994, however, the Americans decided to no longer enforce the arms embargo. And as already mentioned, United Nations forces offered continued humanitarian support, but "the great powers"(23) gave them no mandate to intervene in the fighting. Despite the superpower claims of the US government, they present themselves as helpless to end the undeniable slaughter.

2.1.3. The Impact of Non-Intervention

Of course, western European and US military involvement in the crisis in Bosnia, would undoubtedly cost lives, and it is not the explicit purpose of this chapter to suggest the moral incorrectness or otherwise of political decisions concerning western military intervention or non-intervention in Bosnia. It is part of the purpose of this study, however, to acknowledge that a non-interventionist strategy may precipitate certain western attitudes towards the situation in Bosnia, and specifically towards the possible

political implications of Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot* in besieged Sarajevo. It is important to assess, therefore, the impact of non-intervention policies on the outside perspective of a western observer of the crisis, in the context of media information which presents image after image of death and destruction.

Mass-Media coverage provides the most widely accessible information on the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia. Erika Munk notes that, "American press coverage of the war(s) in former Yugoslavia is in the main uninformed, skimpy, and muddled" ("Notes From A Trip to Sarajevo" 15).[4] Munk refers particularly to the lack of context, that surrounds the numerous reports and images of slaughter that infiltrated the western media in the early days of the siege in Sarajevo. It is unsurprising, in the context of Munk's remarks, that many western observers, despite their awareness of the mass slaughter in Bosnia, might remain confounded by the reasons for the war(s).

Significantly however, there seems to be one consistent message that much of the western media initially communicated with reference to the causes of the war(s); that is, that the situation in former Yugoslavia is fundamentally about ethnicity. It is about a people of different ethnic backgrounds being unable to live peacefully together. This message perceived against the backdrop of largely "uninformed, skimpy, and muddled" press coverage, takes on an almost legendary status; it becomes the constant perspective from which general attitudes might easily be formed towards the crisis, as it is the most easily available information concerning the war(s).

The widely-used, familiar phrase, "ethnic cleansing," has come to account for the continuing murder of civilians; it implies a profound hatred between Serbs, Croats, Muslims and Jews. The concept of "ethnic cleansing" solidifies concrete Serb, Croat, Muslim and Jewish identities and differences. "Ethnic cleansing" may then come to symbolise an historical, deeply-felt, almost primitive hatred between people.

The war(s) in former Yugoslavia (and specifically the siege in Sarajevo), perceived in this context, appear rooted in historically complex ethnic issues. In the

context of non-intervention policies these ethnic issues are implicated as motivated by purely internal problems, specific to the former Yugoslavia. As precise information appears in the main very difficult to access (despite the consistent media coverage of the crisis), the perception of the situation in Bosnia as alien, complex and impossible to understand from a western perspective, may easily be intensified.

The disturbing absence of a reference system from which to construct a context in which to react to the distant crisis might potentially give the situation in Bosnia, as perceived by the west, an almost illusory status: there is certainly an "unreal" quality to the mass slaughter in Sarajevo. And within this context, a non-interventionist strategy on the part of the US and Western European governments is justified; that is, perceived as a correct, moral and political position.

The non-intervention policies among the western governments may precipitate a potential non-interventionist western attitude towards the former Yugoslavia. And this attitude might be successfully described as an ironic form of inertia. Inertia, in this ironic context, does not always emerge as indolence or negligence but often incorporates struggle: a struggle against a bigger, unknown, unwieldy opponent. This opponent might most readily manifest itself in the mass of information which surrounds the crisis. This kind of struggle can result in a paradoxical entropic movement towards disablement: an inability to find a place of resistance, or a place to stand from which to effect political and social change in Sarajevo.

In the context of crisis, inertia too is both poignant and ironic. Crisis implies extreme urgency and has a matter-of-life-or-deathness about it: death and destruction, fear and dread are real on a day-to-day basis in Sarajevo. It does seem something of a paradox that such a critical situation in one part of the world could potentially precipitate complexly inert responses in another (more globally politically powerful) part of the world.

However, despite the apparent justification of non-intervention strategies, this political position has simultaneously evoked angry and appalled responses, both in the west and among some members of the artistic community in Sarajevo.
Ademir Kenovic (director of the little known documentary, *Sarajevo Ground Zero*), represents the reasons for the siege in Sarajevo a little differently to the complex historical genealogy perhaps precipitated by much of the "ethnic-rooted vocabulary" of the initial western media coverage of the Bosnian. Kenovic asserts that the reasons for the war are horrifyingly simple:

> This situation first should be redefined. They are making it complicated and it is so simple. It is extremely simple. It is just bad guys killing good guys and unfortunately it is supported by main political powers in the world... I am almost ashamed to say that we are multi-national, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic people, because it is so obvious, so normal. They wanted to make the impression that it is some kind of ethnic war and it is nothing like that. It is extreme right wing nationalism which is devastating. Also, you tell me how can I be objective? But that camera man is just doing professionally his job (camera moves to corpses on the streets of Sarajevo), you know, he is just showing it (*Sarajevo Ground Zero).*

The city of Sarajevo, as represented in this documentary, is being destroyed because the city represents something that confounds the apparent ideological thrust of the war(s); the ideology of the war is that people cannot live together, and this is perpetuated, Kenovic argues, by the non-interventionist strategies of the western governments, which imply that the problem is specific to the former Yugoslavia, and by the western media's reification of a vocabulary of ethnicity. Once it is accepted that it is an ethnic war, the documentary argues, the differences between Serb, Croat, Muslim and Jew become true and concrete and (almost) provide a justification for genocide.

Erika Munk, in her article, "Notes From a Trip to Sarajevo" presents a similar view to that of Ademir Kenovic:

> The goal of the Serb and Croat war against Bosnia is to divide it between them after killing or expelling the Muslims-and all the Bosnians, of any heritage, who identify with the Bosnian pluralist democracy rather than with Serb or Croat nationalism. Cultural genocide is essential to this enterprise. Bosnia's history, its mosques, libraries, bridges, must be erased, as well as its present and its future. This means demolishing the urban centres, where most Muslims and the middle class live. Traditional cultures usually are considered, and consider themselves, mortally besieged by the modern world. In Sarajevo, the opposite holds: secularism and multiethnicity are being blown to bits by a specious, manipulated traditionalism (15).

Neither Munk's report of the situation in Sarajevo, nor Ademir Kenovic's account of the siege can be allowed to stand as an undisputed authority. Indeed, such a collapse of normal life renders concepts like democracy, nationalism and Cultural genocide unstable and in need of careful investigation in relation to how they emerge in the very particular context of Sarajevo. But such critical vigilance must not preclude statement. That is to say, the enormity of the situation, in addition to the apparently futile yet somehow necessary pursuits of truths —the bewilderment that accompanies the endeavour to grasp what is actually happening— must not be allowed to disable the search for a place from which to stand in order to begin to confront the continuing strife in Sarajevo and the former Yugoslavia. In short, the lack of coherent information concerning Sarajevo and the former Yugoslavia does present difficulties concerning an historical and political context out of which to respond to the war(s), but this lack of information does not justify a non-response to the Bosnian crisis, nor does it legitimise the mythologiszng of the situation.

In the context of the statements made by Kenovic and Munk above it becomes perhaps a little more difficult to rhetorically justify or assert the moral correctness of a western non-interventionist strategy. The disorientating complexity projected on to the situation in Sarajevo by the media seems to facilitate a non-interventionist western attitude; Kenovic's insistence upon the simplicity of the situation in Bosnia suggests that this disorientating complexity may be in actuality located in the circulating information, or lack of information, (not)given in the western mass media. This mass media circus which straddles fact and fiction and collapses the traditional differences between the two, seems to reduce and distance the situation in Bosnia to an isolated and remote discourse.

Both Kenovic and Munk understand the situation in Sarajevo as an international concern, rather than an internal conflict which has no historical or political connection with the international community. By foregrounding the multi-cultural, secular environment of Sarajevo, both Kenovic and particularly Munk are suggesting the proximity of culture in Sarajevo to that of the sophisticated west. If the west does ideologically stand for multi-cultural, cosmopolitan cohabitation, then surely they see themselves at threat in the Sarajevan siege: surely Sarajevo, and what it is claimed to ideologically represent, should be protected by the west?

It is in this ideologically complex context of western non-intervention and conflicting interpretations concerning the reasons for the war that Sontag, a year into the Sarajevan siege, first went to Sarajevo in April 1993.

2.1.4. Sontag in Sarajevo

> To know art, she believes, is to come to bear the burden of the world, and as an artist, to take on the burden of art as an act of will (Sohayes *Susan Sontag: The Elegiac Modernist* 109).

> People are often surprised that there is any theatre in Sarajevo; they imagine there's nothing but coping with the siege and dodging the bullets and the shrapnel, but there's a lot of normality in Sarajevo, which makes everything even more poignant and moving (Sontag *Sarajevo Ground Zero*).

As mentioned above, Sontag had first come to Sarajevo with her son, David Rieff, as his companion, while he researched his book on the besieged city. They were able to obtain press identification, and stay at the then still standing, Holiday Inn.[5] During this initial two week stay, Sontag met Haris Pasovic, a young Sarajevan born director, who gained his reputation working mainly in Serbia. Pasovic invited Sontag to his production of "Grad" ("City") which he had put together over eight days using twelve actors. He was already preparing for his next, more ambitious production, Euripides' *Alcestis (Alkestis)*. After this, Pasovic was set to produce a student directed production (Pasovic teaches at the still-functioning Academy of Drama). Clearly, professional theatre was possible and functioning, however unorthodoxly, in besieged Sarajevo.

In a personal interview with Sontag in March 1995, she described Haris Pasovic as somewhat of a "maverick," seeing himself as the "Emperor" of Sarajevan cultural activities, keen to expose his work and expression of artistic resistance to the siege in Sarajevo to an international community. However, Sontag simultaneously acknowledged Pasovic's admirable commitment to and immersion within the cultural activity of Sarajevo.[6] (Sontag's production, unbeknown to her, would become subsumed under the title of the "Sarajevo International Festival of Theatre," administered by Haris Pasovic, which began in mid-August 1993). Sontag also commented that she immediately recognised Pasovic's ability as a producer as well as a director, and asked if he would be interested in her coming back to Sarajevo to direct a play. Sontag writes:

> "Of course," he said.

> Before I could add, "then let me think for a while about what I might want to do," he went on, "What play will you do?" And bravado, following the impulsiveness of my proposal, suggested to me in an instant what I might not have seen had I taken longer to reflect: there was one obvious play for me to direct. Beckett's play, written over forty years ago, seems written for and about, Sarajevo ("Waiting For Godot in Sarajevo" 88).

When Sontag returned to Sarajevo in mid-July of the same year, she came back to the besieged city in a quite different guise from her initial visit. Her first visit to the city in April, Sontag writes, had brought her to care deeply about the "battered city and what it stands for" (87), and this meant, that if she were to return, she could not do so in the passive capacity of a visitor. During my brief conversation with Sontag, she described Sarajevo as "unbelievably destroyed," and the impact of actually being in Sarajevo, amid the devastation, coupled with her desire to show her "solidarity with the city" (90) in the face of apparent international neglect, compelled her to return in July, and actually "do something."

Although Sontag is not slow to admit that her voluntary commitment to work with professional Sarajevan actors in a city under siege does not make her useful "in the way I could be if I were a doctor or a water systems engineer" (87), she recognises that directing theatre is one of the three things she does. She would return to become (albeit it for a short period of time) a part of Sarajevo at this point in its history.

Despite Sontag's somewhat apolitical claims concerning the production —it is about "making people feel better", Sontag told me; it is an "act of conscience" ("Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo" 103), she told a journalist— and her resistance of what she described as Pasovic's "shadow of politicizing" attempt to get her to use a new "more Sarajevan" translation of Beckett's text, which he had commissioned once he knew Sontag was coming to direct the play (Sontag along with her translator, Amela Simic,

decided that this new translation, which used old Serbian words, made for a stiffer translation of the text; Sontag wanted to use what she considered the best text for the production, rather than use the new translation for the sake of asserting its Sarajevan authenticity), there can be little doubt that the production becomes politicized in the context of Sontag's well-known persona, and her own (publicly declared) political position in terms of US and western European military intervention.[7] In this context, the production has become (however inappropriate or contrary to Sontag's understanding of her involvement with the city of Sarajevo) to mean (different) something(s), particularly to its western spectatorship.

However, Sontag returned to Sarajevo in July 1993 to hold auditions and begin rehearsals for a professional production of *Waiting for Godot*. She came with her photographer, Annie Leibovitz, and stayed once again at the Holiday Inn.[8] Mirza Halilovic, Sontag's assistant director, interpreted for her, as the actors auditioned, and later rehearsed in Serbo-Croation.

There are, of course, enormous difficulties in staging a production in a city which is sixteen months under siege. Due to the lack of electricity, the actors read their scripts by flashlight during the rehearsals held at night. Some of the actors were malnourished; Sontag comments:

> People are very tired there... whenever I stopped something that was going on the stage... everybody immediately lay down. One of the characters in *Waiting For Godot* is a man named Lucky who has to carry a lot of suitcases. This actor...weighs one hundred and ten pounds now.. and he found it hard to carry three suitcases of light material —one was cardboard actually— that were empty; he found it a physical effort (*Sarajevo Ground Zero*).

There was very little material for costumes and scenery; the actors were not getting paid, and there were no tickets; the first one hundred and twenty people who arrive each day

are able to see the performance. And of course there was the continual distraction of war: the shells falling, and the sniper fire.

Sontag's own political perceptions of the act of producing a play in besieged Sarajevo, were (necessarily) shaped while she was actually in Sarajevo, among the artistic community there, rather than from a distanced perspective on the event. That is, despite Sontag's history of avant-garde and somewhat controversial opinions on art and its place in society, coupled with her previous visits to war scenes —she went to North Vietnam during some of the more dangerous days in April 1968 and again in 1972 during the Christmas bombings— and, although she was clearly in favour of US and western military intervention in the siege before she came back to Sarajevo in July 1993, her consciousness of what she was doing in Sarajevo inevitably increased as her production was realised.[9]

Sontag's implicit criticisms of the naiveté of the majority of western observers of the event in their surprise that theatre does take place in besieged Sarajevo, is perhaps a little unfair, although such surprise does imply a western perception of contemporary Sarajevo as medieval and backward. If Sontag had not met Haris Pasovic and witnessed the large amount of theatrical activity in Sarajevo in that first visit to the city in April 1993, she too might have been surprised that such cultural activity existed and could contribute to the daily survival of the Sarajevan people in a meaningful way.

In an interview, also conducted by Erika Munk, with some of the actors who performed in Sontag's production, they too admit that their own first reaction to the practice of theatre in a city under siege was: "How can we be human?" (Emina Muftic "Reports from the 21st Century" 9). Sead Bejtovic (the second Vladimir in Sontag's *Waiting For Godot*) comments:

> When all this started, I asked myself what I was doing in theater and what theater had to do with me. I used to work on all my personal problems just in order to get up in front of an audience.

> But nowadays, the people in the audience have their own problems. What to do? I wasn't relaxed for a long time, I was inhibited. Then I realized that a lot of people who weren't regular theatergoers before the war were starting to come to the theater, and that theater in Sarajevo has the same value as water and food. So I rebuilt my trust in myself (9).

It seems that as the siege in Sarajevo has continued, theatre has become somewhat needed: it offers an "island on which to remain human" (Haris Pasovic 11). Although Munk's interview with the actors reveals that many of Sarajevo's actors have fought on the front line, some of them have returned to work in the Theatre, feeling its significance. They are under no illusions, however, that their work lessens the reality of the hell that Sarajevo's people continue to live in. Haris Pasovic's comments certainly testify to that:

> I would like to add actually, that, you know, this has been [ ] hell from the very beginning. So our job is to produce beauty, because people need beauty. And it's absolutely science fiction to produce beauty in this hell, but I think we're having some success (11).

Sontag, therefore, joins with the Sarajevan actors in seeing the act of putting on a play in a contemporary besieged European city, and particularly her production of *Waiting For Godot*, as "a serious expression of normality" (91). She perhaps also senses the irony of the statement, that while such cultural activity may reduce the distance between the pre-siege lives of the Sarajevan people and their contemporary existence, it may also highlight the fact that while there is everything normal about cultural activity in contemporary Sarajevo, there is everything abnormal about mass slaughter in contemporary Europe.

Sontag claims she had come to besieged Sarajevo, however, foremost to direct and produce a successful piece of theatre, with a group of professional Sarajevan actors who were very anxious to work:

> The most important thing is to do good work there: not to condescend to them and say, okay, this is what I did with you, and you're so tired and I'm so wonderful because I came here and so anything we do is rather marvelous. I didn't feel they were applauding because this crazy American writer came to Sarajevo, I thought they were applauding because they saw something that was good (*Sarajevo Ground Zero*).

Sontag has consistently promoted the importance of doing good work in Sarajevo and has sought to avoid, as the above passage indicates, personalising the production as some great achievement by Sontag, which would, she fears simply imply that in fact the rest of the world does care about Sarajevo. Sontag comments rather tersely in her own writings on the production, "I knew, to my indignation and shame, that I represented nobody but myself" ("Waiting For Godot in Sarajevo" 90). Despite Sontag's selfless decision to go to Sarajevo to direct a play, representing nobody but herself, I also suggest however, that the context of Sarajevo, with all its terrible suffering and displacement, does appeal to Sontag's modernist sensibility and her pursuit of artistic excellence in the face of misery and despair. This is not a direct criticism of Sontag, merely an observation, that Sarajevo may well have presented her with an ideal forum in which to work. I do not suppose this was her overriding motive to go to Sarajevo, but I do think, during the intensive rehearsal process, there must have been some aesthetic thrill involved in knowing that the suffering dramatized in Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* was materially evident in besieged Sarajevo, and, therefore, the play could really come into being.

Although Sontag was mindful that the west would be watching what she was doing, her main understanding of the production, it seems, was that it was "first of all, a

production conceived for Sarajevo" (32). When asked in an interview with Erika Munk if she had considered that she would be the only notable western intellectual to come to Sarajevo, Sontag spoke about her amazement that nobody else was coming and expressed that she hoped "as a side effect -it certainly wasn't my principle intention -my coming here to work would make it clear that this was possible" ("Interview" 31). Sontag perhaps hoped that her production might increase the west's consciousness of Sarajevo, or at least if their consciousness of the city was already quite high, due to the many media images of slaughter that have been pumped into western television channels over the course of the crisis, the production might increase a desire to find out more about the political and historical context of the war(s). Yet Sontag maintains that her first priority was to stage Beckett's text sensitively and successfully.[10]

It was out respect for the many talented actors, who auditioned for the piece, rather than Sontag's preconceived perception of Beckett's text, or political statement, that she tripled the number of "Vladimirs" and "Estragons: "three variations on the theme of a couple" (Sontag 93): two men at the centre (Velibor Topic and Izudin Bajrovic), "flanked on the left side of the stage by two women and on the right by a woman and a man" (Sontag 92). And, in a similar manner, it was out of respect for the safety and dignity of the Sarajevan audience that Sontag staged just the first act of Beckett's play, which in itself ran at least ninety minutes.[11]

Sontag does also comment at length about the appropriateness of Beckett's text in besieged Sarajevo, sensing that the play dramatizes much of what people in Sarajevo are feeling at the moment. Far from it being pretentious to stage despair amid actual despair, Sontag feels that there is something to be gained from having the daily experiences of living in besieged Sarajevo transfigured by art. She is also reported to have said that *Waiting For Godot* in besieged Sarajevo was so apposite "because at that time it was like waiting for Clinton. Haris asked me what I wanted to do and I replied without forethought. It came to my mind as though it was written for Sarajevo"

(Didiovanna 15). It is largely in these terms that Sontag perceives her staging of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo.

Sontag had also come, however, in the capacity of someone who believed in what she understood Sarajevo to stand for: "European values: secularism, religious tolerance, and multi-ethnicity (90)" in the face of what she describes as right wing fascism. She explicitly believes that these "European values" are worth defending, and that the Serbian forces clearly represent fascist politics. And so Sontag came to besieged Sarajevo to engage with its cultural and artistic community in order to express her solidarity with the Sarajevan people, and to set herself apart from the non-interventionist policies of the US and western European governments. The production was made possible by the number of professional Sarajevan actors desperate to work and to offer a sense of normality to some of the Sarajevan people, and certainly in one sense it was legitimised, as each performance was packed.

2.2. Staging Sontag

> Her presence had immediate human value for Sarajevans, as well as symbolic worth, news value, and a political function; it bridged the inward-lookingness of theater and the outer-directedness of film, because it was at once for the city and visible to the world (Munk "Notes From A Trip To Sarajevo" 28).

Sontag was the first western artist/intellectual to really work in besieged Sarajevo. Her involvement with the Sarajevan cultural community, however, perhaps sparked the later involvement of others: Vanessa Redgrave, Joan Baez and Bianca Jagger, to name a few. Clearly Sontag's production had an international impact. As mentioned previously, it was somewhat short-sighted of Sontag to assume that her production would exist "only

in Sarajevo." The production, more specifically Sontag's relationship to and comments about it, became the focal point for a number of articles in many of the leading western papers. And it is in this context that the production first becomes available to a western spectatorship.

Many of these articles tend to narrate the phenomenon of the production around the central persona of Sontag, placing Sontag clearly in the position of author in regard to the event. The production becomes politically constructed in terms of Sontag's understanding of the production and what it may or may not represent in the context of the west's relationship to the siege in Sarajevo. Janine De Diovanna's article, "The Volcano Lover: Sontag in Sarajevo," appearing in *The Observatory*, adopts an almost heroic tone when describing Sontag:

> They listened quietly as Ms. Sontag, *tall and striking, her dark hair streaked with a shock of white* (my italics) discussed what this news meant: how air strikes to save their city might happen, but how they also might not. "I'm telling you this with hope," she said. "And if it does not happen, after tomorrow I might have to move out of the Holiday Inn and move in with one of the actors." There was tense laughter in the small theater because the actors knew that Ms. Sontag could be in as much danger as they are. (During her first week in Sarajevo, Ms. Sontag used the armored car that her friend photographer Annie Leibovitz rented while she was there covering the play for *Vanity Fair*, but since Ms. Leibovitz's departure, the director had been traveling throughout the city in a non-armored vehicle and never wore a flack jacket to the Theater) (15).

The way De Diovanna's article glorifies Sontag, reduces the political potency of the production. This is particularly ironic because the article seems to lean politically towards western European and US military intervention in Sarajevo, yet the political and historical context of the war fades into insignificance in the light of Sontag's bravado. The article might also, as Sontag feared, by representing Sontag as an intrepid heroine

taking on the world's problems single-handedly, precipitate a placating response among its readers, which (mis)understands that the west is actively engaging with the suffering of the Sarajevan people and attempting to intervene in that suffering, and that this kind of intervention is in fact much more civilised and politically correct than military intervention, which smacks of outdated barbarism, lack of foresight and sensitivity to the complexity of the situation.

This representation of Sontag's production, I suggest, perpetuates a superficial engagement with the siege in Sarajevo among outside western observers of the crisis; there is no sense in which this representation of the production incorporates a western spectatorship into the performance strategies of the production. That is, the production, presented in this manner, does not function politically in any other way than in the inherited terms of aesthetic/political praxis. (Sontag's production, as represented in this article, identifies the oppressor and constitutes a brave western act of cultural resistance.) The production is seen to both call upon, yet appease the conscience of the west, and perhaps superficially promote the cause of those in the west in favour of western European and US military intervention in Sarajevo. The production, represented in this way (centred around Sontag's "tall, striking" persona) directly reads the production through the political and ideological predilections of Sontag. Implicit questions of the production, therefore, begin to be asked: how does it reflect Sontag's political stance on intervention?

In this context, the production's title, *Waiting for Godot*, offers an all too easy journalistic modulation into "Waiting for Clinton," forcing its reader to consider what Sontag's production actually "means" in the context of besieged Sarajevo. John Pomfret's article, "Waiting For Godot in Besieged Sarajevo," appearing in *New York Newsday*, discusses Sontag's production in exactly these terms:

> Call it waiting for Clinton, or air strikes, or freedom. Call it waiting for water, electricity or gas. Call it waiting for gunshots, sniper fire and the point between the swish of the tank shell and its earth-shattering, chest-rattling blast. Call it waiting for peace - or waiting for death - in this crumbling European town...
>
> Essentially prohibited by a UN-imposed arms embargo from defending themselves, the people of this city have placed their fate in the hands of the international community - a giant, faceless Godot. Sometimes this Godot seems ready to spring to this city's defense - as it did in May and then again over the past weeks, when the Clinton administration beat the war drums and warned the surrounding Serbs to lift their siege. But somehow this Godot has never yet shown up. and somehow, despite this, Sarajevans never seem to loose faith completely that he will.

Sontag's production, in this context, is seen politically as very much on the side of the right (in terms of right and wrong): the production is represented, in this particular article, as a political statement. Pomfret's representation of the production explicitly encourages the west to think about the connections between the text of Beckett's play (very generally, Vladimir and Estragon's continual wait for the arrival of Godot in the face of adversity, in the understanding that his arrival will make things better) and the besieged people of Sarajevo's continual wait for President Clinton.

In this representation of the production there is no evaluation of the aesthetic complexities of Beckett's text, or consideration of the political strategies of the media of live performance. This huge aspect of the production is side-stepped in order to implicitly suggest the political rightness of the production's apparent promotion of US military intervention. I am not suggesting that Pomfret's article should offer an investigation into the aesthetic economies of the production —indeed it is clear this is not where the interest of the article lies— but that the political potency and insight of this production does not lie in its superficial connection to right or wrong politics.

Sontag's production is also referenced as the initial catalyst for western cultural resistance in various articles, which refer to the campaign of artists world-wide to involve themselves in the plight of Sarajevo:

> Susan Sontag was the first to answer the call... A network of American and European artists has begun work to create a major international collection of contemporary art to be shown in Sarajevo. Under the title "Homage to Sarajevo," it will honor the city's multi-ethnic community (Katzarova "Sarajevan Diary: H(e)aven Can Wait" 174).

The production is represented as the cornerstone of the western intellectual political stance on the war(s): Sarajevo represents multi-cultural, multi- ethnic tolerance, and should not be allowed by the west to be destroyed by medieval, right wing fascist politics.[12] Vanessa Redgrave articulates this position quite clearly, in her article which tells of a large gathering of artists at Time Square Theatre, New York in January 1995, to proclaim their solidarity with the people of Sarajevo and describes a world-wide petition, signed by more than two hundred thousand citizens of Sarajevo, presented to the U.N. in the previous December:

> [the petition calls for] a free, open and unified Sarajevo, and rejecting the partition of the city. "We are firmly convinced that our life of diversity and tolerance is a priceless inheritance of our past," the petition declares, "and the only secure foundation for a peaceful and happy future for all citizens of Sarajevo and Bosnia-Herzegovina ." The petition also demands the lifting of the blockade and de-militarization of the city: "we are threatened with the permanent partition of Sarajevo which would destroy a distinctive way of life which we have cherished for centuries... We reject that proposal... At this critical moment for us all, citizens of the world community, as well as citizens of Sarajevo, bear the responsibility of these critical values (Redgrave 80).

The political economy in which the production is being represented is quite clear. Sontag's production, followed by a steady stream of other western artistic contributions, forms part of an international cultural resistance which is committed to sustaining a sense of normality in Sarajevo and to demanding the attention of the US and western European policy makers.

The Sarajevan film, *Sarajevo Ground Zero*, produced by the Sarajevan film company, SAGA, in collaboration with the New York based production company, Globalvision, and directed by Ademir Kenovic, provides a specific instance of international artistic co-operation. The documentary shows clips of various films produced in Sarajevo under siege (*Shooting at the Wounded*, Muharem Osmanagic, *Water and Blood*, Ibrahim Hrelja and Ferid Pasovic, *Bums and Dogs*, Zlatko Lavanic, *I Burnt Legs*, Srdjan Vuletio, *Confessions of A Monster*, Ademir Kenovic, are among the various titles shown). Each of these films deals directly with the reality of war. Their subject matter is concerned largely with horrific injuries, death, rape: they often include direct footage of the slaughter in Sarajevo. Kenovic comments that the films made in besieged Sarajevo are not involved with the "pornography of death," but simply draw upon the Sarajevan contemporary landscape for their content. The documentary also includes some footage of both the rehearsal process and one of the performances of Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot.* It also includes a brief interview with Sontag, conducted by Charlayne Hunter-Gault.

The documentary is very clear in its political message. It represents the city of Sarajevo as a city desperate to cling on to its culturally diverse pre-siege characteristics. It simultaneously represents the Serbian forces as fundamentally murderers. The documentary, therefore, locates Sontag's production in this context. Sontag is once again presented as someone who did personally respond to the Sarajevan plight, and her production is once again politically represented under that image. Here Sontag's

production is politically located on the side of the right, promoting western, European values, confronting the wrong fascist politics of ethnic partition.

Sontag's production, represented as it largely has been, based on the political and ideological predilections of Sontag, has also provoked negative responses among the western press. Although, as the foregoing summary of responses indicates, Sontag's production was largely represented favourably by the western journalists, who too were in favour of US and western intervention in Sarajevo, personal distaste for Sontag's politics has evoked some very harsh criticisms of the cultural phenomenon of Sontag's production. Critic Hilton Kramer writes in his article, "Sarajevo: False Echoes of Spain," appearing in the *Wall Street Journal*, August 24, 1993:

> So now again comes Ms. Sontag, this time amid the horrors of the civil war in what was once Yugoslavia, to set an example to the faint-hearted writers and intellectuals of the West, whom she roundly accuses of a "failure of conscience" for not involving themselves in this tragic and intractable conflict. "Sarajevo is the Spanish Civil War of our time," she told a correspondent for a major American newspaper the other day, thus in a single sentence betraying a remarkable ignorance of both the Spanish Civil War and the current civil war that she has come to observe as a moral tourist...
>
> In any case, it is not "a failure of conscience" to believe differently from Ms. Sontag on the merits of Western intervention. Once again, she has used her literary prestige to intervene in a political and military tragedy that lies well beyond her competence. [13]

Kramer's strong criticisms of Sontag's actions convey a cynical personal assault of Sontag as an ill-informed moral tourist. Not only does Kramer imply that Sontag is unqualified to offer any political commentary on such "daunting political complexities," he also suggests that she went to Sarajevo only to fulfil her own artistic vanity by attempting to produce what she might consider the finest work of her career. Yet beneath

this personal assault, Kramer's article simultaneously implies a view of the aesthetic which corresponds to Marvin Carlson's description of one traditional version of the theatre as a "politically indifferent artefact" (454). Kramer's ranting and raving against the perceived pretension of Sontag implies an understanding of the aesthetic which claims that the category is essentially apolitical.

Kramer also notes in the same article that, "The habit of absolute moral certainty in the face of daunting political complexities dies hard with these writers, even in situations where they are clearly out of their depth." Apparently, therefore, Kramer considers that proficiency in the realm of aesthetics does not automatically result in proficiency in the (seemingly more intellectually challenging, according to Kramer) political realm. While I cannot completely disagree with Kramer about aesthetic proficiency automatically producing political proficiency, his complete dismissal of any relationship between the two categories smacks of an insufficient understanding of both the aesthetic and the political. Indeed, his article does not allow any dialogue between the two categories. And for such a scathing commentary of Sontag's efforts, he does nothing to provide either an informed, sophisticated political account of the situation in Bosnia, or a detailed synopsis of the aesthetic merits of Beckett (outside of the slightly messy realm of politics, of course!) In short, his article, with the notable exception of his poignant comment, "In Spain in the 1930s, there was at least an illusion —among liberals, anyway— of a clear-cut choice between good and evil. But in the carnage that has laid waste to what was once Yugoslavia there isn't even the illusion of such a choice," does nothing but pull down the ethical and political persuasions of Sontag, and put nothing in their place.

Kramer's reductive representation of Sontag's production demonstrates the inadequacy both of his understanding of the political potency of the aesthetic workings of Beckett's text in this particular historical and political context of Sarajevo and the west's relationship to it, and the inadequacy of his implicit presentation of the apolitical nature

of the aesthetic —be it a stoop or a rise on behalf of the aesthetic towards the political, he does not make that clear in this article. Clearly, Kramer's reading of Sontag's production yields very little, displaying no attempt to understand the complex relationship between this particular production and its place and moment of production, or consider that the production might function as a insightful, political reading of the west, rather than a die-hard modernist's perfect chance to stage suffering amid suffering.

Kramer's article, representing Sontag's production in this manner, I contend, will certainly not precipitate responses among western observers that will offer a way of being in Sarajevo or provide a sophisticated critique of the perplexing complexity of contemporary ethical politics. On the contrary, his comments are more likely to precipitate responses among western observers which begin to reductively question Sontag's production in such terms as: What has theatre to do with war? What has *Waiting For Godot* to do with besieged Sarajevo?

Although Kramer's comments do perhaps point to the possible naiveté or lack of self-consciousness, or oversimplification of the different political movements in the Balkans on the part of Sontag and the campaign of many of the western intellectuals, there is no consideration of the politics of the aesthetic economy of Beckett's play, in the context of besieged Sarajevo and the various contradictory responses the siege has evoked, nor any awareness that the aesthetic event might serve a complex and useful role in the articulation of the ambiguous relationship of the western observer to the former Yugoslavia. Kramer side-steps any interrogation of the theatrical production itself, or the complex cultural phenomenon that the event connotes, in order to pass his own political judgements on the situation in Bosnia —he is not, it would seem, in favour of US and western European military intervention in Sarajevo. This is particularly ironic in the context of his apolitical claims for the aesthetic; surely there is some irony in the fact that he implies his own political position while passing comment about an aesthetic event, and its inability to confront political complexity.

2.2.1. Contradictory Politics

The above political representations of the production, I suggest, imply certain contradictions in terms of their respective implicit conflicting presentations of the aesthetic and its relationship to politics. Neither Vanessa Redgrave's (representative of the western intellectual/artistic community's political position in terms of US and western European intervention), nor Hilton Kramer's implicit presentation of Sontag's production, I argue, provides an adequate conception of the aesthetic and its relationship to politics, specifically as it emerges in the context of postmodernity. This is confirmed, I contend, in their limited readings of Sontag's production, and specifically in their absolute avoidance of an interrogation of the aesthetic workings of Beckett's text in the context of besieged Sarajevo, and the west's involvement in that crisis.

Vanessa Redgrave's article implicates the traditional version of the aesthetic category, also described by Marvin Carlson, which presents the theatre as "an engaged social phenomenon" (454). Clearly Redgrave believes that art has a defined political and social function in the context of the Bosnian crisis. Sontag's production headed the international western community of artists and intellectuals in their consolidated cultural resistance against what they describe as the fascist politics of the Serbian aggressors. By going to Sarajevo to work with Sarajevan artists, or by staging artistic events throughout the western world, the western intellectual/artistic community believe that they are drawing attention to the rich cultural diversity of Sarajevo and, therefore, raising the conscience of the west by forcing them to confront the perceived travesty involved in the medieval-fascist destruction of a European city which has come to represent ideal contemporary western values of religious tolerance and peaceful multi-culturalism. Such cultural resistance demonstrates a solidarity with the artistic community of Sarajevo, and complete assurance that their perception of the peaceful multi-cultural ideal environment of pre-siege Sarajevo is correct. Additionally the position of the western

intellectual/artistic community demonstrates a confidence in these western values articulated above, and they demonstrate a similar confidence in their reading of Serbian aggression and the politics of ethnic partition as out-dated fascism.

Redgrave's understanding of the aesthetic/political praxis, implicit in her reading of Sontag's production, assumes the essentially political nature of art. And in the context of Bosnia, art functions to articulate cultural resistance which names Serbia as the oppressor, and presents the essential values of harmonious multicultural tolerance. For Redgrave, and the ideological position that she represents, there are clear cut right and wrong sides to the Bosnian conflict.

However, the western artistic community does not demonstrate any self-consciousness of the fact that they too represent an ideological position. That is, they seem to accept western values of religious tolerance and multiculturalism as an unquestioned base value, against which other ideologies are to be judged and found wanting. There is no interrogation of their own position, and no suggestion that the ideal western values that both they and their art seem to represent have in some way precipitated the crisis in Bosnia. That is, the multicultural environment of Bosnia also contained within it potential conflict, which rose to the surface when the fighting began in the former Yugoslavia. It is certainly possible that much of the politics of ethnic partition which seem to have torn the former Yugoslavia apart may have been perpetuated by Serbian propaganda, but the values of multiculturalism might also be considered propaganda by members of the Serbian community, and possibly even members of the Sarajevan community. The western artistic community have assumed all of Sarajevo's population under the rubric of multiculturalism. There is somewhat of a paradox involved in the blanketing of a community under a title which explicitly connotes diversity.

The western artistic community also demonstrate no knowledge of the political and historical contexts of the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia. There is no investigation

of the position of those whom they have labeled as political oppressors. The political potency of the aesthetic as Redgrave represents it has no historicity. That is, western values of religious tolerance and multiculturalism are presented as timeless and placeless values which are successful irrespective of historical context. Redgrave's understanding of the political potency of the aesthetic, therefore, does not incorporate the critical cultural rigours at work in postmoden modes of cultural inquiry described in my earlier discussion of postmodernism. Indeed, the western artists and intellectuals could be seen as appropriating the perceived cultural plight of the Sarajevans for their own political and ideological gain in the west.

The different versions of the aesthetic and its relationship to politics, represented by Kramer and Redgrave, demonstrate the traditional dialogue concerning the relationship between aesthetics and politics, which has dominated the debate concerning the way the theatre is to be theorized. Their limited readings and representations of Sontag's production, however, reveal that their different understanding of aesthetic/political praxis are both inadequate.

Their readings of the production add to the disorientation of the outside and distanced western observer by becoming a part of the various conflicting discourses which surround the situation in Bosnia and the west's relationship to it. By reading the production purely in their own political and ideological terms, or those of Sontag herself, the production does not yield anything to the western observer about the crisis in Sarajevo or their own ambiguous relationship to it, that is not offered in the mass of political discourse that already circulates the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia in the western mass-media.

It is clear, therefore, that in the post cold-war context of the Bosnian conflict, a more sophisticated and self-conscious understanding of aesthetic/political praxis must be brought to bear on Sontag's production of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo: an understanding of the aesthetic which incorporates the relationship of the aesthetic to its

historical, social and political place and moment of production, but also acknowledges its own complicity with its place and moment of production, while maintaining an awareness of the distinct apartness that the aesthetic displays from political discourse, outlined in my earlier discussion of the "irreducible particularity" (Eagleton "Introduction" 2) singular to aesthetics. A more sophisticated and self-conscious understanding of aesthetic/political praxis as it emerges in postmodernity calls for a different way of seeing Sontag's production as political —a view which escapes from the narrow, outmoded perspective ascribing the significance of the artwork entirely to the opinions and intentions of the author, or manipulating the aesthetic event to confirm the preconceived political persuasions of the critic. This re-defining or re-examining of aesthetic/political praxis in the context of the historical and political milieu of the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia, must also resist the tendency of some postmodernist critiques of theatrical transactions to reduce the theatrical event to a hyperreal discourse, which confirms the illusion of cultural hegemony at work in a vulgar conception of postmodernity.[14]

In the following chapter I demonstrate that a close investigation of the aesthetic economy of Beckett's text, in the context of besieged Sarajevo, offers a means of incorporating, articulating and critiquing the disorientation of the outside perspective of the western observer into the crisis in Bosnia. I will also demonstrate how Beckett's text, in this specific context, articulates and problematizes the difficulties inherent in negotiating the ethical economy of post cold-war crisis within the context of postmodernity.

I suggest, therefore, that the cultural phenomenon of Sontag's production in besieged Sarajevo will yield something more politically incisive if interrogated through the aesthetic economy of the production available to a distanced perspective of a western observer, rather than through political and ideological predilections. The following chapter, therefore, attempts to re-define the inherited terms of aesthetic/political praxis in

an aesthetic inquiry of an theatrical event which was staged amid actual political and social crisis, at the historical cultural moment of postmodernity. In short, the following chapter re-defines the aesthetic as a mode of investigation, rather than a fixed category.

Notes

[1] I refer to my earlier discussion of the "representational" western context in which Sontag's production emerges. From the outside perspective of a western observer of the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia, the situation in Sarajevo is narrated through a series of representations of the on-going crisis. Despite the mediated quality of such a "representational" context, this context does have discursive reality. That is, it persuades, constructs and offers versions of the Sarajevan crisis, which certainly influence and inform an outside perspective.

[2] United Nations troops, however, are currently in Sarajevo and are operating in a peace-keeping capacity. At the time of writing there is much discussion about the necessity to withdraw UN troops. It seems that US troops would be required to ensure the safe withdrawal of the UN, and this is currently causing political debate. It appears that President Clinton will avoid ,at all costs, sending in US troops.

[3] I refer significantly to Vietnam and the Gulf War in Kuwait in 1990, and (more relevant to the British government) to the Falklands war in 1982.

[4] Erika Munk, however, also includes in her footnotes the work of several journalists that she did find very useful:

> My best sources have been the New *York Times; Balkan War Report;* Maggie O'Kane in the *Manchester Guardian*; Roy Gutman's *New York Newsday* coverage, and his book, *A Witness to Genocide*; *For/Za Sarajevo*, special issues of *Luistania,* #5, Fall 1993; Rabia Ali & Lawrence Lifschultz, eds., *Why Bosnia,* The Pamphleteer's Press, *1993* ("Notes From A Trip To Sarajevo" 15).

Susan Sontag also notes in her fascinating account, "Waiting For Godot in Sarajevo" that there are "plenty of foreign journalists (most of them in favour of intervention, as I am) have been reporting the lies and the slaughter since the beginning of the siege..." (87).

[5] Sontag commented in a personal interview in March 1995, and also in her article, "Waiting For Godot in Sarajevo," that it is surprisingly easy to get to Sarajevo.

[6] In 1994, a decade after the Winter Olympics, Pasovic staged another "Olympics" under the rubric of the "Cultural Olympics", encouraging the involvement of many western artists. Sontag described Pasovic as "grandiose," certainly perceiving these ironic arts festivals as "his game." His commitment to cultural activity under siege however, is complete.

[7] Sontag also suggested, however, that Pasovic had commissioned this new translation in order to give somebody a job.

[8] The Holiday Inn in Sarajevo was where most foreign journalists stayed during the siege. The food supplies there were also scarce. The Holiday Inn no longer stands.

[9] I am thinking particularly of Sontag's perhaps most famous essay, "Notes On Camp", published in a collection of essays entitled, *Against Interpretation* (1964).

[10] Theatre critic Erika Munk actually saw a performance of Sontag's production in Sarajevo. Munk comments in her written account of the Sarajevan performance, "Notes from A Trip to Sarajevo," that Sontag completely "reinvented the play.. [and] in these stringent circumstances, she found a way to make *Godot* technically possible and historically valid" (26). She describes the "three Vladimir and Estragons" as "something like a Greek chorus.. a city-cross section, a collectivity" (26). Continuing in her understanding of the "city-feel" of Sontag's staging of Beckett's play, Munk refers to the feeling of the performance space as distinctly "urban," and evokes the harshness of this specific production's performance landscape - a "scrim" made of UN plastic sheeting was used to cover the bombed out windows at the rear of the Theatre, translucent plastic hung between the upper and lower levels of the stage, sandbags, the tree: doubled, and made from pipe, "feebly and electrically lit by small solar lamps"(26).

Although Munk feels that the production maintained a sense of "immediacy" (27), and "fed the audience's impulses to localize the play's meaning" (27), she comments also upon what she describes as the loss of the horrors of change and of repetition, with Sontag's decision to stage just the first act. Munk also remarks that Sontag's production was a particularly sombre staging of Beckett's play: "the audience laughed only once," Munk writes. The critic goes on to comment that this production was almost macabre in its aptness:

> "*Godot* never referred or was confined to its context...yet somehow *Godot* became too apt; the fit was too tight. Topicality and humorlessness combined to create pathos, and when the candles were carefully extinguished at the end, the moment and its meaning were so calculatedly clear I was left dry-eyed. .. Perhaps the way Godot's relevance was underlined in Sontag's reading made it seem like a prison-visitor's or humanitarian worker's gift, which he slightly resented having to accept, rather than a work of art offered on its own terms" (27).

Although this study is not primarily interested in the artistic success or otherwise of Sontag's production, Munk's commentary of the performance offers some interesting insights into the "immediate" impact of the performance.

[11] Having made the decision to stage only the first act of Beckett's play and triple the parts of Vladimir and Estragon, Sontag comments on its surprising success, despite its unorthodoxy:

> [It is] a valid reading because of the play's unique construction. The second act is formally - though not substantively- identical with the first act. Vladimir and Estragon are there, Pozzo and Lucky arrive. Pozzo and Lucky leave, Vladimir and Estragon are alone again, the messenger comes with the same message, they are alone again. This is repeated. There are two endings, two departures, so they are tremendously deflated.

> Since it is the one play in world literature that's constructed this way, it's the only play you could do this with... I think there is an argument to be made that you can do the whole of *Waiting For Godot* by doing only the words of the first act. You can -what's the right image? - you can pump it up, you can expand it, you can vary it so that you have a total experience
>
> I don't consider this a truncated production, I consider it first of all a production conceived for Sarajevo. You have to remember that I began the production process five weeks ago [July 1993], with the build up of hope for another intervention, and that was going on for three of the five weeks we rehearsed. It seemed to me it was more passionate, and crueller in a way, to have only the text of the first act but to expand it, so that you have three pairs of Vladimir and Estragons. They do three variations on the theme of the couple, formally in terms of gender identity and gender behavior, and emotionally because they are very, very, different, so I'm putting much more into the first act....
>
> The second act is, of course, much darker than the first. I regretted sacrificing Vladimir's speech at the end of the second act, and I thought of putting Iso back up on stage to give it -"the air is full of our cries"- but I thought, I really have done it, I've done it by tripling the Vladimirs and the Estragons. ("Interview" 32).

Having not seen the production, I am unable to comment upon its success, but as the rehearsal process progressed, the piece did seem to become somehow shaped by its besieged Sarajevan context.

[12] In October 1993, a group of artists, intellectuals and politicians in Paris pressed for a special designation of Sarajevo as Cultural Capital of Europe for the coming winter. This title is normally awarded to a city from one of the twelve members of the European community, for a full year.

For further information on the debates surrounding this proposal, please see John Rockwell's article, "Sarajevo Adopted As Cause in Paris" in *The New York Times*.

[13] In direct response to Kramer's somewhat personal attack, Sontag received various faxes of letters of support for her and criticism of Kramer's article sent to the Editor of the *Wall Street Journal*. Among these letters was that of Steve Wasserman, editorial director of Times Books. Steve Wasserman writes:

> Whatever one thinks of American policy toward the Balkan firestorm, the decision by Sontag and Rieff—almost alone among Western intellectuals—to risk their lives on behalf of the suffering innocents of Sarajevo ought to be a matter of praise rather than sneering condemnation.

Clearly, Sontag had much support over Kramer's article. (Please note that the copy of this letter used in research for this project was a faxed copy of the then unpublished letter, which was faxed by Steve Wasserman to Susan Sontag.)

[14] Again, I wish to draw attention to the distinction between a vulgar postmodernist critique of contemporary culture, which celebrates the breakdown in cultural hierarchies, and presents an "anything goes" perception of postmodern culture, and a postmodernist critique which deploys the breakdown in cultural hierarchies critically and historically, and understands the potency of difference within postmodernity rather than subsuming all difference under what would become a paradoxically anonymous rubric.

I wish to reiterate Johannes Birringer's comment concerning the "dirty reality of death"(23) which also constitutes a part of postmodernity. Birringer's comment functions as a check to those postmodern conceptions of the theatre as an ideal forum for the cynical celebration of the breakdown in cultural hierarchies.

Chapter Two

A Sarajevan Aesthetic: Beckett's Waiting for Godot

> It is the historic destiny of *Waiting For Godot* to represent the "waiting" of the prisoners of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, as also the prisoners behind the walls and barbed wire of Walter Ulbricht, as also the prisoners behind the spiritual walls and barbed wire of societies nearer home... , in this waiting there is not only an adjustment to desolation, there is a rebuff to desolation. Even the Auschwitz prisoners hoped, however improbably, to get out: it is not certain that Godot *won't* come (Eric Bentley 66).[1]

> I wanted Atko to deliver Beckett's aria about divine apathy and indifference, about a heartless petrifying world, as if it made perfect sense. Which it does, especially in Sarajevo (Sontag "Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo" 98).

In this chapter I re-define the traditional terms of aesthetic/political praxis (as represented by the conflicting representations of the aesthetic category and its relationship to the political implicit in Vanessa Redgrave and Hilton Kramer's readings of Sontag's production). In order to resist reading this theatrical event through the political predilections of Sontag, and thus reify the traditional terms of aesthetic/political praxis, I offer a thorough interrogation of the politics of the aesthetic economy of Beckett's text. I locate this interrogation of Beckett's text, however, in the historical, political and cultural context of besieged Sarajevo, and amid the historical, political and cultural disorientation of the western observer in terms of their relationship to and understanding of the Bosnian conflict, and finally, amid the conflict's implications for the western study of post cold-war crisis.

In the context of the numerous and conflicting ideological representations of the Sarajevan siege and Sontag's production (which make up the west's narration of the

crisis in Bosnia), *Waiting For Godot* emerges as a text which is not always already drenched in political and ideological versions of the crisis and the west's relationship to it. Beckett's text, therefore, emerges as a part of the Sarajevan conflict that cannot be completely reduced to a set of political and ideological terms. *Waiting For Godot*, as the performance text of Sontag's production, despite its specific historical emergence amid the political and social conflict of the Bosnian crisis, incorporates an "irreducible particularity" (Eagleton "Introduction" 2) within its aesthetic strategies which exclusively enables this production to politically interrogate what is at stake in the conflict, and the implications of the conflict for the western study of post cold-war crisis within postmodernity. It does this, I contend, without asserting and legitimising a particular political position.

In order for Sontag's production to yield incisive political commentary on the Sarajevan siege, the disorientation of the western observer in relation to the political and historical context of the siege and their role within it, and what the conflict reveals about post cold-war crisis within postmodernity, the production must be allowed to read the conflict within the aesthetic economy of Beckett's ahistorical and apolitical text (rather than be represented as a not very concealing cloak for Sontag's political convictions concerning US and western European military intervention in Sarajevo). I incorporate both the traditionally conceived version of the aesthetic as essentially apolitical, and the political and historical context of this specific aesthetic event in contemporary Sarajevo, amid the cultural context of postmodernity, in the following political interrogation of the aesthetic economy of *Waiting For Godot,* as it emerges in besieged Sarajevo and amid the various and conflicting western representations of the crisis.

I argue that *Waiting For Godot,* in this specific Sarajevan context, enables the production to function as a means of political comment; that is, the action and import of Beckett's play pertinently dramatize and reflect on the crisis in Sarajevo, and the western observer's ambiguous relationship to that crisis. Beckett's text, in this context, I suggest,

also can be seen to dramatize and reflect on the complexity of theorizing post cold war crisis in the context of postmodernity.

In order to engage with the text as it emerges in Sarajevo, a western spectator must performatively re-imagine and re-contextualise the text of *Waiting For Godot* amid the felt disorientation, precipitated by a crisis of interpretation which emerges from the various and conflicting representations of the crisis in Bosnia. The aesthetic negotiations of *Waiting For Godot*, therefore, both exemplify and problematize the position of a western observer, whose understanding and experience of the crisis in Bosnia has been displaced into the mass of media-represented information concerning the war(s). I suggest that the aesthetic economy of *Waiting For Godot* enables the production to function as a means of aesthetic political intervention in the west's self-understanding of its relationship to the siege in Sarajevo. That is, *Waiting For Godot*, staged in the particular context of besieged Sarajevo, offers a distanced perspective of a western observer, a poetic means of articulating and participating in the Sarajevan struggle against their oppressive situation and the probable Sarajevan relationship to western European and US (apparent) political apathy. It also offers such observers a poetic means of articulating their own disorientation in relation to the Bosnian crisis. Such articulation and participation, I argue, is not available in the mass of political discourse that surrounds both the Bosnian crisis and Sontag's production, detailed in the previous chapter. I argue that *Waiting For Godot* in this context constitutes a uniquely contemporary Sarajevan aesthetic: a means of enacting the difficulty of understanding contemporary social and political crisis within the complex challenge that the live performance of Beckett's play in Sarajevo offers to the concepts of meaning and interpretation.

Sontag's decision to stage Beckett's play in the very specific historical and political context of contemporary Sarajevo must not remain unquestioned, however. In this chapter I also briefly consider the problems involved in Sontag's decision to stage

Waiting For Godot in the historical and political environment of contemporary Sarajevo in the context of Beckett's ironically specific ahistorical and apolitical setting for his play. I refer to Beckett's specificity as ironic because the setting he requires is both anonymous and acontextual.[2] The paradoxical specificity of Beckett's settings and stage directions, coupled with his notorious objections to critics and directors of his work who attempt to interpret *Waiting For Godot* by reducing its import one that is legible within to a set of cultural codes in a particular context, render Sontag's decision to stage *Waiting For Godot* in this specific Sarajevan location, suspect.

I contrast Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo, therefore, with JoAnne Akalaitis's controversial decision to contemporise Beckett's *Endgame* by setting it in a subway station, in order to demonstrate the crucial difference between Sontag's use of context and Akalaitis's fabrication of context. Akalaitis's infamous 1984/5 production (performed by the *American Repertory Theater* in Cambridge, Massachusetts) was threatened with closure by Beckett's agents and (dis)claimed by Beckett himself to be antithetical to the aesthetic project of his play.[3] Although the dispute was eventually settled outside of court and the production went ahead with a note in the program from Beckett disassociating himself from the production, the controversy fueled the continuing heated debate concerning directorial rights of interpretation, and the success or failure of productions which deviate significantly from Beckett's precise stage directions.

In the light of this debate and particularly Jonathan Kalb's reading of the failings of the Akalaitis production, I examine Sontag's decision to stage *Waiting For Godot* in the specific historical and cultural context of Sarajevo. I argue that Sontag's acutely contextual staging simultaneously makes political use of both the contextual setting of besieged Sarajevo and the acontextual and non-specific effects and implications of Beckett's text. I discuss in particular, how these implications enact the political potency of the production and the theoretical challenge that the event connotes.

3.1. *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo as Political Comment

> *Waiting For Godot* seems an obvious choice as it illustrates a lot of the things that people are feeling now in Sarajevo... [it is a play about] a weak, vulnerable, abandoned people, while they wait for some unknown or greater power to come and help them out (Sontag *Sarajevo Ground Zero).*

In this opening section I argue that a performative re-imagining and re-contextualizing of Beckett's text amid the crisis of interpretation which emerges amid the conflicting western representations of Bosnia, enables distanced western observers to both participate in the processes of disorientation experienced by the people of Sarajevo, and to articulate their own experience of disorientation in relation to their involvement with the Bosnian crisis and the various representations that surround the conflict. In short, I demonstrate how the action and import of Beckett's play both pertinently dramatizes and reflects on the experience of the Sarajevan people living under siege, and the western observer's ambiguous relationship to the crisis. I also examine the manner in which such dramatization and reflection can be considered political.

Sontag claims, as mentioned previously, that Beckett's play, "written over forty year ago, seems written for and about Sarajevo"("Waiting For Godot in Sarajevo" 88). Given this statement, it is clear that Sontag believes the relationship between *Waiting For Godot* and the crisis in Sarajevo to be intimate. As Sontag indicates in her statement which heads this section, the Sarajevan civilians, after over one thousand days of siege, are now (in a similar manner to Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon) a "weak, vulnerable, abandoned people." As they face another winter, the mental and physical resources of the Sarajevan people are low. They continue to wait for and hope that something, be it in

the form of western European and US troops or otherwise, will arrive and stop the slaughter.

In articulating the intimate relationship between *Waiting For Godot* and the crisis in Sarajevo, Sontag suggests that the performance of Beckett's play in a city under siege functions to dramatize and enact both the "humiliation"(91) and the "human dignity"(90) experienced by the besieged people of Sarajevo. The significance of her comment pertains to the complex relationship between "humiliation" and "human dignity" in the context of besieged humanity, and the way in which that relationship emerges in the paradoxical actions of "waiting" and "hoping" as they are dramatized in *Waiting For Godot.*

I refer to the actions of "waiting" and "hoping" in Beckett's play as paradoxical both because they connote "passive action," and because there is a continual tension and contention between these two actions in the movement and dialogue of Vladimir and Estragon. In the following discussion of *Waiting For Godot*, I examine the way in which the constant negotiation between the passive actions of "waiting" and "hoping" constructs both the text and the performance structure of Beckett's play. In the course of this analysis, I investigate how *Waiting For Godot* effectively dramatizes and reflects on the manner in which the complex relationship between humiliation and human dignity emerges both within the experience of political, cultural and social siege, and within the west's self-understanding of its relationship to that siege.

3.1.1. "Waiting" and "Hoping" in Waiting For Godot:

Waiting For Godot is often described as the play in which nothing happens, twice; this provides a succinct if highly superficial description of the paradoxical dramatic (non)action of Beckett's play. Vladimir and Estragon spend both the first and second act waiting and hoping for the arrival of "Mr. Godot." Their disappointment and humiliation, caused by the non-arrival of "Mr. Godot," announced by The Boy at the end

of the first act, is intensified at the end of the second, when The Boy returns to confirm that Mr. Godot has still not arrived. In the light of this repetition, however, it is implied that Mr. Godot's non-arrival is only temporary and Vladimir and Estragon will return the following day hopeful of his arrival, despite their previous intense disappointment and humiliation. Immediately, the "passive action" of waiting emerges complexly and paradoxically; it is at once humiliating and dignified.

In this context, then, the dialogue between Vladimir and Estragon, and the series of interchanges with Pozzo and Lucky, are both conditioned and undercut by the absent figure of Godot. It would seem that the only reason why the dialogue takes place is because Godot has not yet arrived. If, therefore, Mr.Godot were to arrive, there would no longer be any need for the dialogue. The waiting and the dialogue occur as a result of (Mr. Godot's) absence; absence is a condition of both their waiting and their dialogue. Significantly, absence enables the (non)action of waiting to have some potency. The fact that Vladimir and Estragon's real business for being there is to meet with Godot, however, undercuts the import and significance of their waiting and dialogue. In the context of Mr. Godot's continual absence, the dialogue which takes place between Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky, functions only to fill in the time which passes, and becomes an impotent articulation of the humiliating experience of waiting for somebody (or something) that does not come. Godot's non-arrival disempowers their waiting; it becomes futile and without hope.

Simultaneously, however, the fact that Godot has still not arrived at the end of the play causes the dialogue between Vladimir and Estragon and the interchanges with Pozzo and Lucky, to stand on their own and provide the dramatic (non)action of the play. That is, their waiting becomes the dramatic substance of the play; it constructs its performance structure. In this context, without the continual and formal absence of Godot the (non)action of the play would not take place and their waiting could not be

hopeful. The very condition of the play's action (the arrival of Godot) is continually anticipated but never materialised.

This paradox is crucial to the formal structure of the play, which appears to take shape between time. The formal structure of the play, therefore, functions as a rebuff to a linear concept of time. The similarity between the first and second acts is desperately fragile. Although, in the context of the second act, the first appears like a rehearsal of the second, the few differences between the two illustrate that something has changed; something has moved on. These differences witness the passing of time, but their proximity to the elements of "sameness" between the first and second acts, enable the passing of time to function in *Waiting for Godot* within the trans-temporal structure of memory. Vladimir and Estragon will only wait for Godot if they remember that he has not yet arrived. And Godot's continual absence can only precipitate meaningful waiting if his continual absence is forgotten and perceived as temporary. And there is no point in the play at which Godot's continual absence is exclusively forgotten, or his momentary non-arrival is not remembered. The formal structure of the play constantly brings forth the paradoxical temporality of memory, which manifests itself in the dramatic mood swings of Vladimir and Estragon in relation to themselves and to one another:

> **VLADIMIR:** Now? . . . (*Joyous.*) There you are again . . . (*Indifferent.*) There we are again ... (*Gloomy.*) There I am again (38).

The irreducible dialectic between temporary absence and continual absence constitutes the paradoxical dynamic of the (non)action of *Waiting For Godot.* This irreducible dialectic pertains to the constant negotiation between the "passive actions" of "waiting" and "hoping" and the paradoxical temporality of memory. The dialogue between Vladimir and Estragon functions to continually, yet momentarily, remove their sense of anxiety precipitated by their unfulfilled desire to meet with Godot. At once their

waiting is affirmed and meaningful in their momentary absorption in their actions. It then becomes negated and meaningless as the memory of Godot's non-arrival confronts them anew. Vladimir and Estragon's waiting is legitimated when the "momentariness" of Godot's non-arrival is remembered; they then look to a moment beyond the present and this anticipatory outlook implies that their humanity is sure from one point in time to the next. Without the hope inherent in anticipation, however, their humanity is unsure and their dialogue and actions become fragmentary and dysfunctional in the face of their obliteration. Everything that the characters do is simultaneously given all purpose and no purpose because the play's action is conditioned by the irreducible dialectic between the temporary and continual absence of Godot dramatized in the constant negotiation between the "passive actions" of "waiting" and " hoping" and the paradoxical temporality of memory.

3.1.2. Dramatizing Disorientation

The immediate effect of the text is disorientation. The disorientating import and structure of *Waiting For Godot* pertains specifically to the concept of "meaning." If the (non)action of the play is to connote all significance, yet no significance, how is one to make sense of it? The process of disorientation is enacted in Vladimir and Estragon's endeavour to make sense of both their situation and themselves in an environment in which meaning is not conceivable, given the framework available. That is, both Vladimir and Estragon are seduced by the concept of "meaning." "Meaning" appears to be inherent in their "passive action" of waiting, in terms of anticipation: if they are waiting, surely they are waiting for something? The "passive action" of waiting appears as a means to an end, but seems to hide that end. It tantalises its subjects, Vladimir and Estragon, with hidden significances and coerces them into attempting to understand their experience in the same terms: they are there, so there must be a reason for them being there. That reason however, constantly eludes them; it functions only as an apparition.

This apparition, however, becomes their reason and so they are locked in a paradoxical mission in which reason becomes the subject and object of their inquiry.

The concept of meaning, therefore, although it is undoubtedly evoked in the disorienting import and structure of *Waiting For Godot*, becomes an inadequate framework in which to formulate a response to the work. The process of disorientation is again enacted when one begins to performatively engage with the workings of the text from the outside perspective of a western observer of the crisis in Bosnia; like Vladimir and Estragon, the (western) readers of *Waiting For Godot* find themselves trying to make sense of a text which in its very structure deconstructs the tools of analysis. The text of Beckett's play, constructed by the irreducible dialectic between temporary and continual absence dramatized in the complex relationship between "waiting" and "hoping" and the paradoxical temporality of memory, holds interpretation under siege.

Waiting For Godot, therefore, dramatizes the paradoxical relationship that both the characters and the text itself display towards the concept of "meaning." As such, it demonstrates the manner in which humanity constantly shifts between "humiliation" and "dignity" in the context of extreme deprivation and disorientation. Deprivation and disorientation occur in *Waiting For Godot* both in terms of physical lack and in terms of semantic lack. *Waiting For Godot* delicately illustrates and negotiates the intimate relationship between empirical experience and the impulse to internally reflect on that experience. And it is within its delicate negotiation of this intimate relationship that *Waiting For Godot* enacts the suffering inherent in the struggle to understand what is at stake in a given experience.

As Eric Bentley's statement (which heads this chapter) concerning the historic destiny of Beckett's play suggests, *Waiting For Godot* poignantly dramatizes the mental and physical processes at work when humanity is temporarily, yet continuously, removed from its sense of normality; when its own destiny seems no longer under its direction. Clearly, *Waiting For Godot* does not explain suffering of this kind: Beckett's play enacts

it. It is concerned with the manner in which deprivation and disorientation manifest themselves, rather than with an explanation of what suffering is, or what causes it to come about. *Waiting For Godot* does not allegorize besieged Sarajevo, in the same way that it does not allegorize Auschwitz. Rather, it provides a means of presenting the paradoxical relationship humanity displays to itself in such extreme contexts of both physical suffering and semantic suffering.

The leading article of the San Quentin prison paper offers an insightful response to the implications of Herbert Blau's 1957 staging of *Waiting For Godot* (with a company from the San Francisco Actors' Workshop) performed before an audience of inmates:

> It was an expression, symbolic in order to avoid all personal error, by an author who expected each member of his audience to draw his own conclusions, making his errors. It asked nothing in point, it forced no dramatized moral on the viewer, it held out no specific hope... We're still waiting for Godot, and shall continue to wait. When the scenery gets too drab and the action too slow, we'll call each other names and swear to part forever —but then, there's no place to go! (Martin Esslin 88).[4]

Herbert Blau's staging of *Waiting For Godot* at San Quentin demonstrates that Beckett's play bears an intimate relationship to the experience of physical and semantic entrapment. And the above article suggests that Beckett's play has a performance history which confirms that *Waiting For Godot* has particular resonance for an audience presently involved in the shifting processes of waiting. *Waiting for Godot* provides an aesthetic framework in which these shifting and disorienting processes are brought together in a formal dramatic structure. And this formal structure enables the formlessness of these processes to dramatize and reflect on itself. It provides the abstraction of hopeful and non-hopeful waiting with a means of articulating and thus commenting upon itself.

3.1.3. Disorientation in *Waiting For Godot* and the Disorienting Wait in Sarajevo

The relationship between the paradoxical dramatic (non)action of *Waiting For Godot* and the shifting and disorientating processes experienced by the prisoners at San Quentin Jail are clear. Similarly, clear connections can be made between the (non)action of *Waiting For Godot* and the humiliation, dignity and despair of the Sarajevan civilians. Their lack of water, food, electricity demands that the Sarajevan people engage in activities --digging wells for water, queuing for hours at the few remaining food outlets-- which physically absorb them for a large part of the day. Ironically, this absorption might momentarily enable them to focus their attention away from the fact that they continue to live under siege and the western world appears to have lost interest in their lives. Their humiliation occurs in their present standard of living in contrast to their lives before the siege. Their humiliation might be intensified by the continual non-arrival of western European and US political or military intervention. Their dignity emerges in their daily struggle to survive, continuing commitment to the cosmopolitan identity of their city, and their belief that intervention of one form or another will finally come.

Although *Waiting For Godot* can be seen to dramatize much of what the Sarajevan people are feeling now, the aesthetic/political implications of Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot* in the specific context of Sarajevo reach beyond the manner in which Beckett's play can be seen as a reading of exclusively besieged Sarajevo. That is to say, the manner in which *Waiting For Godot* dramatizes and reflects on the crisis in Sarajevo does not simply amount to the similarity between the situation of Vladimir and Estragon and the situation of the Sarajevan people. More than this, the event, as it functions as an aesthetic positioning within western culture, dramatizes and reflects on the crisis in Sarajevo, and its international implications. And it is in this context that the

event can be seen to function politically, or more precisely, it can be seen as an aesthetic enactment of the Sarajevan political and social crisis and its international implications.

The manner in which this Sarajevan theatrical event dramatizes and reflects on the crisis in Sarajevo distinguishes Sontag's production of *Waiting For Godot* under siege from Herbert Blau's staging of *Waiting For Godot* at San Quentin Jail. Similarly, it demands that an investigation of the Sarajevan staging locate itself in the context of the event's complex relationship to the manner in which humiliation and human dignity emerge within the experience of political, cultural and social siege.

As an aesthetic positioning within western culture, Blau's production offers an interesting yet, I argue, a politically unprovocative theatrical event. Blau's production is performed within a space in which human captivity is legitimized by western society. San Quentin Jail houses those who have (apparently) endangered North American society. The event of staging suffering and struggle inherent in the passive action of waiting in a prison is particularly poignant and it certainly provides the prisoners with a means of apprehending their experience of captivity. It does not, however (aside from the company of professional San Francisco actors) appear to involve the community outside of the Jail in any significant manner. As Martin Esslin comments, "it is said that Godot himself, as well as turns of phrase and characters from the play, have since become a permanent part of the private language, the institutional mythology of San Quentin" (Esslin 85). Paradoxically, Herbert Blau's production in this context appears to render Beckett's play somehow finite and contingent.

The success of Beckett's play seems dependent on an audience of prisoners: "what had bewildered the sophisticated audiences of Paris, London and New York was immediately grasped by an audience of convicts"(Esslin 83). Beckett's play, performed in this context, appears to become an allegory. In the environment of a jail, the suffering inherent in the struggle to understand what is at stake in any given experience enacted in

Waiting For Godot, becomes specific to an understanding of the punishment of crime. And since reflection upon the meaning and purpose of incarceration might well be considered a desired aspect of the prisoner's penitential process, the staging of *Waiting For Godot* at San Quentin could feasibly be seen to function in a corrective and didactic capacity. The event, therefore, remains politically unprovocative because there is no obvious tension between the performance and the context of the performance. Herbert Blau's staging of *Waiting For Godot* at San Quentin does not, in its aesthetic positioning within western culture, formulate the prison system as a problem; on the contrary, it might eventually serve to perpetuate that system. This is no condemnation of Blau's production, rather it is a demonstration of the way in which the context of a particular performance is crucial to the implications of the dramatic work.

Sontag's production, however, occurs in the midst of besieged Sarajevo. Sontag's production enacts captivity and entrapment in the context of a besieged contemporary European city. The fact that the import and (non)action of *Waiting For Godot* appears particularly poignant in relation to the Sarajevan people becomes acutely ironic when that relationship is understood in the context of a contemporary "civilised" European city. The tension, then, between the performance and the context of the performance is clear. Sarajevo is not a prison. It is not a legitimised institution for the imprisonment of civilians.

Any political reading of Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo, therefore, must investigate the manner in which the aesthetic event dialogues with its place and moment of production. Its place and moment of production become, in a very real sense, part of the theatrical event. Beckett's play is staged in the context of one of the most severe sieges in modern history and in the context of continuing non-intervention of the US and western European governments. Sarajevo has become a city known to most western people; the city has become, in a bizarre fashion, like a theatrical venue itself. The media's continual presence has increased the spectatorship of the crisis.

Sontag's staging of Beckett's play in Sarajevo, therefore, does not simply pertain to the people of Sarajevo; it has serious political implications for the massive western spectatorship of the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia.

3.1.4. Disorientation in *Waiting For Godot* and Disorientation among the Watching West

Certainly, in the context of the besieged city, Beckett's play does seem "written for and about Sarajevo." However, this statement does not limit the resonances of Beckett's text in the context of besieged Sarajevo, to the besieged people of Sarajevo. As the media coverage and the non-intervention policies of the US and western European governments imply, the crisis in contemporary Sarajevo has significant ramifications in the west. And Sontag's production implicates the international context of the Bosnian crisis in a manner which enables the theatrical event to function as political commentary on the siege in Sarajevo.

Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo is staged and directed by a US citizen; it is performed by professional Sarajevan actors before an audience of largely Sarajevan civilians. In this specific context and in the international context of the Bosnian crisis, the event can be seen to problematize both the physical and semantic suffering in the struggle to understand what is at stake in the siege in Sarajevo, experienced by the Sarajevan civilians and by the western spectatorship. This is not to suggest that the siege in Sarajevo is experienced in the same way by the Sarajevan people and the western spectatorship, but that the siege pertains to both.

The semantic lack experienced by Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's text exemplifies the semantic lack experienced by the westerner observing the siege in Sarajevo from afar. As the previous chapter indicates, there is a distinct lack of context, available to the western observer, out of which to respond to the war(s) in the former Yugoslavia. Although information concerning the slaughter and physical suffering and

deprivation is widely available, there is little to no historical or political context offered in the various representations of the siege in Sarajevo, and little discussion of the entanglements of the cultures and conflicts involved aside from a simplified and immediate controversy as to whether or not western European and US forces should intervene in the situation. The various representations of the siege available, however, particularly the articles concerning Sontag's production —which side-step the aesthetic complexity of the production, in order to promote a preconceived political stance on the situation— remove the crisis from Sarajevo and place it amid the various representations of the crisis. These representations contribute to the disorientation initially experienced by the western observer. Simultaneously, however, they tantalise the western observer with the expectation of potential coherent historical and political explanations and meanings of the Bosnian crisis; like Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting For Godot*, the western observer is seduced by the prospect of meaning, which appears to be inherent in the various western representations of the siege in Sarajevo.

These potential coherent explanations and meanings, however, function only as an apparition. As my earlier analysis of the unselfconscious ideological position of the artistic western community implicit in Redgrave's understanding of aesthetic/political praxis demonstrates, these western representations are often complicit with the very absolutist ideological and political discourses that they claim to stand in opposition against. The explanations and meanings that they do offer, therefore, are perspectives and interpretations. The text of *Waiting For Godot* abstractly dramatizes the disorientation precipitated by these processes of representation as they emerge in the context of distanced western observers.

The aesthetic economy of Beckett's text, in this particular context, therefore, incorporates the physical and semantic suffering of both the Sarajevan people and the distanced western observer. In this sense, the formal dramatic structure that Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo gives to the disorienting relationship between humiliation

and despair experienced by the Sarajevan people and by the western spectatorship in relation to the siege, becomes political. That is, the formal aesthetic structure of Beckett's play — its dialectic of "waiting" and "hoping", its always aborted (re)productions of meaning— presents both western observers and the Sarajevan people with a means of articulating and therefore participating within their felt disorientation in the context of the Bosnian crisis. Such clear articulation and participation, I argue, is made available only in an aesthetic interrogation of Sontag's production.

3.2. *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo as Political Intervention:

This section investigates how the staging of Beckett's text in this specific Sarajevan milieu —which implicates the international context and ramifications— articulates and participates in the Sarajevan's struggle against their oppressive situation and against western European and US (apparent) apathy. In addition, the analysis of the aesthetic economy of Sontag's Sarajevan *Waiting For Godot*, demonstrates how this production might be theoretically conceived of as a form of political intervention in the west's self-understanding in relationship to the siege in Sarajevo.

In this section, I argue that the political potency of the event resides in the complex tension between the performance and the context of the performance. Unlike the San Quentin production, Sontag's production of physical and semantic suffering is not staged in a socially legitimized place of suffering: Sarajevo is a contemporary, cosmopolitan European city, not a place of imprisonment. However, the siege has changed Sarajevo's identity as a cosmopolitan European city. It has become a place of apparently un-legitimized imprisonment. The tension between the performance and the context of the performance is complex because the physical and semantic suffering at work in Beckett's text should provide a contrast to the contemporary multicultural environment of Sarajevo. However, dramatization of suffering is very apposite in besieged Sarajevo. In this respect, Sontag's production functions to politically intervene

in the Serbian and Croatian attack on Sarajevo and the apparent stasis in the level of western interest in the Bosnian crisis, by highlighting this complex tension. In short, this section argues that political intervention occurs *within* the various ways in which this theatrical event enacts such tension.

Sontag states that staging *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo enables her production to function as "an expression of normality" ("Waiting For Godot in Sarajevo" 91), and argues that "the [Sarajevan] audience for theater expects to see a play like *Waiting For Godot*" (90):

> This is a great European play and they are members of European culture. For all their attachment to American popular culture, which is as intense here as anywhere else, it is the high culture of Europe that represents for them their ideal, their passport to European identity. People had told me again and again on my earlier visit in April: We're part of Europe. We're the people of former Yugoslavia who stand for European values: secularism, religious tolerance, and multi-ethnicity (90).

Sontag's comments concerning the normality inherent in staging a European play in Sarajevo at this time function strategically and politically if understood in the following ways.

Firstly, Sontag implies that staging Beckett's play affirms and foregrounds the European identity of Sarajevo. In affirming the besieged city's European identity, Sontag's staging of Beckett's play simultaneously implies Sarajevo's ideological investment in the "European values" of "secularism, religious tolerance, and multi-ethnicity." Sontag's statement, therefore, implies that the historic, culturally eclectic, specifically European identity of Sarajevo is at stake in emphasising the normality inherent in the staging of Beckett's play in Sarajevo. In this manner, Sontag's staging of specifically *Waiting For Godot* in besieged Sarajevo can be seen as politically strategic.

Sontag's production strategically enacts both Sarajevo's (apparent) solidarity with a specifically contemporary European value-economy, and the city's commitment to that value-economy in the staging of a play which popularly represents European high culture. Sontag's production, therefore, in foregrounding this commitment, implicitly strengthens Sarajevo's ideological resistance to the (equally ideological) extremist, nationalist politics of their Serbian and Croatian oppressors. The event enacts the historical subtext of multicultural activity in the city and solidifies (accurately or inaccurately) the city's relationship to the west.

In the context of this solidification, however, Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot* simultaneously functions to politically intervene in the non-interventionist policies of the western European and US governments. In its enactment of Sarajevo's European, culturally sophisticated identity, Sontag's production exposes both the reductive simplicity and the unfortunate absurdity of the popular western view which cannot understand the usefulness of theatre to the people of besieged Sarajevo. Implicit in this popular view is the ideological belief that such cultural activity is no longer important to the Sarajevan civilians. More dangerously, this ideological perspective circumvents and prescribes the besieged identity of the Sarajevan people and reduces their humanity.

The Sarajevan civilians, perceived in this ideological manner, become a distant, alien almost primitive people. This ideological perspective, therefore, implicitly legitimates non-interventionist political strategies which suggest that the crisis in Bosnia is motivated by a complex, historical ethnic feud particular to Sarajevo. The normality of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo implicit in Sontag's staging of Beckett's culturally sophisticated play in a culturally sophisticated city (and made explicit in Sontag's comment that the Sarajevan theatre audience expects to see a play like *Waiting For Godot*), directly antagonises and deconstructs this ideological perspective and in doing so challenges the political policies of the above governments.

If Sontag's production is read as asserting and solidifying Sarajevo's relationship to the historical and cultural identity of the west and its value-economy, theatre in Sarajevo in general and Sontag's staging of Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* in particular, seem absolutely appropriate; not because theatre provides a means of escape or because Beckett's play dramatizes extreme physical and semantic deprivation, but because theatre is part of the cultural activity of Sarajevo and *Waiting For Godot* is a "great European play" and "they are members of European culture." As an affirmation of the European identity of Sarajevo and the sophisticated culturally active lives of its people, Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo politically intervenes in the western ideological perspective which implicitly perceives the people of Sarajevo as primitive rather than contemporary cosmopolitan citizens.

The affirmation of the European identity of Sarajevo and the culturally sophisticated lives of its people inherent in Sontag's production must now be strategically re-located in the context of besieged Sarajevo in order to fully understand the political implications at work in the complex tension between the performance and the context of the performance. In the context of this complex tension the concept of normality connotes complex signification. Sontag's production of *Waiting For Godot*, both as cultural document and as theatrical event, provocatively foregrounds and enacts the apparent paradox concerning the normality of staging of Beckett's play in the disorienting context of an historical moment which constantly negotiates between pre-siege and besieged Sarajevan identities.

Sontag's production of Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* recalls the culturally eclectic environment of Sarajevo and in doing so Sontag's production reminds its spectatorship that a pre-siege Sarajevo existed. In a similar way to the (non)action of *Waiting For Godot*, besieged Sarajevo seems to exist precariously between time. Besieged Sarajevo displays an intimate relationship to its pre-siege self, but clearly, like the second act of *Waiting For Godot*, something has changed. The spectre of pre-siege Sarajevo haunts

the shells of former civic buildings and the memories of the Sarajevan people. Sontag's production enacts both the trans-temporal (retro)action that is memory and the constant and disorienting negotiation of the trans-temporal historic and cultural context in which the siege emerges.

The text of *Waiting For Godot*, against this particular Sarajevan backdrop, however, formally structures the precarious position that contemporary Sarajevo and its civilians occupy in relation to their pre-siege selves and the western spectatorship. It provides the Sarajevan people with a tangible means of dialoguing with their pre-siege lives. In a similar way to Vladimir and Estragon when they momentarily forget Godot's absence, Sontag's production might enable its audience to momentarily understand their besieged lives as temporary in the context of their remembered European and culturally sophisticated identities. And in this momentary understanding of the temporary nature of the siege in Sarajevo and the solidification of the city's relationship to the west, western European and US intervention seems probable. Sontag's production makes available the possibility of an end to the siege, be it in the form of western European and US intervention or otherwise, amid the continual absence of an end to the suffering.

I am not suggesting that Sontag's production functions ultimately as a form of theatrical therapy in Sarajevo. On the contrary, the irreducible dialectic between temporary and continual absence at work in the formal structure of *Waiting For Godot* enacts the disorienting manner in which the shifting experiences of humiliation and dignity manifest themselves within the trans-temporal physical and semantic location of contemporary Sarajevo. Sontag's production does provide the Sarajevan people with a tangible means of both dialoguing with their pre-siege lives and formally apprehending the semantic complexity (or inadequacy) inherent in trying to make sense of their current situation.

3.2.1. Problematizing the west

Sontag's staging of Beckett's text, amid the political and social crisis of besieged Sarajevo also politically intervenes in the west's self-understanding in relation to the siege. In the first instance, in the light of Sarajevo's perceived commitment to the value-economy of the west ("secularism, religious tolerance and multi-ethnicity"), enacted in Sontag's assertion of the normality of staging *Waiting For Godot* in contemporary Sarajevo, the western European and US decision not to intervene in the crisis is playfully questioned. If these values are under threat in Sarajevo, then it is possible they are under threat throughout the western world. And if the western powers are not explicitly and immediately interested in defending these values at all costs, does this then comment upon their lack of commitment to these values, or their lack of commitment to these values anywhere else but in their own domains?

Commitment to these western values, however on the part of western leaders does not automatically imply that the only ethically correct action in the case of Bosnia is aggressive western political and military action. Nor should it imply that the only justification for western military intervention in foreign conflicts is a perceived threat to western values. Clearly the issue of western aggressive political and military intervention emerges in western Europe and the US as a complex ethical and political issue. Yet, it should not be forgotten that Sarajevan figures like Ademir Kenovic (director of *Sarajevo Ground Zero*) and western figures such as David Rieff consider the act of western military intervention as the only ethical action, in the light of what they consider to be complete genocide of the Bosnian-Muslim people. There is, therefore, an apparent tension between a view of the Bosnian conflict as a complex ethical and political issue, and a view of the crisis which suggests that the previous view misunderstands the barbaric nature of the conflict. This tension, I contend, articulates what is at stake in the Bosnian conflict and its relationship to the west in the context of postmodern modes of cultural inquiry of contemporary distanced crisis.

Sontag's assertion of the normality of staging *Waiting For Godot* in a contemporary European city, coupled with the politics of the aesthetic economy of Beckett's text —which dramatizes always aborted (re)productions of meaning— illustrates the ethical and political complexities of a post cold-war crisis in the context of postmodernity as they emerge in various attempts to synthesise adequate western responses to the cultural phenomenon of contemporary besieged Sarajevo. The critical rigors of a sophisticated postmodern mode of cultural inquiry demand that each ideological position within western culture is understood as a product of that western culture. And, the postmodern mode of cultural inquiry demonstrates that each position offers a different perspective on western culture, but is also inextricably linked to all other positions within that culture. Such a sophisticated mode of cultural inquiry illustrates the ethical and political complexities of contemporary cultural and political crisis.

However, in the light of the extreme physical and semantic suffering of thousands of innocent civilians in Sarajevo, the critical rigors of postmodern cultural inquiry, which imply the ethical and political complexity of the situation and the role of the west, seems an entirely inadequate way to approach and consider the Bosnian conflict. And at worst it might excuse the complete neglect of responsibility to defend helpless innocents might easily lurk behind such a sophisticated mode of cultural inquiry. Rieff writes:

> The future of Bosnia, and possibly the future of much of Eastern Europe as well, holds not peace but the sword. After what the West and the UN have done, and not done, perhaps that was to be expected. And perhaps, what ever they might have done, anything else was a dream. The fall of great empires is so often followed by cruel wars of succession. What is certain is that a lot of dreams have died in Bosnia during the past two and a half years: the dream that the world has a conscience; the dream that Europe is a civilized place; the dream that there is justice for the weak as well as for the strong. It should come as no surprise that the old millennium dream that the

> truth will set us free should die there as well. And this reality, it turns out, is better apprehended in the ruined town center of Gorazde, in the cleansed villages of the Bosanska Krajina, and in the Lion Cemetery in Sarajevo than in the Palais de Nations in Geneva or in the UN Secretariat building in New York, much as we might have it otherwise. The defeat is total, the disgrace complete (225).

As in Beckett's dramatization of "waiting," post cold war distant crisis, seems to engender a paradoxical (non)action among the west. Much is taking place among the western media in terms of reporting the slaughter and discussing the merits or otherwise of military intervention. The UN, who have no mandate to intervene other than "humanitarianly" in the Bosnian crisis, also appear to carry out a similar paradoxical (non) action. Action on the part of the political powers in the west is displaced into the discourse surrounding the war(s), or into the daily activities of simply "making people feel better," be it in the form of UN food packages, or Sontag's commitment to work with a group of professional Sarajevan actors.

Sontag's Sarajevan production, I contend, approached as an aesthetic inquiry into the Bosnian conflict and the west's ambiguous relationship to the crisis, illuminates the limitations of a postmodern mode of cultural inquiry as an adequate means of analysing contemporary conflict in the actual reality of contemporary European crisis. Beckett's text, in its aesthetic rendering of the paradoxical conflict between the desire to act and the perplexity of non-action both exemplifies and problematizes the outside perspective of a western observer, that is located amid the various western representations of the siege in Sarajevo. And in doing so Sontag's Sarajevan production draws attention to an irreducible conflict between two versions of the western world in the light of its response to the Bosnian conflict. On the one hand the conflict reveals the apparent barbarism of late-capitalist western culture, which has allowed a genocide that might have been prevented and could have been stopped. On the other, the conflict has confirmed the

laudable political sophistication of the western world, sensitive to the political and ethically complex nature of contemporary cultural conflicts, and not rushing, therefore, to engage in aggressive military action in Bosnia.

3.3. In Conclusion: *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo as Contemporary western Aesthetic/Political Praxis

The interrogation of Beckett's text, as it emerges in besieged Sarajevo yields postmodern aesthetic/political praxis. As such, the production offers an enactment of politically incisive art in the west within postmodernity. This unique theatrical event, I contend, does not function in simple opposition to the cultural conflict of which it is a part. And, as I have made clear throughout my study of the Sarajevan production, this theatrical event not only takes place in the actual environment of besieged Sarajevo, but it also emerges amid the various and conflicting western representations of the crisis and the theoretical complexity of postmodern mode of cultural inquiry.

Waiting For Godot, as it emerges in Sontag's Sarajevan production, demonstrates that politically incisive theatrical postmodern aesthetic/political praxis incorporates the apolitical and ahistorical characteristics of the aesthetic category into its performance strategies, which simultaneously account for their own place and moment of historical production. In sharp contrast to JoAnne Akalaitis's 1985 production of Beckett's *Endgame*, performed by the American Repertory Company in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Sontag's production of *Waiting For Godot* does not attempt to comteporize or politicize the theatrical setting of Beckett's play. Jonathan Kalb comments:

> Douglas Stein's set is a burned-out subway tunnel with implied windows high up... it unquestionably suggests a specific time and place - an American city, probably New York, after Nuclear holocaust - which, in the beginning heightens spectators' involvement by dredging up

> emotional baggage about the arms race and making it difficult to push the production away to a safe, objective distance. Like Brecht's plans for *Godot*, however, it also limits the action to a single field of reference, blocking off differing approaches to the meaning in the text (Kalb 81).

Kalb's comments imply that Akalaitis's decision to contextualize Beckett's text in this way ultimately reduces the wider implications of Beckett's work. By contextualizing Beckett's text, I suggest that Akalaitis's production contradicts the sublime hopelessness of the action and dialogue of *Endgame*. That is, she attempts to make it politically potent by suggesting a particular time and place. By implicating a fictitious, specific historical and political moment, this production suggests that the contradictions inherent in Beckett's texts are at some point reconcilable. In placing Beckett's dialogue and action within the economy of political discourse, Beckett's text becomes re-configured within an evaluative economy. That is, political discourse operates, however contingently, within an economy of value that decides at certain points in its narrative that particular political positions are more correct than others. But in the absence of this specific setting, political discourse becomes subsumed under the aesthetic economy of Beckett's text which questions the concept of evaluation. Akalaitis's production limits the amount of theoretical questions that Beckett's aesthetic text poses.

Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot*, however, does not impose a political context or reading on Beckett's text. It is not a production which physically occurs outside of besieged Sarajevo, with an American cast, costumed in the poor clothing of Sarajevan citizens, against a painted destroyed Sarajevan backcloth. Rather, *Waiting for Godot* becomes besieged Sarajevo, besieged Sarajevo does not become *Waiting For Godot*. The plastic UN backdrop, used in Sontag's production, is a part of the landscape of besieged Sarajevo, it was not made for the production. Sontag's production, I argue, retains the acontextual, apolitical aesthetic economy of Beckett's text. It is not a political reading of besieged Sarajevo, it is besieged Sarajevo. And as besieged Sarajevo has

become a part of a contemporary western international ideological community, *Waiting For Godot* also becomes the landscape of the west's imagination in relation to the Bosnian crisis. And the way in which the aesthetic economy of Beckett's text problematizes the concepts of evaluation and meaning, suggests that Beckett's text also incorporates the dilemmas of a postmodern, post cold war, approach to contemporary crisis in the western world.

Sontag's Sarajevan production also yields a unique articulation of the complexities at work in a contemporary theorization of social and political theatre in the post cold-war west. The production demonstrates the political potency of the multi-chronicity of a live theatrical event which includes the theatricalized time and space of Beckett's text in Sarajevo's Youth Theatre, the besieged Sarajevan audience members, and distanced western observers, into its performance strategies. *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo, therefore, politically combines and exposes in one event the various and conflicting representations of the crisis as they emerge in Sarajevo and in the west. Intriguingly, the production mythically appears to hold the entire conflict together in the apparent wholeness of Beckett's text. The production thus provides a unique means of staging and interrogating the essence of conflict which is at stake not only in besieged Sarajevo, but in the debate surrounding the politics of western theatre.

Sontag's staging of *Waiting For Godot* in Sarajevo demonstrates that the aesthetic is a condition of the political. That is, the aesthetic incorporates the political category. The aesthetic economy of this production, however, does not offer an alternative to political discourse. It does, however, allow the production to maintain an "irreducible particularity," (Eagleton 2) which enables the production to successfully dramatize the most abstract and irreducible form of contradiction at work in a distanced western response to the Bosnian conflict within postmodernity.

This staging of Beckett's text in besieged Sarajevo enacts the complexity of theoretical contemporary cultural reflexivity, specifically when such reflexivity confronts

actual social and political crisis. The crucial theoretical question this theatrical event begins to address, much less answer, is not whether postmodern aesthetic/political praxis is possible, but how the aesthetic mode of inquiry, here embodied in the economy of live theatrical performance, can playfully and powerfully further enable the cultural critique of postmodernity.

Notes

[1] In his 1967 "Postscript", from which this is a quotation, Eric Bentley takes issue with the remark he made in his 1956 article regarding the undramatic quality of Beckett's *Waiting For Godot.* Bentley suggests that Beckett's play is highly dramatic, as the subject of the play, is "not that of pure waiting" (65), but it is "what happens in certain human beings *while* they are waiting" (65). Bentley understands *Waiting For Godot* as ultimately embodying hope as the characters continue to wait with a distant anticipation of an arrival.

[2] The setting for Act One of *Waiting For Godot* is as follows: "A country road. A tree. Evening. The setting for Act Two is largely the same: "Next day. Same Time. Same Place."

[3] Samuel G. Freedman comments in his article regarding the Akalaitis production, "Who's to Say Whether a Playwright is Wronged?" (*New York Times,* Dec 23, 1984), that in the playbill, "stapled next to an advertisement for Oriental rugs, was a statement by the playwright Samuel Beckett denouncing the production as a "complete parody" and suggesting that "anybody who cares for the work couldn't fail to be disgusted by this. On the other side of the page was a rejoinder from Robert Brustein, the artistic director of the theatre. 'Normal rights of interpretation," he wrote, "are essential in order to free the full energy and meaning of the play.'" Freedman's comments succinctly presents the continuing debate surrounding directorial interpretations of (particularly) the work of living playwrights.

[4] Martin Esslin's article is taken from *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1961). Quotations from the *San Quentin News* by kind permission of the librarian. Esslin's article appears in Ruby Cohn's 1967 edition of *Casebook on Waiting For Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1967. 83-88).

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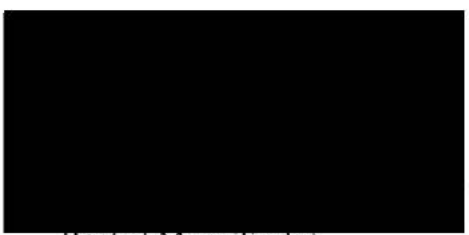
Author 

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