

‘Marcia Farquhar. And I’

by Professor Roberta Mock

On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on.

Say for be said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid.

Say a body. Where none. No mind. Where none. That at least. A place. Where none. For the body. To be in. Move in. Out of. Back into. No. No out. No back. Only in. Stay in. On in. Still.

All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.

(Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho*)[1]

The way I watched Marcia Farquhar and Reynir Hutber’s *And I* was neither expected nor intended. This is because I watched it as a privileged spectator, to write what you are now reading. I am not the unknown audience member in a future time, the one Marcia anticipates throughout the film, who comes and goes, who doesn’t stay in, as she must. As I did. I watched every single minute, in order, only once. Alone, with her. Wearing headphones. Unlike you, I could stop, catch my breath and resume where I left off.[2] Still. It took over a month because I found it difficult. As, I was and am sure, did Marcia. This is something we shared. We, Marcia and I, were in it together.

With the exception of the first 43 minutes (on my phone, under a duvet that was not my own, as if in a tent, on my first ever visit to Liverpool), I watched *And I* on a computer monitor. I stared at Marcia and listened as hard as I could and typed. At first, I tried to synthesize and summarize. And then I just hollowed out and looked into her eyes and mouth and let my fingers say what they needed to say on the keyboard. Sometimes those eyes broke my heart, especially when that mouth stilled. Sometimes those eyes made me afraid, for both of us, of something just beyond, beyond words, beyond our time.

I touch typed 17135 words while watching *And I*. Reading them does not really tell me what I was experiencing nor quite what Marcia said. I recorded that I LOLed at least once. (“Welcome to the bosom of my family!”) Unlike Marcia’s punchlines – the ones she eventually delivers; the ones she remembers taking hours or months or even a year to emerge, in the right moment, in all their splendour, and then represents (“Welcome to the bosom of my

family!”) – the words I typed do not resolve. They mimic but skirt around sense, saying a space between Marcia and I.

Most of the time I watched the film in sections lasting about 40 minutes. That wasn't intentional. That was usually what I could manage. I haven't smoked for years and it made me want to go out for a fag. As I suspect did Marcia. About 40 minutes before the end of *And I*, Marcia notes that she was told that lessons at school lasted 40 minutes because people couldn't think beyond that. I am no slouch when it comes to watching. I'm often at my happiest watching live performances that last 4, 6, 12 hours. But watching *And I*, I fail again and again: to be in, to be still, to go on.

This has something to do with how Marcia is not located in the film's *mise-en-scène*. Instead, her face is the film's *mise-en-scène*. She says the rest of her body where it is not. It is not with me. She conjures it – thirsty, surprisingly bony, sticking to a plastic seat we can't see – with words; her physical discomfort is not demonstrated but articulated into being, articulating her body into being. A contemporary review of Samuel Beckett's late monologue/novella, *Worstward Ho*, began: “The less there is to see, the more there is to say”.^[3] In *And I*, as in Beckett's text, presence and absence performatively produce the other at once.

Still. Even though I can hear her body, once I look away, I am no longer in the performance, of the performance, one that takes place between my headphones and my screen. When I watch a live durational piece in a gallery or a studio or a theatre – like *The Omnibus*, Marcia's 30 hour performance at the National Review of Live Art in 2010, a performance that haunts *And I* and collapses tenses in my experiencing of it – I look away and am still there, here, with the audience, with Marcia engaging with them, with us, spinning a web with sight lines. In *And I*, Marcia says that in her “own”, live performances, she can give space, can give more to her audiences by not speaking.

The distance between *And I* and Marcia's collaborative *12 Shooters* project is both negligible and immense. Made in 2007, *12 Shooters* comprises 13 short films, each made by a different artist who was invited to take up one of Marcia's restaged live performances as raw material for a film. Their screenings have to comply with three conditions: (“First the body”) Marcia must be present; (“Next – First how all at once”) they are to be shown together; and (“Back to once so-said two as one”) the event needs to include at least one or two elements of the live performances represented in the films, in order to “reiterate the difference between

the live and recorded performance”.^[4] Live, here, is also alive, foreshadowing and forestalling the day she won't be in the room. (“On. Stare on. Say on. Be on. Somehow on. Anyhow on. Till dim gone.”)

And I, though, operates through Marcia's lack of presence, her future in its future. In it, she tells us that she is dedicated to punchlines, that the story she is telling is about her death (my notes do not reveal whether the punchlines are related to the story or to death or to both; whether the story is all of And I, or part of it, or both). I am reminded, as I so often am, of Herbert Blau's observation (in an interview about Samuel Beckett) on the defining paradox of theatre, that "the person performing in front of you is dying in front of your eyes"; it's just a matter of time.[5] Marcia tells us that 12 Shooters was an attempt to address the issue of permanence, the ephemerality of live performance, and watching the films one after the other with her was meant to be a durational experience in itself, like the watching of And I. Language very rarely fails Marcia. Still. My notes read: "That is a particular. A nod to. Posthumous. [long pause.] Can't think of the word. Certainly not fame." ("What when words gone? None for what then. But say by way of somehow on somehow with sight to do.")

In the final minutes of And I, Marcia thinks about Lou Reed, about meeting him at a dinner party, about knowing Reed's face from the Screen Test he made for and with Andy Warhol. Warhol produced hundreds and hundreds of Screen Tests: film portraits strictly and formally composed in front of a plain background, static camera trained on the subject, face framed and pinned by its gaze, just like Marcia in And I. Reed is ravishing, mouthing a coke bottle that is reflected in his dark sunglasses. Marcia remembers his beautiful, young, intelligent eyes and is delighted when Reynir tells her that Reed's eyes are not actually visible in the Screen Test. ("See for be seen. Misseen. From now see for be misseen.") She conjures her own sunglasses from nowhere and puts them on by way of finale: "And how long is it?" she asks. ("See no more. Say no more. That alone. That little much of void alone.")

One of the 12 Shooters screenings took place at the Chelsea Hotel in New York. The Chelsea Hotel, where Warhol's Chelsea Girls, featuring the Velvet Underground, was filmed; where Edie Sedgwick famously set her bed on fire. Andy and Edie apparently fell out; her part in that film was cut (and later recycled) and Nico replaced her; Nico's debut album was called Chelsea Girl. In Mark Harris's account of the 12 Shooters evening, he observes that Marcia's "stories test the chains that link us to the dead, as if reminding them to pay attention".[6] (In And I, Marcia tells us that working in the "phantasmagoric medium" of film, she feels the dead

are quite close.) Harris connects her to Warhol's superstar divas, "playing soliloquies from the centre of their community." And he quotes Marcia: "I loved all the Factory family incest ... and at 14 had photos all over my wall of the Velvets and Edie".[7]

The Philosophy of Andy Warhol, his "autobiography," was published in 1975, subtitled parenthetically "from A to B and back again" (that is, from A to B to A). Its

first unnumbered chapter/prologue is called “B and I: How Andy puts his Warhol on”: “I wake up and call B,” writes A/utobiographical A/ndy, “B is anybody who helps me kill time. B is anybody and I’m nobody. B and I”. [8] A/ndy is created, creates himself, through his relationship with B; his “I” is manufactured in his Factory by and with and through elective kinship. Of course, B is some rather than any body – or rather, they are many bodies, combined and redacted throughout the book. At first B is female, elsewhere male. Occasionally, certainly, B is Brigid Berlin. Although it is often said that the book is “ghost-written,” it is actually an edited and organised transcript from hours of interviews, some of which were recorded by and with B/rigid. The ghosts are the sounds of their voices, merged in print as the life/work A/ndy who, like Marcia in And I, is/has no body. The Philosophy of Andy Warhol, like Marcia’s And I, produces rather than explains its subject, both art and artist, through haunted snippets of conversation, anecdote, gossip. Gossip, as Irit Rogoff has written, is a form of testimony that externalizes; that makes “overt its relations to subjectivity, voyeuristic pleasure and the communicative circularity of story-telling”; that is “invariably located in the present”. [9]

Marcia describes the sensation of life and work swimming in her head during the extended moment of filming And I as kaleidoscopic. And at the eye of this swirling perfect storm is 1967, then very nearly half a century earlier: “a kaleidoscopic year,” she calls it. 1967, of course, was a big year for Andy Warhol and his Factory family players. It was the year that the LP The Velvet Underground and Nico came out, featuring Warhol’s banana on the cover and his name as credited producer. It was the year that both Chelsea Girls and Nico’s Chelsea Girl, featuring Velvets John Cale and Lou Reed, were released. It was the year that Warhol’s film, Imitation of Christ, was produced. Imitation of Christ, featuring Nico and Brigid Berlin, is exactly 8 hours long, the same length as And I.

For Marcia, another Chelsea girl, 1967 – the summer of love – was the summer her father died, her father who sounded like John Cale in Songs for Drella, the album made years later by Cale and Reed in memory of Warhol. Mama Cass was playing the first acetates of Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band out the window and into the same street, in Chelsea,

another Chelsea, the “original” Chelsea, where her father lay between dying and not-dying. That kind of endurance, her father’s, impressed her. Endurance artworks, Marcia says – referencing the work of her teacher at the Slade, Stuart Brisley – should signpost to such acts of endurance, to (according to my notes) “something more urgent, existential, political. The work, not as a black hole, but as a place of. [The silence is unnerving.]”

Marcia tells us that the title, And I, riffs off the work of both Andy Warhol and Samuel

Beckett. The film's visual framing echoes Beckett's 1965 television play, *Eh Joe*, as much as it does Warhol's *Screen Test with Lou Reed*, made in the same year: its camera drawing incrementally and intrusively closer to a man's face being interrogated by a woman's voice until his features become the screen. Although she chose not to meet either Warhol or Beckett when opportunities may have been presented, both appear in Marcia's gossipy anecdotes: her charismatic Spanish exile boyfriend who tried to pimp unsuccessfully for Andy; her mother or mother's sister who may have been kissed or anaesthetised or both by Beckett's brother when she had her appendix removed. No matter which or even whether; the matter is the storying rather than the story. "The truth always has the fiction hovering around," says Marcia. As Gerry Harris notes in her description of *The Long Haul*, the 12 hour performance in Palo Alto in 2013 that Marcia discusses in *And I* – repeating, reiterating, rehearsing its elements, which were themselves repeated, reiterated, rehearsed, and still, always, never the same – there is "a sense of contiguous connection between these stories, and simultaneously, one of dizzying uncontrollable complication".[10]

Although Beckett (his writing, his example) helped Marcia come to terms with the trauma of her father's death, of her brother's mental illness and incarceration, in *And I*, he is associated with her mother: her Irish mother who is compared to Beckett's mother, May; her mother who read *Happy Days* to her outloud, prying open and exposing the value of Beckett's world by being Winnie. Winnie, buried first to her waist then her neck in sand, unable to access her props and material routines. Winnie, who tells her eventually silent husband that

even when you do not answer and perhaps hear nothing, something of this is being heard, I am not merely talking to myself, that is in the wilderness, a thing I could never bear to do – for any length of time [Pause.] That is what enables me to go on, go on talking that is.x]

It is no coincidence that Marcia's work exemplifies the elements identified by Derval Tubridy in Beckett's theatre that are equally vital to performance art: "the experience of the body in space in terms of duration and endurance; the role of repetition, reiteration and rehearsal; and

the visceral interplay between language and the body".[12] Marcia notes that although Beckett left Ireland and his mother, as Irishman and son, he didn't go away as much as he went in.

Going in and being heard, or perhaps not heard, are central to Beckett's *Not I*: a play that begins, funnily enough, but not funnily at all, when you hear the words "out... into this world"; a play that Marcia tells us she happened to see and that changed her life.

Written and first performed in 1972, its relationship to *And I* is dialectical, like the slash in presence/absence, life/work, artist/art, acting/not-acting, documentation/performance-to-camera, dying/not-dying, out/into. At the end of *Not I*, the actor playing Mouth uncovers her eyes and returns to simply “I” (though this is never simple). At the end of *And I*, Marcia covers her eyes and returns to simply “I” (and, of course, this could never be simple either). *And I* is not *Not I*. The double negative – not *Not* – refuses to cancel itself out to produce a stable, single autobiographical “I” but instead transforms into an excessive conjunction. As monologues, *Not I* dissociates and *And I* associates. Mouth (“... she!”) is unable to use a personal pronoun, but Marcia lovingly embraces the becoming of “I” and more.

To be “not herself” – the Marcia bracketed as performance – is to be “and herself”. Whereas Mouth is unable to own her own memories, Marcia absorbs and is extended by those of others. This operates more like Warhol’s networked B than the voices of the multiple, Irish, “old crones, stumbling down the lanes” that Beckett wrote as a single “she”.^[13] Still, Marcia tells us that the voices of the dead are alive in her head, that they ghost her work through mimicry: “They’re like channelling from a library of acoustic spectres that I can replay from this eerie nowhere of my mind, keeping these people with me.” But *And I* is haunted by many other supplements and revenants: her younger self; her previous work; her art historical lineages and mythologies; her husband and daughters and granddaughter; her friends and acquaintances and students; her interlocutors and critics; her collaborators and curators and contemporaries; her cats; her audiences past and future; Reynir. Reynir, whom Marcia tells unequivocally, is the Auditor to her Mouth.

The Auditor in *Not I* – a cowed figure who says nothing but who lifts his arms on four occasions “in a gesture of helpless compassion” – merges so successfully into the dim shadows of the play that he occasionally slips out of it altogether. The voices Mouth seems to hear (“what?... who?... no!”), although we do not, are not emerging from him. He appears in the published text but not in the iconic film version with Billie Whitelaw, the film based on the

UK premier directed by Beckett himself at the Royal Court, on the edge of the original Chelsea, the production which changed Marcia’s life. Marcia is insistent that the Auditor was not on stage when she saw *Not I*, early in its run – although he had been in previous performances that she did not see – and remains seared in her mind’s eye: an absent presence, a privileged though perhaps redundant listener. Unlike Beckett’s Auditor, Reynir may speak, when and if he feels he must. What he says is for Marcia, not for us; I barely caught most of his words and my notes are punctuated by holes in these moments, holes that are not uncomfortable pauses. Marcia casts him as a mild tormenter; my impression is of an efficient nurse. Perhaps

these are not mutually exclusive.

If *And I is not Not I*, then it is, similarly, also not Shirley Clarke's *Portrait of Jason*, which like Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*, was filmed in the Chelsea Hotel (in Clarke's penthouse apartment) and also released the following year in 1967. Assembled from a single 12 hour interview, its central figure, Jason Holliday – queer and black, hustler, artiste, performer – produces himself through increasingly drunken, exhausted and emotional conversation, anecdotes, gossip. The only person on screen, he addresses the camera, posterity and the others in the room – Clarke, her partner and crew – whose voices can be heard, increasingly, goading and provoking him. There are those who see both process and product as cruel and exploitative; there are those who see it as a game of complicity designed to produce a film that, like *And I*, is neither documentary nor fiction, or perhaps is both. This ambiguity in *Portrait of Jason* lies in the film's editing down to a 105 minute feature, editing quite unlike that of the work Marcia tells us did influence Reynir's aesthetic choices: *The Charles Bukowski Tapes*, Barbet Schroeder's pruning of 64 hours of interview material with the poet, filmed over a three year period, into 52 short monologues with a total running time of four hours.

Whereas Clarke's deliberately out-of-focus transitions both obscure and draw attention to an insecure shooting chronology and absent material, Schroeder's approach is transparently fragmented and emphasises the cut, refusing to impose a narrative arc. Reynir's transparency as film-maker, on the other hand, emphasises the refusal to cut or to reassemble, leaving the establishment of a narrative arc to Marcia. This, above all else, is his challenge to her, one she recognises with a kind of horror. Unable to edit her performance – or to be edited by somebody else and so to be distanced from it – *And I* is stilled as document, any single moment of which may (one future day, when its original screening conditions have been detached or lost or forgotten) be replayed and scrutinized endlessly,

any revelatory slip amplified and potentially simplified. As a performance scholar, this is why I chose to watch every moment of the film only once, in order; and this is why my quotations from and impressions of it may not be strictly accurate, may not be yours. It doesn't matter, and yet it matters a lot. This is what I thought I heard; this is what I thought I saw, in it with Marcia.

The editorial work of *And I*, for Marcia, is not limited to post-production but also includes processes of preparation. Her live performances, she tells us, are always planned to look like they come off the top of her head. And they rely on interaction with others, on intersubjective exchange. For *And I*, she had to prepare to be unprepared, to perform for and with a single laconic spectator in the room with her. Her rehearsals were her previous durational performances and yet she is unable to

rely on the techniques, the deceptively casual aesthetics of artifice, of watching and being watched, that propelled them. Like Winnie in Act Two of *Happy Days*, she is unable to access her props and material routines.

During demanding rehearsals with Beckett for both *Happy Days* and *Not I*, Billie Whitelaw learned how to control her pauses with precision. Beckett's pauses are studied. They replace words. Marcia's pauses in *And I* are unlearned moments when she is not fully in control, when words do not come. They are exquisite and generous and painful, instants of failure that point to the risks inherent in this performance. Gerry Harris has written that, watching Marcia perform, she felt that she was observing a glamorous and vulnerable woman "dancing on an edge which at any moment she might step over, taking us with her into something even more chaotic and perhaps much darker, yet liberating".^[14] And she does this, in *And I*, without the copious amounts of alcohol that lubricated the extended interviews of Jason Holliday and Charles Bukowski, or that fuelled the Christmas performance Marcia needed to complete a year later to finally hit the punchline. ("Welcome to the bosom of my family!")

In *And I*, Marcia discusses artistic life as a process where nothing – or very little of significance – should be considered a failure in the long run, for any length of time. Failure, on one day, means survival on another. Much more troubling would be the collapse or loss of her artist self, or perhaps the sense that she was unable to find it in the first place. Perhaps this is why she once, long ago but after seeing *Not I*, turned down the opportunity to live with Billie Whitelaw as a kind of au pair; she needed to own her own "I" first. And perhaps why, now, she says she wants to avoid autobiographical fact and naming those who are alive and close

to her – although she does both in *And I*, as she has in previous live performances, perilously slipping between the single "I" of artist and singular "and I" as art.

("On back better worse to fail the head said seat of all.")

Footnotes

1. Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (London: John Calder, 1983), p. 7. All unattributed quotations in italics in this essay are from the same text
2. *And I* was designed with the conceptual condition that it can only be shown once in any one location and that it must always be shown in its entirety. Audience members may leave and return, but they are not able to stop the 8 hour film or rewind it to see what they missed.
3. Stephen Bann, "Incompetents," *London Review of Books*, Vol. 5 No. 11, 16 June

- 1983, pp. 17-18 [online] <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v05/n11/stephen-bann/incompetents>
4. Maizlish (ed.), Marcia Farquhar's 12 Shooters (London: Live Art Development Agency), p. 192.
 5. Herbert Blau, Sails of the Herring Fleet: Essays on Beckett (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 158.
 6. Mark Harris, "Chelsea Hotel, March 14, 2008," in J. Maizlish (ed.), Marcia Farquhar's 12 Shooters, p. 106.
 7. Ibid., p. 110.
 8. Andy Warhol, The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again) (Orlando: Harcourt, 1975), p. 5.
 9. Irit Rogoff, "Gossip as testimony: a postmodern signature," in Griselda Pollock (ed.), Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 58.
 10. Geraldine Harris, "Marcia Farquhar, The Long Haul, Palo Alto, June 2013" in Harriet Curtis, Lois Keidan and Aaron Wright (eds), The Live Art Almanac Volume 4 (London: Live Art Development Agency & Oberon Books, 2016), p. 84.
 11. Samuel Beckett, Complete Dramatic Works (London: Faber & Faber, 1990), p. 145.
 12. Derval Tubridy, "Samuel Beckett and Performance Art," Journal of Beckett Studies, Vol. 23 No. 1, 2014, pp. 49-50.
 13. Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett: A Biography (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 622.
 14. Geraldine Harris, "Marcia Farquhar, The Long Haul, Palo Alto, June 2013," p. 85.