Figuring (un)figures: Reading Beckett’s Ping through Moving-image

by

Jennifer C. Triggs (BA, MDes.)

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore the idea that Samuel Beckett’s ‘Ping’ is a text that ‘performs’—acting on the reader to create an active response - through the act of translating the text into a different medium - one that fundamentally also ‘performs’; sounds, shows, moves, that of moving-image.

*Ping* is traditionally considered a ‘difficult’ piece of prose. Challenging conventional notions of plot, character and syntax, and premised on ambiguity, it is a radical work and an extreme example of Beckett’s avant-garde approach to writing.

Previous research on the text has tended to employ a mimetic approach, the quest for a singular, unified ‘meaning’, despite its fragmented nature and resistance to such interpretation. In this thesis, I explore instead the idea that new understanding of *Ping* can be achieved by switching the focus of its analysis to the *reader’s activity* in response to the text. I do this using a novel practice-based approach, responding as an artist to the *active process* that I believe is key in reading the text with the active process of creating an original artwork. I use the medium of moving-image to reflect what I feel are striking parallels between the operation of the text and the structures of film. Moreover, through translation into an audio-visual medium and the medium-specific issues of visualisation and sound that this raises, I am able to focus the research on the performative aspects of the text.

Re-reading *Ping* through the act of creating artwork successfully reveals the multiplicity, splitting, fluidity and movement that results from reading the text, the extent of which has not previously been identified. It reveals, most notably, its blanks and the active way that these work with respect to the reader - prompting creative activity and ensuring that the aesthetic object of the text remains perpetually ‘in process’. The depth created in reading the text, moreover, is made tangible by the work I have created. The moving-image installation coalesces and interrelates in a way that is analogous to reading the elements in *Ping*: creating fluid multiple senses and inter-relationships (including with the viewer/reader), which importantly are not the result of narrative development over time. It represents, in its making and viewing, an equivalent to the interaction experienced in reading *Ping*, making visible the performative workings and ‘trap-like’ form of reader-text interaction, and reinforcing my original premise that the most appropriate form of investigation for an artwork such as *Ping* is the creation of an artwork.

For the external viewer, it is a new work created as a result of reading *Ping*; an engaging piece of (Beckett) art which invites its own complex set of alternative readings.
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Foreword

I first became interested in Samuel Beckett’s work during my Masters degree in Illustration, where I used his novel *The Unnamable* as inspiration for a short film. I found I was fascinated by the aesthetic possibilities of Beckett’s words, and in response to this text made a set of sequences closely based on individual sections, a kind of condensed filmic illustration of the text.¹

Subsequently, I was drawn to *Ping*. This was a result of its eccentricity and not least because of its title. The text appealed to my own aesthetic sensibility; my work at that time was monochromatic and minimalist yet figurative. As a visual artist inspired to make images around literary texts, the apparent abstruseness and lack of obvious images in *Ping* struck me as a challenge. Although it is significantly starker than *The Unnamable*, it quickly became clear to me, however, that the main challenge of *Ping* was less to do with how one might generate visual images for the text, but rather in how to reconcile the multitude of changing interpretations that it held. This I was to find echoed in the range of the interpretations of *Ping* in scholarly literature. This paradox led me to think about exactly what it was that the text did to generate these fluctuating interpretations. A review of the literature revealed that what had struck me as this key aspect of *Ping* had not previously been explored, and suggested that research into the ‘space’ between the text and the reader’s mimetic interpretation, i.e. the visualisation and conceptualisation process of the text, would provide new insights. As an artist, I felt I could best respond to the active process in the text with a similarly active, creative process. I thus adopted a different approach to those previously undertaken - creating a moving-image artwork as an investigation of the workings of the text.

As I describe in Chapter 2, I approached the work with the general strategy of consciously switching between making and reflecting. I adopted a cyclical pattern of interspersing practical activity with pauses to reflect on what had been created, and

¹ This work is further discussed in Chapter 3, p.71.
pursuing the thoughts and ideas generated by this reflective viewing with further theoretical investigation, where appropriate, and a re-reading of the text. This prepared me for the next stage of making.

My overall aim with regards to my final artwork was to construct a piece that encompassed the key elements of reading the text - ambiguity and ‘work’ for the viewer – whilst maintaining sympathy with Beckett’s aesthetic. Rather than attempting to make a film adaptation of *Ping*, illustrating the text in a straightforward sense, I attempted to illuminate the reader-text interaction in the text. My primary purpose was not to attempt accurately to replicate *Ping* in film, but rather to use the active process of translation and the differences between the forms (i.e. written prose and moving image) to provoke thoughts about the way *Ping* works. Consequently, the moving-image work at each stage forms a key part of the overall investigation of *Ping*, and the final moving-image installation (as documented in Chapter 5 and on the DVDs accompanying this thesis\(^2\)) is a culmination of my engagement with the reader activity of the text.

The artwork, both in its development and in its final form provided me with insight on the workings of *Ping*, from which to contribute to the general pool of knowledge on the text. I have therefore, fully described and illustrated each stage of its ‘making’ and my subsequent ‘viewing’ of it. For the external viewer, it is a new work created as a result of reading *Ping*, and also constitutes a new visual ‘text’ that is open to personal interpretation.

In summary, in this thesis I explore the idea that *Ping* is a text that ‘does’, through *the act of translating it* into a medium that fundamentally also ‘does’ (sounds, shows, moves) - that of moving-image. To my knowledge, this is the first investigation of *Ping* based on creating moving-image, and also the first to reflect the full extent to which process is key to *Ping* by responding to it with the active process of making. Critics have expressed that a more open-ended approach to *Ping* is required, and this

\(^2\) The work in its final incarnation is documented by, firstly, a film-clip of the final set of moving-images with sound, and secondly film of the installation in situ. I suggest these be viewed following the reading of this thesis, or alongside my final ‘viewing’ (Chapter 5)
is what I have attempted in this project; creating not a simply a mimetic
interpretation, but an expression which, like *Ping*, itself raises questions - to my mind
one of the primary purposes of artwork.

The thesis structure

Chapter 1 is a contextualisation of Beckett’s *Ping*. It provides background on Beckett
and his work, an outline of the text, a review and discussion of the relevant critical
literature, and a history of short prose adaptations, visual art and music based on
Beckett’s writing. It ends with a discussion of my own approach to investigating the
text.

Chapter 2 is a look at the text in depth (including analysis of recordings and the
experience of reading the text aloud). In it, I identify its performative elements (i.e.
gaps, ambiguities and so on) and the effects these have on the reading process,
including its heightened sense of visuality and aurality. To do this, I use aspects of
theory from Wolfgang Iser (‘negations’ and reader-response theory) and Alfred Gell
(‘the artwork as trap’ and ‘cognitive resistance in pattern’). Through the application
of these theories, I also begin to establish relevant strategies and structures that I can
use in the construction of a moving-image translation of reading *Ping*.

In Chapter 3, I trace the first stages of translation of the text into a visual medium:
the development of my own visual equivalents for the elements and processes of
*Ping*. It begins with a description of my construction of images as a response to the
individual elements in the text, and then a reflection on these images as viewed
animated in a time-line. This is followed by a discussion of issues relating to reading
*Ping* that are raised by this viewing: in particular the issue of narratological figures
that are created by the reader, in spite of the ambiguous subject-object relations *Ping*. 
Chapter 4 follows the second phase of my practical activity: the subsequent re-processing and re-assembling of images to create a new (6 1/2 minute) version of the moving-image sequence. Following this, I describe and discuss my viewing of this moving-image sequence, with the new images and sequences I created edited into a suitable structure. In the final section, I address the idea of sound in the text with a view to incorporating an audio element into the work. To further identify ways in which I might articulate the effect of ‘sound’ in Ping in moving-image, I use Michel Chion’s notion of the ‘acousmître’ as a framework.

Chapter 5 outlines the development of a soundtrack for the moving-image work and the realisation of the work as a multi-screen installation. Following this is a description and discussion of the effects I experienced in viewing the work, detailing how it reflects back on the workings of the text.

Finally, I offer my conclusions and final comments, including reflections on future work that may be done.
Chapter 1: Background

1.1 Beckett and his work

The Irish writer Samuel Beckett (1906 –1989) has long been considered one of the most important writers of the twentieth century. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. He is renowned for his experimentation in literature and theatre, creating enduring works emblematic of the modern condition, which have since become culturally embedded in the western psyche.

Beckett is best known for his dramatic works (e.g. Waiting for Godot (1952) and Endgame (1958))1, but as S. E. Gontarski notes, Beckett considered that it was his prose work, that was “the important writing”.2 He wrote prose throughout his life, beginning with the story ‘Assumption’ in 1929, and, after 1950, the majority of his output was in short prose form. Beckett’s fiction is mainly in the form of monologue, building on the twentieth century modernist development of stream of consciousness, and later developing a postmodernist sensibility. His writing exhibits characteristics common to other twentieth century modernist writers, for example James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein (he knew and worked for Joyce as a young man). From the start, Beckett had a marked interest in experimentation; his work displays significant deviations from pre-existing (19th century) literature, and a concern with consciousness and the subconscious workings of the human mind.

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Beckett’s early prose (1929-1945) emerged from a tradition of Irish storytelling, with its characteristic wit and verbosity, Irish setting and speech. Beckett had a close personal affinity with Joyce (for whom he undertook research work in the late 1920s) and his early works, particularly *Watt* (written 1942-45) had arguably ‘Joycean’ features: the visual/typographic interruption of the text (with spaces, musical scores and footnotes), lengthy complex sentences that worked through all possibilities of an event, and streams of idiosyncratic internal monologue. As in much modernist writing, these Beckett works took an oblique approach to the depiction of objective events (the focus of what is generally taken as traditional fiction - i.e. the mode of fictional realism characterised by mid-nineteenth century literary works). In particular, since they were often written in the form of a continuous stream of experience they avoided conventional chronology. These works instead adopt a more fluid handling of time, meaning, for example, that the sense of ‘beginning’ and ‘ending’ is less clear. Similarly, the omniscient narrator common to nineteenth century fiction is omitted, and instead the impersonal third-person narrators of these texts are increasingly erratic and unreliable; for example, in Beckett’s *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, written in 1932 the narrator comments:

> The fact of the matter is we do not know where we are in this story. It is possible that some of our creatures will do their dope all right and give no trouble. And it is certain that others will not.³

From 1946 to the early 1950s, Beckett was exploring style through an increasingly destabilised form of monologue in the modernist mode. Beginning with *The Nouvelles*, he wrote in the first-person. By the time of his Trilogy of novels (*Molloy* (1951), *Malone Meurt* (1951), and *L’innomable* (1953)), this viewpoint was used to unite narrator and character, and made (the inability of) narration the focus of the text. He took this form - endless voices telling stories of or to themselves - to its conclusion in the last novel of the trilogy, *The Unnamable*. Beckett shifted the emphasis of his work around this time, developing what is now considered a ‘postmodernist standpoint’ (Brian McHale, 1987, David Lodge, 1977). In McHale’s view, the modernist (epistemological) questioning of, for example, what part the

(fictional) subject has in its world, was overtaken in *The Unnamable* by a more base ontological (postmodern) questioning: of the fictional world and of the mode of existence of the texts themselves.\(^4\) Essentially the change that McHale recognises is that instability or uncertainty becomes much more pervasive as a theme in Beckett’s writing from this time on.

The prose works Beckett wrote from the 1960s to 1988\(^5\) are more minimal in nature; both in their length and in the sparse treatment of their fictive elements - narrator, characters, plot and locale. In these works, the locales are very often no more than a kind of no-man’s land: ‘scattered ruins’ (*Lessness*, 1969) or a barely defined ‘place’ ravaged by dark and light (*All strange Away* (1963); *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965); *Ping* (1967)). Characters are either simplified to mere bodies, or to an unelaborated ‘he’, and narrators become impersonal and undefined as figures; thus the certainty of clear narrative (or other) voices in these texts is yet further diminished. In *Ping*, *Imagination Dead Imagine* and *Lessness*, a progressing plot is replaced by persistent ‘images’ of ‘whiteness’ and ‘no sound’. This suggests an impulse towards silence but it is all the time countered by the persistence of the language.

The vocabulary in these texts is somewhat simplified in comparison with his earlier work; there is a tendency, in these texts, for Beckett to “delyricalise, to destylise the language of fiction, to designify the words”.\(^6\) In the English texts, he often uses old English words in preference to those of Latin origin\(^7\) and dispenses with traditional sentence structure. This results in a kind of ‘colourless writing’, to use Roland Barthes terminology,\(^8\) with less of the trappings of traditional literary language. Throughout his career, Beckett wrote both in French and in English (in the late 1940s and 1950s in French exclusively), a decision he made, according to James Knowlson, because of the greater objectivity that this allowed him to have towards language. It

\(^7\) This is particularly noticable in Ping as the most pared dwon of Beckett’s short prose.
gave him the scope for simplicity and manipulation of language that he wished to produce in his work, which is particularly in evidence in the late short prose.9

This reduction of fictive and grammatical elements ultimately means that, of all his prose, these late pieces are perhaps the most concerned with form; a writing that is premised on the dissolution of sentence structure, and use of rhythm and repetition. As Beckett himself commented, with respect to prose: “it is the shape that matters”.10 The crafting of these ‘shapes’ involved considerable work for Beckett. Beckett scholar Mary Bryden points out that in literature in general: “Reduction is not, in fact, the same as scantiness: it is the result of intense labour”,11 and indeed the creation of these short prose works often involved a process of repeated redrafting by Beckett.12

Beckett worked in a wide range of media, moving between textual, dramatic, aural and visual forms. His extensive body of work includes critical essays, novels, film, theatre, radio and television plays, poetry and short prose. For prose writing, 1946-1953 was Beckett’s most intensely productive period. During this time he completed First Love, The Expelled, The Calamative, The End, Mercier et Camier, The Trilogy and Texts for Nothing. However, most critics agree that Beckett found himself in a ‘literary impasse’ after completing the French version of The Trilogy in 1950.13 He wrote in a letter in May 1953:

Since 1950 [I] have only succeeded in writing a dozen very short abortive texts in French [the Texts for Nothing (1950/51)] and there is nothing whatever in sight.14

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12 The French text Bing was redrafted 9 times by Beckett before it was published.
At this point Beckett instead turned back to drama, beginning work on *Endgame* in 1953. By the 1960s he was immersed in theatre; writing and assisting in the production of his plays in Paris and London. Beckett was interested in the whole gamut of sound and visual media. This was exhibited in the range of forms in which he worked, and extended to the possibilities afforded by its developing technologies. He used new technology centrally in his work, for example, the tape recorder on stage in *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958) from which much of the dialogue is played.\(^\text{15}\) He further developed this interest in recorded voice when he transferred his attentions to radio plays in the early 1960s, writing *Words and Music*, *Rough for Radio I and II*, and *Cascando* in 1961 then *The Old Tune* in 1963. In this period, he also wrote *Play* and *Come and Go* for the stage, and *Eh Joe* for television in 1965, which made use of the radio voice on stage, to create his own distinctive form of (un-embodied) characters.\(^\text{16}\) In 1963/4 Beckett shot his only work for the big screen, *Film*, in New York, a predominantly silent black and white short directed by Alan Schneider and starring Buster Keaton, which reflected his keen interest in the rudimentary silent film.\(^\text{17}\) The same year he wrote the prose piece *All Strange Away*, and in 1965 worked on *Imagination Mort Imaginez*, *Assez*, and *Le Dépeupleur*.\(^\text{19}\)

James Knowlson argues, in his acclaimed biography *Damned to Fame*, that Beckett’s struggle with *Le Dépeupleur* (*The Lost Ones*)\(^\text{20}\) led him to temporarily abandon that text in 1966 in favour of work on a shorter piece, *Blanc*.\(^\text{21}\) This text was renamed *Bing* during its numerous manuscript revisions, and first published in Paris in 1966.\(^\text{22}\) Following this, Beckett wrote the English text *Ping* in 1966/7. *Ping* is based on its French counterpart, *Bing*, but is ultimately a different text. After studying the

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\(^\text{17}\) The only sound is a spoken “ssh” early on in the film.
\(^\text{19}\) English titles: *Imagination Dead Imagine, Enough* and *The Lost Ones*.
manuscripts and drafts of both texts, Brian Fitch concluded that; “nobody other than Beckett - no translator - could have produced the [English] text of Ping”, it is a new text:

It would be quite false to maintain that the writer has merely “redone” in another language what he had already done previously in a first language. It is not a question of “redoing” (in the sense of “repeating”), but rather of “recasting” or “remaking”, that is recasting an already existing textual matter from which a new text has emerged that happens to be in another language. [my emphasis]

While there are similarities between the two works (e.g. in the vocabulary and expressions), Ping is far more than a straight translation. As Fitch points out, the immediate contexts of the words are subtly different, changing the meaning. The most significant change is the use of the word “ping” in the English text in place of two different words “bing” and “hop” in the French. Thus, Ping “rests more heavily on its ‘pings’”; there are thirty-four of them as opposed to nineteen “bings” in the French. This particular word-use and its culmulative effects are central to the workings of the piece. It is the English text Ping that concerns me here.

1.2 Beckett’s Ping

Ping was first published in No’s knife: Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1967 (1967) under the collective title of Residua, along with the prose pieces Enough and Imagination Dead Imagine. The text (reproduced in full in appendix 1 of this thesis, p.193) is 1030 words. It is made up of a limited selection of words and phrases arranged in different permutations, with no present tense verbs or pronouns and very

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28 120 words in about 1000 phrases.
few conjunctives. Traditional punctuation is limited to full-stops, and there are also regular phonetic ‘pings’ which punctuate the text:

Bare white body fixed one yard ping fixed elsewhere. [my emphasis]

The ‘visual images’ we can extract from Ping are essentially limited to white planes (“floor”, “walls” and “ceiling”) and a partial thwarted view of a body; “legs joined like sewn”, “hands hanging palms front”, repeated in various combinations. The colour white predominates throughout the text: the word appears ninety-one times. In contrast, an image of an eye, “black and white half closed long lashes”, appears only twice, the second time at the very end of the piece. The text also offers visual possibilities and ambiguities in the form of ‘traces’, ‘blurs’, ‘murmurs’, ‘perhaps’ phrases and a procession of baffling affirmations and negations, where images are described and then apparently ‘cancelled’:

Light heat white floor one square yard never seen. White walls one yard by two white ceiling one yard never seen. [my emphasis]

Ping is one of the most condensed of Beckett’s later prose works. In Beckett’s short prose before Ping, some locale and a semblance of traditional sentence structure and grammar, including pronouns (indication of the presence of a fictive figure/narrator) can still be found. But in Ping, as Fludernik argues, “no situation is any longer evoked, no setting, no dramatis personae, no minds, no speakers”. Although defined as prose fiction, in fact Ping cannot sufficiently be accounted for within the confines of traditional narratological frameworks. Concepts of character, plot, setting and so on, have limited applicability here due to the calculated indeterminacy and reduction of these elements in the work. Beckett’s constant erasure of images (to “never seen” or “invisible”), challenge the reader’s attempts to assemble a visual scene. He limits verb-forms to past participles that function rather as adjectives (such as “joined” and “seen”), so that the text as a whole has no clear tense and thus no discernable chronology. The reader finds that in the place of narrator/character

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figures, there are only hints or else ambiguities that raise questions of who speaks and to whom: words recounted, a ‘body’, an ‘eye’. Of all the late short-prose, it is in Ping, with its extensive and all-pervading indeterminacies, that the question of ‘who is speaking?’ is most implicit and hence explicitly posed by Beckett. Ping is thus, in its design, a ‘difficult’ text; the repetition, rhythm and idiosyncratic grammar/sentence structure (e.g. few conjunctives, limited punctuation) mean that it cannot be read in a traditional manner. At the Beckett scholar Susan Brienza’s suggestion, we might instead read the text as poetry, incantation, ‘a fugue in seven parts’, a picture, or as a mathematical problem. The severe reduction of conjunctive words radically opens the possible parsing of phrases, and creates ambiguity with regards to the subject and object of sentences. The overriding characteristic of the piece is ambiguity; it corresponds to Beckett’s definition of what art should be, in 1938:

Art has nothing to do with clarity, does not dabble in the clear and does not make clear…

Ping is to my mind the most distinctive of Beckett’s short prose, surpassing his other works of this period in its elegance and ambiguity. In its form, it represents the most unusual and condensed of the late texts. I first became interested in it because of its stark visual aesthetic, which seemed to reflect my own visual work. Its peculiarly enigmatic qualities made it an attractive and interesting challenge to investigate. Also, from my first reading of the text, I felt it had striking parallels with the structures of film: the “pings” were like cuts between scenes (“bare white body fixed ping fixed elsewhere”), there was a ‘stop-frame’ feel to the “sentences” (almost as if they were a series of stills), and the images evoked viewing or perhaps camera eyes. Thus the text particularly appealed to me with respect to my interest in creating moving image/animation (in 1999 I had made a short-film based on The Unnamable), and also as a unique example of Beckett’s avant-garde achievement.

32 The Unnamable (1999) can be viewed at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5QhtP8OZS0
1.3 *Ping*: Review and Discussion of the Literature

There is relatively little extended work on this particular prose piece. Those analyses that have been done very often take the form of a list of possible suggestions. *Ping* has variously been described as a figure at the end of consciousness (Lodge, 1968; Stanzel 1986), a representation of the crucifixion (Lodge, 1968), an experiment in fiction (Mood, 1969; Brienza, 1987), an intriguing riddle (Mood, 1969; Segre, 1977), an allegory of the human condition (Kern, 1970; Finney, 1972; Cohn, 1973), (close to) a musical piece in words (Cohn, 1973; Brienza 1987; Fludernik 1996) and as a piece of self-reflexive writing-about-writing (Barge, 1977), an assemblage of multiplicities (Hill 1984) and a textual performance (Watson, 1991). This range of views testifies both to the generative potential of the text and its resistance to a *singular* interpretation.

It is impossible to gauge the author’s intentions in respect to the text. Beckett provided little by way of direct commentary on the meaning of his writing - he preferred to leave the dissection of his texts to others:

My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin.  

In a similar vein, when asked by his friend and director Alan Schneider who or what *Godot* meant, Beckett replied: “if I knew I would have said so in the play”.  

Since its publication, numerous methodologies have been used to ‘unlock’ the text, with debatable success. John J. Mood (1969) and Elizabeth Segre (1977), for example, have both undertaken mathematical analysis of the word/phrase pattern in *Ping*. Such statistical approaches, however, do not reap great rewards. As Mood

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33 In a letter to friend and director Alan Schneider dated December 29, 1957. Quoted in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (Grove Press, New York: 1984) p.109
35 Elizabeth Bregman Segre, ‘Style and Structure in Beckett’s “Ping”: “That Something Itself”’,
notes; “No substantial evidence was found to indicate any such mathematically structured shape or pattern according to some combination”. These analyses in fact reveal more about the nature and power of readerly desire; our desire to glean and assemble meaning from literary texts (particularly the more abstruse ones), and the extent to which we are “teased by the possibility of a pattern, if even an incomplete or broken one”.37

Predominantly, traditional literary methods have been used, such as comparative, stylistic and linguistic analysis, beginning with the first critique of Ping, ‘Samuel Beckett: Some Ping Understood’ by David Lodge in 1968.38 Lodge wrote this in response to the critic Ihab Hassan, who viewed contemporary avant-garde literature as ‘anti-literature’. Hassan saw such works as manifestly writing about writing, intended to demonstrate the inadequacy of language.39 Lodge uses his piece on Beckett’s Ping to oppose this view, emphasising the importance of (what he considered was) its subject:

Beckett is telling us ‘about’ something; and if the telling is extraordinarily difficult to follow this is not simply because all experience is difficult to communicate (though this is true) but because this experience is difficult to communicate in this particular way.40

However, getting to the ‘something’ which Lodge proposed as the ‘experiential’ subject, involves a great deal of projection and conjecture. In his summary:

‘Ping’ is the rendering of the consciousness of a person confined in a small, bare, white room, a person who is evidently under extreme duress, and

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probably at the last gasp of life. He has no freedom of movement: his body is ‘fixed’.  

Clearly Lodge has settled on an effectively mimetic interpretation of the text; his subject is derived in a rudimentary sense, from the objects that ‘appear’ through the nouns - “body”, “planes”, “murmurs” – and from the fragmentary nature of the text (which he understood as a representation of the difficulty the figure has in expressing his circumstance). However, if we compare the text (see p.193) to Lodge’s summary, many of his conclusions are too prescriptive. Though he does not claim that this reading is a “definitive or exclusive” one, and indeed he later outlines his students’ interpretation: of Ping as a crucifixion scene, still Ping has to be significantly ‘closed down’ in order to make this kind of interpretation work.

For example, nowhere in the text does Beckett specify a room, or that the body is male, or indeed that there is a ‘character’ to which a fading consciousness may be ascribed. There are two points flagged by these elementary differences between the text and Lodge’s summary: first the inherent ambiguity of the text; and second, the level of reader-input required by the piece. Lodge’s decisions satisfy a particular mode of interpretation, which has at its heart a quest to reveal ‘what the text means’, based on building up from the imagery in the text. This is of course a central aspect of any interpretation, however, as I will later go on to explain, it is an aspect of reading that Ping fundamentally seeks to deny. By adopting this focus, Lodge sidesteps many of the integral ambiguities that are central to how Ping functions as a text.

This mimetic interpretation of Ping, nevertheless, became a generally accepted template for the text. Following Lodge, and at his suggestion, Ping has been analysed in comparison to Beckett’s other prose. The preferred comparative framework

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43 They suggested that the “body” is Christ-like by virtue of the “scars” and “flesh torn of old” which appear alongside the word (Lodge, p.178.) By extension, this would set the “ping” possibly as the nails entering the body and “eye” as representing God, but these, again, are all ideas are projected on, not confirmed in, the text.
44 Nor indeed is there a ‘box’ or ‘cube’ despite common references to such in critiques of the text.
proposed by scholars was to place the text in the context of post-1961 short prose (e.g. Brian Finney, 1972; Ruby Cohn, 1973; Barbara Hardy, 1975, Laura Barge, 1977; Knowlson and Pilling, 1979; Ulrika Maude, 2005). These scholars point to the similarity of its imagery to that of Beckett’s other short prose works, for example, the alternating light in Imagine and The Lost ones and colours in Comment C’est, and thus setting it as a kind of minimal permutation. This approach dominated criticism from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, and tended to promote a mimetic/expressive framing of the text in the mode of Lodge’s interpretation above (a minimal description of a enclosed static figure in near silence, and the meanings this produces). In my opinion, the comparative approaches described above exclude much of what is distinctive about the Ping text. To quote Brian Finney:

With Ping we find Beckett boldly experimenting with a form so linguistically fragmentary as to constitute a radical departure from his previous writing. [my emphasis]

The grouping of texts forces us to focus on the similarities among works. Thus, there is a sense in which their differences and singularities are not taken into consideration.

In the critiques that adopted this comparative approach, there was the idea/assumption that the body of Beckett’s prose forms an ongoing project that finds its final expression in the late short prose works. Leslie Hill (1984) observed two separate foci within this research: 1. on the negation of the trappings of narrative fiction in these late works (Ruby Cohn, 1973; Barbara Hardy, 1975; Knowlson and Pilling, 1979) and 2. on the later works as a distillation of the previous body of prose (Laura Barge, 1977). He criticised these particular comparisons as simply repeating a myth of “cultural apocalypse”, a negative reading of modernity sometimes associated with the modernist project. This, he notes, is in any case somewhat at

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45 Others also set Ping in relation to the rest of Beckett’s prose work (1929-1961). See for example the comparison of themes and images in Brienza, 1987.
odds with Beckett’s complex approach to ending; usually characterised by a paradox of ‘non-ending’. (For example, the last words of *The Unnamable* are: “I can’t go on, I’ll go on”, and at the end of *Godot*, Vladimir asks: “Shall we go?” and Estragon replies: “Yes, let’s go”, followed by the stage direction: “They do not move.”) Hill instead suggests we regard the short works (1969-1984) as an *expulsion* from the previous body of text.

Hill’s paper marks a turning point in the history of mimetic interpretation of the late texts, recognising that “it is such concepts of wholeness that these writings dispute”, and they instead hold a fundamental multiplicity and infinity. His short consideration of *Bing* (which he does not appear to distinguish from the English text) develops on from the comparative method by relating the text to its precursor *Le Dépeupleur*, but primarily as an *expulsion from* it. He takes this metaphor of expulsion from a textual body, through into *Bing*, suggesting that the “blings” and “hops” in the text (later replaced by the “pings” in the English text) are emblematic of the body bursting forth into representation. On the one hand, this makes for a rather visceral take on the text, which to me is somewhat at odds with the (machine-like) stark aesthetic of *Ping*. However, embedded in this idea, is that the “blings” and “hops” elude the most habitual system within literary representation, and are: “not descriptive but *performative*”. Through this incisive comment, Hill sews the seeds of a *non*-mimetic approach to *Bing/Ping*, that was to be revisited by David Watson in 1991 (see following discussion).

Following Hill (from the mid-1980s onwards) we find more studies that are similarly critical of mimetic/expressive interpretations of *Ping*. Monika Fludernik (1996) writes that such readings “can be explained as a strategy of radical appropriation of the mimetic project, an intrepid move of sense-making against all linguistic

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52 Leslie Hill, ‘Reading Beckett’s Remainders’ (1984) p.182. Within this, there is the brief suggestion that the body to which he refers is its writer or reader but this is not elaborated on.
53 A sense also adopted by Ulrika Maude, which she derives from: “White scars invisible same white as flesh torn of old given rose only just”, see ‘Mingled Flesh’, *European Joyce Studies* 16, 2005, p.99.
54 In other words they do not describe a ‘ping’ – they are/body a ping.
evidence” [my emphasis].\(^{55}\) David Watson (1991) also dismisses this previous approach in relation to texts like Ping, as insubstantial, since work of this kind functions beyond normative narrative rules. He criticises the mimetic/expressive formulation of the late texts in strong terms:

> To privilege representation and expression is to privilege énoncé over énonciation, to ignore the phenomenon of utterance and the text as a process to which the subject is subjected – a wilful ignorance in a text such as Beckett’s which so radically foregrounds the mechanics of its own process.\(^{56}\) [my emphasis]

Watson, in his critique of Bing, points to a particular process which is instead based on the non-referential functioning of words. In an extension of Hill’s comments on the performative nature of the “bing” and “hop” (forerunners of the “ping”), Watson suggests that the way that these words work is outside of narrative (i.e. referential) representation; they instead ‘perform’ through sound. In his conception, the two words are two opposing forces, both by way of their very different phonetic sounds and the way they are produced labially; “hop” as a kind of “enclosure”, and “bing” an “expulsion”.\(^{57}\) Thus through their (sound) opposition they perform or re-enact continually alternating positions (between, for example, affirmation and negation) which Watson sees as the most characteristic process of the text.

Although Watson’s theory deconstructs a feature that is particular to Bing, his notion remains useful as an example of a way of reading text that, unlike the mimetic/expressive mode, is not based on developing a fixed, singular, unified narrative, but rather potentially accommodates the active, mobile, multiple and generative qualities of the text. Such an approach is required, in my opinion, in order to better accommodate the complexities of Ping. A piece like Ping, works centrally with ambiguities, and constitutes what Roland Barthes might call “a triumphant

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\(^{57}\) I interpret this as follows: “Hop” requires a rounding then (partial) closing of the lips, whilst “bing” requires closed to open lips to produce the word, resulting in physical miming/enacting of enclosure and expulsion respectively.
plural, unimpoverished by any constraint of representation”. It opens up the potential of multiplicity in texts, rather than narrowing down to a specific interpretation of meaning. As Beckett himself writes with regards to overly totalising approaches to literary criticism (1929):

The danger is in the neatness of identifications…Must we wring the neck of a certain system in order to stuff it into a contemporary pigeon-hole…literary criticism is not book-keeping.

Thus to progress the investigation of Ping calls for a more multifarious and open-ended approach, one which ultimately like the text, raises questions rather than ‘pinning down’.

So what possible ways forward might there be? Extrapolating from Watson’s words, it appears that the focus might better be placed on the ‘text as a process’. If one specific process is that it ‘performs’ via the “pings” (Hill, 1984 and Watson, 1991), does it perhaps ‘perform’ in other ways, for example through its ‘gaps’ in traditional literary elements? Is ‘performativity’ in fact the main spring of Ping - its definitive quality – so that the text constitutes a ‘performative act’ rather than a descriptive text?

To more fully investigate ‘textual performativity’ in Ping, an important aspect (omitted by Watson) must be considered: the issue of the reader. The notion of text as a performance structurally suggests the (albeit phantom) presence of an audience. Watson’s analysis is limited in that he does not look at reader activity as an element of the process(es) in Bing (and for our purposes, Ping). In his analysis of the late texts, the subject that is “subjected” to the textual process is the compromised textual subject(s), i.e. the supposed characters, narrator and so on, rather than the reading subject, who is in fact more integral, in my opinion. By re-directing the emphasis to the effect of the text on the reader, there seems to me to be significant scope for

extending the notion of performativity suggested by Watson, and previously by Hill, into an approach which encompasses the importance of the text’s relationship with the reader and vice versa. Brienza (1987) recognises the importance of the reader’s relation to text and of the reading process in Ping. She argues that in the negotiation of the text we find ourselves ‘becoming co-authors’, as “the reader’s imagination must connect the dots of an enigmatic picture, tracing the blurs provided by Beckett”. I, in fact, would argue that far from being only “part of Ping’s purpose and message”, as Brienza suggests, this complicit process between reader and author is in fact the key feature of the text.

Along similar lines, Monika Fludernik (1996) in an attempt to ‘think’ Ping (and other such minimalist prose works) in a more productive way, initially suggested (via Brian McHale) that one should think of the text as “a map or model whose final constitution requires the reader’s active response” [my emphasis]. This in itself has limitations, in that, if we interpret “reader’s active response” as meaning each reader bringing his/her own experiences to a text, this does not move us on. This is not only because the end point of this approach is still then ultimately unification of the text into a singular ‘meaning’ for the reader, but also because this meaning is substantially personal to each reader; relates to the content of what each individual brings to their interpretation. Instead, when considering the interaction between reader and text as a feature of Ping, it is crucial to concentrate on textually based processes. We must focus on specific processes that are inherent in the text and how these direct (and indeed misdirect) the reader’s response.

To gain access to (locate and deconstruct) these processes, it seems to me that what is required is a way of reconstructing the ‘performance’ between text and reader in Ping. Scholars have noted the sense in which Ping seems to sit between genres (Brienza, 1987; Gontarski, 1995; Fludernik, 1996), and have been positive about the possibilities generated by the ‘adaptability’ of Beckett prose (Gontarski, 1995;

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62 This appears to be McHale’s sense; text considered as “a map for the reader to read himself or herself into”.
Could it be then that translation into different media or genres is a fruitful direction for extending understanding of Ping?

1.4 Ping Adaptations

Although he did not allow the adaptation of his drama, Beckett did permit the production of new work from his prose texts. Consequently, there have been many adaptations of Beckett’s prose to the stage (including The Unnamable, 1972; The Lost Ones, 1975; Company, 1983; All Strange Away, 1984) to greater or lesser degrees of dramatic success, and his pieces have often been read aloud as performance. With respect to Ping, however, the text has itself been largely overlooked in terms of dramatic/oral performance. The only documented performance reading I have located was a recent reading of Ping included as part of a recent Beckett festival exhibition: Rehearsing/Samuel Beckett (2006). The lack of theatre/spoken-word productions of Ping may be due to the particularly reductive nature of the text and the ambiguity this produces. The Beckett scholar and theatre critic Jonathan Kalb suggests that there are significant challenges involved in adapting Beckett’s prose (particularly the short works), not least the problems of the complex syntax, and ambiguous ‘speakers, and ‘characters’, and how to dramatise fictional ‘events’, “which may often take place in the mind and not easily be articulable in other terms”. This, however, does not preclude such works from ‘successful’ adaptation. In Kalb’s opinion, the U.S. theatre company Mabou Mines’

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64 Further discussion of these can be found in Jonathan Kalb, Beckett in Performance (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge and New York: 1989) pp.117-143.
1975 production of *The Lost Ones*, \(^{68}\) “actually approximates the audience/stage transaction in his [Beckett’s] plays”, \(^{69}\) a rare achievement, which as Kalb explains, goes some way to accommodate “the reflexive perceptions that occur in readers’ minds” in Beckett’s later prose. \(^{70}\)

A further explanation could be that *Ping* is simply lesser known in theatre circles. This is not the case, however, with respect to avant-garde composers; the text has been adapted as, or provided inspiration for, a number of musical works. The first was Rodger Reynolds’ *Ping* (1968), which was a musical performance with video (comprising a figure in a white box standing motionless) and projections of words from the text fading in and out. The music was improvised but with some boundary conditions set for the players. It was described by its composer as, “lyrical music, though not melodic in any traditional sense- generally slow to change, but sustained and richly textured.” \(^{71}\) Save for a few stills, \(^{72}\) the performance was not documented, however the music has been recorded. \(^{73}\) Listening to this piece, I found it an atmospheric and beautiful work, but as an interpretation of the text, it was difficult to see how it related. The use of visual elements may have been the key to this, although from the few stills, in my opinion, Reynolds approached the visuals very literally and in the vein of the mimetic critical interpretations discussed earlier.

A later piece incorporating *Ping* is *Text music 6* (1973). \(^{74}\) This was produced by Clarence Barlow and derives from his 1971 ‘Text Music’ system of music for piano where the letters of a text are substituted for notes, theoretically enabling texts to be ‘played’ by those without musical knowledge. Barlow characterised the live

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\(^{72}\) A photographic still (of the face) of the figure representing the “bare white body” (and two instances from the projected words) are included in Bryden, *Beckett and Music* (1998) pp.196-9.

\(^{73}\) A recording of the musical composition is on the Roger Reynolds CD, *All Known All White*, published by Pogus Records, 2002. Cat. No. 21025-2 CD

\(^{74}\) Published in 1973. First performed in Europe in 1982.
realisation of his musical system as a “cross-cultural event”,\textsuperscript{75} as opposed to a traditional musical performance, as such.\textsuperscript{76} He described the rendition of Ping as “a sort of slow motion rendition” of the text over a duration of four hours. This piece was not recorded, therefore it is difficult to comment on its effect. Barlow, however, described it as:

A sensitive piece of music, passing in its long course almost unnoticeably from one constellation (e.g. slow, soft, single notes) to another (e.g. fast, virtuosic passages or a mixture of all possibilities).\textsuperscript{77}

A further musical work was Anthony Gnazzo’s Ping (1975). There are scant descriptions of this piece that exist (and as far as I can ascertain no public recording of the work), save Charles Amirkhanian’s comment that it was to have been “played with Gnazzo as mime”.\textsuperscript{78}

The most recent work was French composer Jean-Yves Bosseur’s musical performance with voice and lights from 1981,\textsuperscript{79} a piece on which Beckett himself was a consultant.\textsuperscript{80} This musicalised interpretation of Bing appears to have been more wide-ranging and cross-genre than the other ‘musical Ping’ works. According to the composer, a score for six voices was employed, where the text was allocated “each sentence to one or several voices”.\textsuperscript{81} The words were murmured, rather than sung, and pre-recorded. Through this an element of mime was introduced; each figure reacting to their individual voices by tightening their lips, instead of speaking the text live.\textsuperscript{82} On stage, and at Beckett’s suggestion, there was a further figure who stood apart from the others and more brightly lit. This was to allow the impression

\textsuperscript{76} He notes that this cross-over between art forms and the misunderstanding it can create in audiences was reflected in the pattern if audience members dwindling (to 6 people) by its conclusion each time it was executed.
\textsuperscript{79} This work was not recorded, but descriptions by the composer can be found in Jean-Yves Bosseur, ‘Between Word and Silence: Bing’, in Bryden, Beckett and Music (1998) p.241-247.
that the other voices might be in his head. The instrumental structure (for piano, clarinet, cello, trombone and accordion) consisted of “a group of chords…subjected to gradual transformations”. The performance exhibited familiar Beckettian dramatic structures; for example the use of spotlights in the piece resembled those in Beckett’s Play (where the spotlights ‘switch’ the speaking characters on and off). This work, in its structural consideration, seems generally to have conveyed more of the elements and nuances of its original text than the others – encompassing the central ambiguity with respect to speakers and characters in the text, and a suitably non-traditional way of reading it - no doubt aided by the input of the author.

The majority of these pieces were not recorded (in performance or as audio recordings), and as a non-musician, it was a challenge for me to envisage the pieces from written descriptions/musical-scores, and thus to properly comment on their merits or otherwise. In order to get a better grasp of how ‘Ping music’ might sound, I therefore engaged with a composer to create a musical piece based on Ping (details are included in Appendix 1). This was a serialist composition in the vein of Barlow’s Text Music 6. This piece was a purely musical interpretation based on the object of the text, without a visual/theatrical element. This musical collaboration provided interesting and valuable insights about what was gained and lost the musicalisation of Ping. Primarily, it revealed the fundamental differences between the two mediums; words and music work in different ways, and in the context of Ping, translation into music alone (the substitution of words by notes in particular) does not account for the sophisticated relation of words to each other, or accommodate the images produced in reading the text. Most importantly, therefore, this practical activity reinforced that it was the process aspect of translation into a different medium, which was most pertinent to the text, and that the act of visualisation – engaging with the images of the text - is key to reading Ping.

All of the musical works previously produced (Barlow, Bosseur et al.) were as artistic experiments and performances, not for the primary purpose of literary research. However, they naturally provoke some reflection on the original text. In a

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general sense, the proliferation of musical responses to Ping points to an essential aurality/musicality in the text of Ping, an aspect also noted by others;\textsuperscript{84} Fludernik, for example says that “it comes close to creating a musical piece in words”.\textsuperscript{85} It seems that Beckett also recognised this quality of the text, having, according to Bosseur, suggested Bing as suitable for the French composer’s project proposal: “to inflect a text in a musical or even operatic direction while somehow bringing out its inherent musicality”.\textsuperscript{86} A further observation that can be made about previous musical responses to Ping, is that they were multimedia forms; situated as ‘audio-visual events’ or ‘art-performance’, and commonly incorporated a distinctive visual element. The fact that the majority of the composers were compelled to create, and in each case place centrally, a visual dynamic in their response to the text, I would suggest, denotes their recognition that visuality plays a central part in the text. Indeed, Reynolds recalled, that in making his piece: “it appeared that the only way that Beckett’s approach could be manifested in performance before an audience was by means of visual presentation”.\textsuperscript{87} Though it is not clear whether the staging of idea Bosseur’s piece as a visual performance with music, was his or Beckett’s idea, Beckett certainly approved it as a suitable response, offering suggestions as to its structural development as such.\textsuperscript{88} Thus, in the production and form of these pieces is, firstly, a demonstration of the text’s adaptability, and secondly, its visual and performative potential.

In terms of purely visual adaptations, in still imagery, there are eight “blind-relief” images; squares containing simple abstract shapes raised on white paper, which were made in 1970 by the German artist H.M. Erhardt (b. 1935).\textsuperscript{89} These were produced in conjunction with Beckett for a special edition of the text, and sit alongside a number

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{85} Fludernik, Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology (1996) p.303.
\end{footnotesize}
of illustrated editions of his other short prose. The video element of Roger Reynold’s musical performance seems to have been the only moving-image work based on Ping. These are the only visual works based on Ping to date. Personally, this struck me as somewhat peculiar, considering the multitude of images and ideas that came to my mind when reading Ping, and, as we have seen in critical writing on the text, the variety of interpretations the text has generated. It may be, however, that artists have only considered Ping from the point of view of creating literal ‘illustrations’ of the (minimal) images in the text. In which case the lack of visual work based on Ping is perhaps understandable, as this would not necessarily generate work of great aesthetic interest. As this literature review has made clear, the text as object is, however, not the full story as regards Ping, and its illustration (in this limited sense) would not provide a true reflection of the richness and visual possibilities of Ping. This does not preclude the aesthetic and research potential that maybe achieved, however, by approaching the text’s translation into a predominantly visual art-form in an alternative manner.

1.5 Beckett Art as Investigation

Beckett’s work has a long history of use as inspiration for visual artists. In addition to the writer’s own creative collaborations with on artists’ books or special editions (including with Avigdor Arikha, Max Ernst and Jasper Johns), Beckett’s work has influenced visual art across a wide range of mediums from minimalist painting and

sculpture (e.g. that of Louis de Brocquy\textsuperscript{93}, Frank Stella and Robert Morris\textsuperscript{94}) to video
and installation (e.g. that of Stan Douglas\textsuperscript{95}, Tony Ousler, Smith/Stewart and Joan
Joana\textsuperscript{s}\textsuperscript{96}). The video artists Smith/Stewart evoke Beckett’s \textit{Company} (1980) and
\textit{Breath} (1970) in the disembodied body-parts and sense of physicality of \textit{Inside Out}
(1997) and \textit{Godforsaken Hole/Free Hand} (1999).\textsuperscript{97} Similarly, Tony Ousler’s
projections of ‘talking heads’ onto objects are reminiscent of Beckett’s disembodied
stage characters (\textit{Play and Not I}).\textsuperscript{98} The American sculptor and video-
artist Bruce Nauman (b. 1941), in particular, has maintained a longstanding interest in Beckett’s
work, which he reflected in his own. Nauman has worked, like Beckett, in a wide
variety of media. He has often engaged directly with Beckettian themes, including
miscommunication, repetition, language-play, and absurdity, even going so far as to
reference Beckett in the title of his video/performance-piece \textit{Slow Angle Walk: Beckett Walk}
(1968).\textsuperscript{99} More recently, Beckett’s centenary in 2006 generated a slew
of new works inspired by Beckett, which were either shown or made specifically for
this celebration. The conceptual artist Jenny Holzer created a new piece where she
projected extracts of Beckett’s writing (among others) onto buildings in London, in
association with the Barbican Art Gallery,\textsuperscript{100} and Robert Gober exhibited pieces
directly influenced by Beckett including his sculpture \textit{Untitled, 2004-05}. Gober’s
mixed media work draws on ideas of humanity, frailty and temporality that \textit{were}
impressed on him by \textit{Endgame}. The piece includes a priest’s shirt set on top of a

\textsuperscript{93} Louis de Brocquy painted a number of portraits of Beckett. See www.anne-
madden.com/LeBPages/chronology24.html
\textsuperscript{94} See Maurice Berger, \textit{Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s} (Harper and Row,
1989).
\textsuperscript{95} Douglas created an exhibition of Beckett’s teleplays in 1988. See Beckett, Douglas, Ben-Zvi and
\textsuperscript{96} See Susan Morgan, \textit{Joan Jonas: I Want to Live in the Country (And Other Romances)} (MIT Press,
2006)
\textsuperscript{97} Descriptions of these works can be found in Hans Rudolf Reust, ‘SMITH/STEWARD’ in \textit{ArtForum}
(Oct, 2000).
\textsuperscript{98} Images can be seen at website of The Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw:
www.csw.art.pl/new/99/ousler_e.html. See also videos at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCKK-
ljuhOE
\textsuperscript{99} A description stills of this work, and discussion of other Nauman works on Beckettian themes can
be found in Robert C. Morgan, \textit{Bruce Nauman} (John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2002)
p.167.
\textsuperscript{100} \textit{For London} by Jenny Holzer, Beckett Centenary Festival at the Barbican Art Gallery, London.
www.beckettcentenaryfestival.ie/events
plaster cast of an ash can, an object that appears in the play.\textsuperscript{101}

In addition to this, late 20\textsuperscript{th} century scholarship such as Lois Oppenheim (ed.), \textit{Beckett and the Arts} (1999) and Mary Bryden (ed.), \textit{Beckett and Music} (1998), indicates an increasing interest in artworks relating to Beckett as a way of taking Beckett studies forward.\textsuperscript{102} Exhibitions exploring connections between Beckett and the arts include the multidisciplinary exhibition \textit{Anywhere Now} (Sydney, 2003). This showcased six artists whose practice (which included sculpture, photography, video/performance and electro-acoustic installation) explored “themes and concerns in common with Beckett without being narrowly literal or illustrative in their representation of Beckett’s work”.\textsuperscript{103} The \textit{Beckett & Company} conference (London, 2006), was primarily designed to explore Beckett’s relevance for the arts (visual, compositional, et al) in the twenty-first century. In order to do so, the organisers included a number of screenings and performances of new works that reflected on Beckett in various different ways (e.g. through experimental film, musical composition, and ‘artistic intervention’), alongside academic papers on the subject.\textsuperscript{104} Events such as these have highlighted the profound effect Beckett’s work has had on art, and in addition, that the dynamic between these two can be a \textit{two-way} process, with art having the power to comment on Beckett’s work. We can see this clearly in the Barcelona exhibition \textit{A Theatre without Theatre} (2007) which looked at the relationship between theatre and the arts in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{105} Here, specific focus was put on reading contemporary art \textit{through} the work and the theories of seminal dramatists such as Beckett, including tracing the transformation of theatre space (art affecting theatre) and theatricalism in contemporary art (theatre affecting art).

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Untitled}, 2004-5 by Robert Gober exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Academy, Jan 2006.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Beckett & Company}, 6-8 October 2006. A collaboration between Tate Modern, the London Consortium, Birkbeck, Goldsmiths (University of London) and the LCACE. http://beckettandcompanyconference.blogspot.com/
\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Artaud}, Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), 25\textsuperscript{th} May-11\textsuperscript{th} September 2007. www.macba.es/controller.php?p=_act…
Setting up such implicit or explicit ‘communications’ between works has long been a mainstay of curatorial design in exhibitions; through their juxtaposition, a dialogue premised on similarities and differences is created. An example is the UK touring exhibition ‘Incommunicado’ (2004): “an exhibition of work by contemporary artists addressing the theme of communication”. At the centre of this show was a projection of Comédie (1966), which Beckett produced in collaboration with filmmaker Marin Karmitz. This was a French-language film adaptation of Beckett’s Play (1964); a theatre piece in which three players in urns take turns to voice the tale of an affair. The other artists showcased included Mona Hatoum, Bruce Nauman and Erika Tan and the show encompassed works in a range of media including sculpture, video, photography and print-media.

On viewing the works, it occurred to me that they dealt with similar subject matter, but also incorporated some significant element of difference in relation to the Beckett piece (i.e. different media or form). I began to wonder if works such as these could thus act as an investigation of Beckettian concerns. The works that were selected ‘talk to one another’ in relation to the theme of communication, and once set alongside the centrally placed Beckett film, they amplified the themes and structures of this piece (such as absurdity, repetition and so on), whilst retaining their own power as individual artworks. Nauman’s video installation Violent Incident: Man – Woman Segment (1986), for example, enacts the perpetual (psychological) distance between individuals in his repetition of a couples’ actions. This has parallels with the physical separation of the characters in Comédie who sit in urns up to their necks facing the viewer, and talk quickly and across rather than to each other. In Comédie, the words spoken in the film have been artificially speeded up, so there is also an intrinsic difficulty experienced in comprehending the dialogue (which since in French, may be increased for an audience who have English as their first language). The inability to follow the dialogue is not a failure of the viewer, but is intentional -

106 National Touring Exhibition, Hayward Gallery, shown at the City Art Centre, Edinburgh 13th March-8 May 2004.
107 Works shown by these artists were the video-works: Gauze, 1969 and Violent Incident: Man – Woman Segment, 1986 (Nauman), text works: PRNT PIDGN No.s 1-8, 2003 (Tan) and the video So much I want to say, 1985 and sculpture Set in Stone, 2002 (Hatoum). Details of other works and commentary on the exhibition can be found in the publication: Incommunicado (Hayward Gallery Publishing: London, 2003)
the resultant ‘anti-communication’ being a characteristic (indeed, an integral part) of communication. This intention is made clear, in my opinion, when viewed alongside the Nauman piece, revealing the miscommunication-communication dialectic as a major theme of Beckett’s film.

The exhibition thus demonstrated to me, that artwork dealing with ‘Beckettian’ concerns and structures has the potential to reveal and extend aspects of Beckett’s work. Relocated to a research context, this could then be further developed as a valuable and interesting way of taking the area of Beckett studies forward. The potential exists for ‘Beckett art’ (artworks created in response to his specific works or themes) to shed new light on Beckett’s work – that is, we can read Beckett through (the creation of) artwork(s). This is the approach taken in the research described in this thesis and is, I believe, novel in relation to the work Ping.

In summary, the main points gained from a review of the literature and related artwork are that: traditional literary approaches are limited in analysing Ping, and a more ‘open’, multifarious approach is required in order to accommodate the complexities of the text. Active process is potentially key to Beckett’s Ping; readers are actively implicated in the textual processes, and the idea that the text has performative aspects might usefully be further explored in this context. Moreover, it has been established that, translation of the text into different media may provide an effective and appropriate route to extending understanding of the workings of the text.

1.6 Discussion of My Approach

Most Ping scholars since Lodge acknowledge that Ping is “difficult to read”. For me, what needs to be considered is how exactly its difficulties manifest, and the effects and possibilities of these. It is my assertion that active process is the key element of the Ping text (primarily the continued and constantly changing engagement between
reader and text). With this in mind, the act of creating (artwork) seemed to me to be the most appropriate response to the text. Art-practice is itself driven and characterised by process; it is active, generative, developmental and open-ended (its output commonly raising questions). This makes it a particularly suitable mode in which to extend the investigation of Ping (a text which can be characterised in the self-same way).

Previous critical focus on the meaning of the text, as derived from the textual object (what one sees on the page), has meant that often other aspects that are central to the Beckettian ouvre are overlooked: what the text does, how it works and what it makes the reader do. If one was instead to look at the gaps “in-between the phrases” and, as Brienza suggests, “measure the arcs of the linguistic interval, not the terms”, these aspects might better be accommodated. Personally, I wondered what would happen if one switched the focus to the text as it is formed in the mind of the reader, and made artwork centred on the indeterminacies and gaps of Ping, with the resultant generation of multiple interpretative possibilities that art produces.

I decided that translating the text into moving-image - a visual and performative medium - was the most suitable option. This choice was appropriate in relation to my general aim: to extend the idea of Ping as ‘performative act’ rather than a descriptive text. Moving-image as a format, fundamentally shows, sounds and moves, thus, could reflect in a direct way, on how the Ping ‘performs’ in relation to its audience.

I felt there were interesting parallels with film: the “pings” were like cuts between scenes, the ‘stop-frame’ feel of the ‘sentences’, and the “eyes” and “eye” evoked viewing or perhaps the camera-eye. This aspect was something that scholars had touched on; Brienza, for example, connected the staccato style of the text with the cinematographic ‘snapshot’. It seemed to me, however, that there were many further and more fundamental parallels to be made with and through the medium; beginning with the text’s dependency on ‘projection’ (by the reader), on the

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montaging of words, and on ‘cuts’ and ‘gaps’ in the text. As will become clear throughout this thesis, Ping has a number of prominent aural, visual and performative elements; which relate in various ways to the medium of moving-image.

Importantly, by working within a time-based medium, there was the added potential to comment on the idiosyncratic, start-stop narrative movement in the text and how the text ‘goes on’ in a general sense. Working within the framework of ‘how to translate into moving-image’, would also bring to bear an additional set of medium-specific criteria to the investigation of the text. Sound (voice/sound-design/music), visual imagery (seen and implied), movement, and time, would direct the focus of my investigation, as well as narratological elements common to film and prose fiction such as narrator(s), character(s), narrative progression and so on. In considering these aspects, new approaches to the issue of how the text works might be found.

111 I discuss these in Chapter 2 and they are demonstrated in the practice documented in Chapters 3-5.
Chapter 2: Ping - Written Between the Phrases

2.1 Introduction

The premise of this project, then, was that Ping is a text that ‘does’, and thus could usefully be explored through the act of translating it into a medium that fundamentally also ‘does’ (sounds, shows, moves) - that of moving-image. Having identified translation into moving-image as a suitable basic approach for investigating Ping, I needed to develop some suitable artistic strategies to do this. I first had to consider the following main issues in relation to the text: 1. The key characteristics and processes of the text, and how they work; and 2. The structures that might be used as appropriate equivalents for these within moving-image. I began, therefore, with a close reading of the text, where I applied relevant literary and aesthetic theories. My intention was that this would help to develop appropriate visual frameworks for the processes of the text in film, and to help further define the creation of artwork as a methodology. To understand Ping in an interdisciplinary way I deliberately chose theoretical frameworks that reflected my focus of performance and visuality (and later, aurality) in the text: reader-response theory, visual anthropology and aesthetic theory. These I felt were particularly pertinent to the psychological and aesthetic effect of Ping’s literary images and features.

2.2 ‘Traces blurs signs no meaning’

What Ping communicates most powerfully is the intrinsic difficulty of seeing anything with the clarity that would be necessary for ‘all’ to be ‘known’.¹ Knowlson and Pilling, 1979

From the outset of *Ping*, it is clear to the reader that this is not going to be a standard reading experience. The first thing that one comes up against is the ‘gaps’ in the syntax. Traditional punctuation in the text is limited to full stops, and conjunctive words are severely reduced in *Ping*, resulting in flexibility as to the possible parsing of phrases by the reader. By removing the connections between words, Beckett is able to play with their semantic value, so that frequently, several senses may be implied by a single word or phrase. For example, take the ‘sentence’: “Eyes holes light blue alone unover given blue light blue almost white only colour fixed front.” Here “given” can be read as a noun - a known or established fact or situation (‘blue is a given’), or as a past participle (with the sense of ‘if blue were given’). “Given” always appears before the colours in the text: “blue”, “black” and “rose”. Its ambiguity throws an uncertainty around the words that follow; in each instance we are not sure in what sense that colour is to be understood. Similarly “light”, in the phrase “blue light blue” could indicate a sudden illumination, but also the paleness of the blue. In this way, the referential content or capability of words to communicate ‘directly’ is disrupted. The coexistence of many possible meanings for words or phrases (polysemy) sets up a fundamental resistance in the text with regards to referential meaning-making. The fluidity of word associations means the reader cannot assume any concrete singular meanings.

In the few cases where prepositions are used, they are generally in relation to incorporeal elements, as in; “white on white”; “in the wind”; “one second with image”. They do not appear with elements that we might try to visualise, for example the “body”, the “eye” or the surfaces (“planes”, “walls”, “floor” etc.), thus we cannot definitively, situate these in relation to one another. The words in themselves still have mimetic potential – “eye” still invokes an image of an eyes and “white”, the colour white – but their disconnection from each other means that they are generally disassociated from a mimetic narrative function and refuse to build up an imaginative picture in the expected way.

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2 *Ping* is thus also typographically dense (a block of unbroken print).
3 With the exception of “black and white” which appears only with the ‘eye’ in the text, and thus arguably has a more ‘solid’ quality (see Chapter 3 for further discussion).
4 They also evoke the other culturally determined associations that these have for the reader.
Staying on this grammatical level, Beckett sets up some other fundamental ambiguities (or gaps) with regards to features we might expect in the prose genre. Verbs are limited to past participles (such as “joined” and “seen”) in which implied action is past. Their sense in the text is thus predominantly adjectival. These words do not, therefore, convey the action that we might usually expect from verbs, or a clear tense. We might look to words with the suffix ‘-ing’ for an indication of current or continuous action, however where such forms are used in the text they are instead adjectives, as in “shining” and “hanging”. Thus, as readers, we do not derive a clear sense of action in *Ping*. The only conceivable remnant of plot is the sudden featuring (twice) of a black and white “eye”, and a gradual shift from the appearance of “unover” to that of “over” (from just over half way through to the end of the text). Neither of these are explained, nor the result of a cause and effect linear narrative. Since what it is that is ‘over’ is not specifically defined, aside from at the last, the text itself, then the text also forgoes any definite narrative closure. Thus, as readers, we are not given a sense of time, action or a clear linear progression to follow during the course of the text.

With regard to the speakers and characters that we might expect in prose, we are again given very little. There is no clear narrator (no pronouns) and the “bare white body” (perhaps a potential character) is apparently virtually “invisible”, and puppet-like rather than anything one could relate to as a kind of ‘embodied’ character: fragmented into body parts (“legs”, “hands”, “feet”, “mouth” etc.) that are “seamed [or joined] like sewn”. The “black and white” disembodied “eye”, which appears twice, again has no clear links or context within the text.

Unable, definitively, to link the words or discern a plot or protagonists, we might instead turn to the instructional feel and the sentence *content*; stage directions to the ‘image’ we should ‘see’. Our instinctive attempt as reader, to build up and fix images within the text is, however, thwarted; Beckett does not allow the images (or distances) in the text to remain stable. Creation or presentation of an image in *Ping* is invariably followed by its subsequent erasure:
Light heat white floor one square yard never seen.

Or:

Bare white body fixed white on white invisible.

These are images ‘drawn’ and almost immediately then ‘rubbed out’. The surface or object you are being instructed to ‘see’ is quickly retracted as “never seen” or “invisible”, in what is a common structure of: statement – negation. Versions of this ‘cancelling out’ structure occur throughout the text, beginning with the opening phrase: “All known all white”. If ‘all is known’ but is then also “all white”, then it seems that in effect nothing is known; a switch from omniscience to ignorance in one short phrase. Conceived in this way, the opening words set the scene for the unstable position of the reader.

One ‘cancellation’ that I find particularly striking occurs in some of the sentences containing ‘perhaps phrases’. For example:

Ping perhaps not alone one second with image always the same same time a little less that much memory almost never ping silence. [My emphasis]

And:

Ping murmur perhaps a nature one second almost never that much memory almost never. [My emphasis]

These sentences seem to open up the possibility of a character presence or place, whilst almost immediately then denying/shutting out this self-same possibility. The first sentence in particular is interesting, since in an apparently characterless text (where there are simply fragments of body/bodies), the phrase “perhaps not alone” both suggests the presence of a new figure, and also qualifies the potential of there being an original (pre-existing) figure (who may not now be alone).

Through the repetition of structures such as these, ‘cancellation’ or erasure is established as a continuing theme in Ping. It is also established as a central performative process with respect to how we, as readers, engage with the text; assertions followed by retractions in the text produce a series of gaps in our
imaginative visualisation process. Add to this, the words’ refusal to concretely (or referentially) ‘mean’, and the enigmatic recurring word “ping” (another non-representational feature, to be discussed in depth later in this chapter), and we are a considerable distance from Lodge’s mimetic picture of the text, and from one where “all” may be “known”.

2.3 ‘Blanks’ and reader-text interaction in the literary text

The proliferation of ‘gaps’ in Ping - in syntax, in place of expected prose features (plot, clear characters etc.) and in readers’ visualisation of its images - instigate a strong resistance to mimetic reading. A positive way to consider this aspect of Ping emerges, though, when the text is read in conjunction with structures identified by Wolfgang Iser in his important work *The Act of Reading* (1978). Iser’s reader response theory (of which *The Act of Reading* forms part) was an attempt to formulate a general theory of the interaction between reader and text, focussing particularly on features common to modernist literature. Iser includes Beckett under the umbrella of modernist literature, referencing his work in a general way. Iser’s work has previously been used in the study of Beckett (e.g. Gidal, 1986) and Iser has himself written on Beckett’s work, however in neither case is *Ping* discussed.

In the *Act of Reading*, Iser set out to evaluate what he calls the “performances” of meaning, which precede those finally produced by individual readers. This ‘pre-formulation’ process is dependent on both text and reader and ultimately sits in-between the two; instigated by the former and undertaken by the latter. His focus is therefore on the potentiality of texts, rather than on their specific (unified) meaning.

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6 Only *Murphy* is specifically cited in *The Act of Reading*.
8 Iser makes mention of *Godot, Endgame, Happy Days, All That Fall, The Trilogy, Murphy and Imagination Dead Imagine*, in *Prospecting* (John Hopkins University Press, 1989), and *The Trilogy, Endgame, Murphy and Imagination Dead Imagine* feature in *The Implied Reader* (John Hopkins University Press, 1974).
(which is in any case particular to the individual reader and his/her experience). This approach is therefore particularly appropriate to use in this investigation of Ping.

Iser argues that, in the texts to which he attends,⁹ the ‘reception’ of the text is characterised by what is essentially an act of composition:

The reader is not simply called upon to ‘internalise’ the positions given in the text, but he is induced to make them act upon and so transform each other, as a result of which the aesthetic object begins to emerge.¹⁰

And:

The text itself simply offers “schematised aspects” through which the subject matter of the work can be produced, while the actual production takes place through an act of concretisation [by the reader].¹¹ [emphasis mine]

In basic terms then, the literary text acts as a set of ‘instructions’ for the reader, in response to which he/she builds up an imaginary object (or image) based on the text, ‘the aesthetic object’. The aesthetic object is separate from the text itself; it is created in the mind of the reader, and is constantly changing/re-formed as the reader moves through the text.

Within these ‘instructions’ Iser identifies that it is structures of indeterminacy; “forms of an indeterminate, constitutive blank”, that are the catalyst for and regulator of the reader’s ideational activity.¹² Thus, although ‘blanks’ in the literary text are in one sense a block to ‘smooth’ reading activity, they also work to draw the reader ‘into’ the text; prompting and guiding active reader interaction in order to fill in the gaps, and providing a space for the psychological activities of the reader. Iser explains that in texts with high instances of textual blanks (such as those by Joyce and Beckett), the reader’s activity is characterised by this ‘writing’ in of the gaps. These kinds of works sit within the criteria of what critical theorist Roland Barthes termed the ‘writerly’ text,¹³ and in contrast to the more mainstream ‘readerly’ text.

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⁹ Literary texts such as those of Pinget and Joyce.
Reading these kinds of texts, therefore, involves a considerable level of (creative) cognitive work, and for Iser, here the reader is positioned as active participant rather than passive recipient of the literary work.

According to Iser, blanks can be constituted on different levels, including syntactically (in the disconnection of words and sentences), and on a ‘pragmatic level’ (in the omission of traditional genre features, i.e. clear plot, character and narratorial perspectives). Iser goes on to explain that blanks are also created in texts, by what he terms “primary” and “secondary” negations. ‘Primary negations’ are those that are situated within the text: negation of content, for example statements that are made and then revoked. ‘Secondary negations’, however, are effected within the domain of the reader. As a response to the primary negations of the text, the reader is forced to rethink his/her image making activities; to “cancel the meanings he [or she] has formed”.14 An abundance of primary negations in a text (a tendency that Iser notes as increasingly occurring in modern literature, particularly in Beckett’s novels15) results in the reader’s continual making and remaking of images and meanings, and therefore, changes the focus of the reader’s experience (through their resultant secondary negations). Instead of a traditional literary meaning-making endeavour - where the reader is essentially engaged in the consolidation of literary material – in these circumstances, he/she is subject to the contemplation and reprocessing of mental images.

2.4 ‘Blanks’ in Ping

Both representing and instigating action in the literary text, Iser’s blanks and negations are performative linguistic structures. They are therefore particularly applicable to considering how structures in Ping affect and direct reader activity. Reframing Ping’s textual gaps as ‘blanks’, it is possible to unpack how these work

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15 Iser, The Act of Reading, p.211.
within the text; in particular, their cumulative effect and the activity of the reader in a secondary creation of the text; the ‘aesthetic object’ of Ping.

As described earlier, Ping is characterised by gaps, such as in the syntax (the disconnection of words and sentences), and the omission of clear plot, character and narratorial perspectives in the text. These create indeterminacies in the text that interrupt our smooth reading. However, if we take a closer look at the operations involved, this is not the only effect. Consider, for example, an instance of syntactic gaps. As I explained previously the lack of conjunctives mean there are gaps between the words. This means that the words and phrases have multiple senses. The response to this is, then, to consider their possible contextual meanings, as I did earlier (“light” as denoting an illumination or paleness, and “given” as a known or potential fact/situation). Based on these, we inevitably project a number of different possible narrative scenarios/images in order to try to discern the clear visualisation/consolidation of the text we to expect to obtain from reading. In this way, although the gaps interrupt our smooth reading, they also (by playing on our desire to construct narrative) provoke reader activity - the attempt to construct stable connections - and thus may be regarded as an example of Iser’s ‘blanks’.

Similarly, the retraction/cancellation of ‘images’ in Ping can be viewed as an example of primary negations; creating (generative) blanks in the text. The primary cancellations clearly create conceptual gaps within the text, in the place of each original image which is ‘taken away’, for example in:

Bare white body fixed white on white invisible. [Emphasis mine]

This gap is a blank in Iser’s sense, as it is a catalyst to reader activity - the reader responds to the primary negation with a secondary negation, of the imaginative image he/she has formed.

Something of the particularly complex and generative quality of Ping can be further unpacked by working around the basic framework of primary-provoking-secondary negations. For the reader, the revoked statement (idea or image) can never be fully
erased, in that the statement first made remains as a ‘trace’ (or memory) in the mind. In the example above, this means the ‘bare white body’ persists as an image for the reader, despite becoming ‘invisible’ by the end of the sentence. The reader performs the secondary negation with respect to the image of the text he/she is creating (the aesthetic object), but is nevertheless left with a figuration; an irresolvable image of the absented original. Ultimately then, these kinds of primary negations in Ping start a process that concludes in the generation of a new figure (by the reader); a transformation or a recasting of the original. In this sense, the blanks created by this process of primary and secondary negations are perhaps more accurately described as a kind of ‘pseudo-blank’.

The persistence of the obliterated image (or idea) is an effect and feature that is inherent in all modes of representation. As Milne explains in her paper ‘Representing Absence in the Visual Unconscious’: “that which is destroyed [in representation] can never be destroyed”. Beckett seems to exploit this particular feature of representation in his use of primary negations in Ping, effecting further disorientation in the reading process. The negation of images to the status of ‘never seen’ (as opposed to ‘no longer seen’) is a good example:

White walls one yard by two white ceiling one yard never seen. [Emphasis mine]

Here it seems both that the elements (nouns) are disallowed from being mimetically consolidated, and that their (fictional) existence in the first place is laid open to question. This adds to the disorientation, which as we are beginning to see, is characteristic of the reader’s visualisation process of Ping.

A brief look at how one might negotiate this negation reveals the complexity involved. Conceptually for the reader, the image in the previous example (the negation to “invisible”) is ‘there’ and then ‘not there’. In this latter case, however, it

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was potentially *never* ‘there’ in the first place. If there is no original image\(^\text{17}\) to then be absent, what can be produced from this? It seems to me that, the negation of an image that may not have existed in the first place is potentially the negation of nothing, representing then a kind of ‘double-negative’. Therefore, in a certain way this type of negation may in fact act as a ‘positive’ rather than deleting; underlining the image that it appears with, but in terms of the *impossibility* of that image (a kind of ‘impossible qualification’).

In both of the negations I have described, the ‘trace’ that remains (the image retained in the mind of the reader, following the primary-secondary negation) is a transformation of the original image that ‘hangs in the air’. As a figuration of the absence of an image, it refuses to be consolidated. In the case of ‘never seen’ however, the trace retained is of an original image whose existence in the first place is put in doubt, and so emerges in an even less tangible form; a *dubious* memory in the mind. Characterised by its impossibility, however, like its ‘invisible’ counterpart it is a figuration nonetheless, evoking the possibility and potential of its ‘original’. These structures of negation appear repeatedly throughout the text; there are five ‘never seen’ negations (alongside ‘surfaces – “floor”, “walls”, “ceiling”’) and fifteen ‘invisible’ (generally appearing with the body/body-parts). Their frequency then, leaves us as readers, with an accumulation of ‘un-figurations’ – a curious kind of ‘residue’ generated in the reading of *Ping*, consisting of ‘image-shaped’ absences and almost tangible ‘evocations of potential’.

Iser states that the aesthetic object “establishes itself as a transcendental viewpoint for the positions represented in the text (from which it is compiled)”\(^\text{18}\). In *Ping*, with its proliferation of textual blanks and negations as I have described, then these ‘positions’ are multiple and conflicting projections. This being the case, it seems that the essential feature of its aesthetic object is irresolution. In *Ping*, then, the aesthetic object does not emerge in a clear or (narratologically) progressing form in the reader imagination, it instead emerges *and remains* in a particularly fragmented and

\(^\text{17}\) By the same token, if there no original how can it be there in the first place? Such is the paradoxical nature of the structure created.
\(^\text{18}\) Iser, *The Act of Reading*, p.98.
transformative state: a collection (an “impossible heap”\textsuperscript{19}) of irresolvable figurations. In light of this, it seemed to me that visualising/sounding the accumulation of these ‘un-figurations’ - for example as (impossible) images simply ‘piling up’ rather than building to form a ‘narrative scene’ - could be a way to reveal something of the alternative to traditional narrative progression that there is in Ping.

In addition to the negations I have described (“never seen” and “invisible”), the phrases “only just” and “almost white” (which appear twenty times each in the text) convey a similar but less strong sense to them than the ‘never seen’ and ‘invisible’ negations. They are perhaps more suggestive of a fading or disappearing image. Over such a short text, then, the number of blanks and negations in Ping is marked. Thus, in my opinion, Ping is in fact an extreme exposition of the structure(s) to which Iser draws our attention. According to Iser, the degree of compositional activity required by the reader is in direct proportion to the degree of indeterminacy in the text. Applying this theory to Ping, with the high levels of indeterminacy produced by its frequent blanks, the reader is substantially implicated in its ‘creation’/creative processes. Reading Ping’s gaps involves a particularly dynamic and creative process of projection, cancellation and the processing of irresolvable images by the reader (to construct its ‘aesthetic object’), to the extent that, in my opinion, the reader is made conscious of his/her participation in this process. I would therefore suggest, that the contribution of the reader of Ping can be articulated in stronger terms than ‘active participant’; the reader is in fact positioned as a ‘creator’ in the reading process.

Read through Iser, the positive aspect of Ping’s syntactical gaps is revealed: their generative effect. The gaps, as ‘blanks’, encourage the creation of new (re)figurations and drive the readers’ (cognitive) movement in the text. These frequent ‘impossible qualifications’, ‘pseudo-blanks’, syntactic and pragmatic gaps work as interruptions and catalysts, essentially forming a kind of punctuation for the reader; stopping and also driving the reading of text. The constant procession of blanks and negations in Ping, means that interruption (to smooth reading), and the

\textsuperscript{19} An apt expression from Beckett’s Endgame (1958): “Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there’s a heap, the impossible heap”. Beckett, Endgame (New York: Grove Press, c1958.) p.12.
processing and re-processing of ‘phantom’ images by the reader replaces narrative progression as the dominant type of movement in the text. Thus, in my view, it is in the blanks of Ping that the dynamic movement of the text lies; with these structures effecting a start/stop movement in the reading of the text.

2.5 Ping as Pattern

The pervasive gaps and indeterminacies in Ping continually provoke (changing) aesthetic response in the reader. It seems to me, that in a certain way they also keep him/her held; the reader is suspended in the act of generating and rejecting his/her own projections, as opposed to being able to build up a picture of the text. To explore this idea further, and thus further unpack the visualisation process in Ping, it is useful to consider the theory of the cultural anthropologist Alfred Gell. In his essay The Critique of the Index (1998), Gell considers the psychological aspect of (non-representational) decorative art, developing an idea of what he terms “cognitive resistance”, in relation to how we engage with complex two-dimensional visual patterns.

Gell writes of complex visual patterns (i.e. those that are difficult to mentally follow), that:

We are drawn into the pattern and held inside it, impaled, as it were, on its bristling hooks and spines. This pattern is a mind-trap (c.f. Gell 1996), we are hooked.

He terms this (‘essential’) property in complex patterns - “the fact that once one submits to the allure of the pattern, one is liable to become hooked, or stuck, in it”.

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21 Gell defines complicated patterns as ones that we perceive of simultaneously as texture and an arrangement of shapes, i.e. those “often comprising a great many motifs deployed in two dimensions simultaneously…and the simultaneous suggestion of a great many relationships between motifs.” Art and Agency, p.79.  
“cognitive resistance” or “cognitive adhesiveness”. In my view, this is strikingly similar to the ‘suspension’ effect created in the visualisation process of reading Ping.

On a surface level, the similarity between language in Ping and visual pattern is in their repetitiveness. However, the pattern of this repetition in Ping is something of a red herring. Critics have been seduced by word patterns as a potential key to the meaning of Ping, but any patterns arising (in the frequency of words and phrases) prove to be irregular (see Mood, 1969 and Segre, 1977 in Chapter 1). Reading Gell’s more psychological approach to patterns, what does seem to connect the two, is the seductive and potentially frustrating effect of engagement with both forms. According to Gell, the ‘cognitive resistance’ effect is the result of our difficulty/ inability to visually resolve (or fix) a pattern, teamed with our desire to “possess”, i.e. to fully comprehend it. A pattern might be difficult to fix as an image, for example, because it is designed in such a way that we perceive it as both shapes and texture. In this circumstance, we cannot entirely abstract them as one form or the other (to fix the visual field), which we need to do in order to clearly ‘see’ the form in its entirety. Our desire to “possess” the pattern is piqued by the obstacles to its total comprehension, thus the complexity (indeed impossibility) of working out and ‘visually solving’ the pattern, ‘hooks us in’ and ‘holds us inside it’.

Gell explains that, ultimately then, the ‘non-possession’ integral to engagement with such forms, i.e. ones that we want to possess (resolve) but cannot, causes us to relate in a particular manner to the artefact that they embellish: as perpetually ‘unfinished business’. Engagement with work that has the quality of cognitive resistance thus takes the form of an ongoing process, creating a relationship that is characterised by inexhaustibility.

In light of the aspects of Ping revealed in the previous section, the parallels the text has with complex pattern (those forms that Gell suggests exhibit the property of

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23 Gell, Art and Agency, p.82.
24 Gell, Art and Agency, p.82.
25 Approximately 100 words repeated in different phrases make up Ping.
26 Chapter 1, p.17.
cognitive resistance) are, in my opinion, clear. The gaps in the text and the images created are characterised by their *irresolvability*. Consequently, engagement with the text involves substantial cognitive ‘work’. Moreover, in the reader’s visualisation process, this engagement becomes, like in Gell’s patterns, based on the reader’s unending and inconclusive processing and re-processing of these beguiling elements, in an attempt to ‘resolve’ them. This ultimately sets a kind of ‘suspension within process’ as a significant effect for the reader. The cultural theorist Leo Bersani suggests that one of the (secret) goals of narrativity in fiction is “the emptying climax that frees us from the tension of desire”.28 As we are constantly ‘suspended’ (entrapped) within the visualisation process in both forms, we do not reach an “emptying climax”. In reading *Ping*, readerly desire text is instead ongoing. The kind of aesthetic satisfaction gained from engaging with *Ping* is thus, in my opinion, alternatively manifested - in a manner more redolent of a visual art-form. I suggest that the pleasure of the text lies in its circularity - the play of ideas derived from its open-endedness.

The idea of cognitive resistance in literary and dramatic texts was apparently *not* alien to Beckett (with regard to his own works). Arguably, this is the sense to which he was referring when he talked about “the power of texts to claw [into/at us]”.29 It is reasonable to suggest, therefore, that ‘cognitive resistance’ (analogous to that in complex visual pattern) is a key property of *Ping*. Furthermore, it seems to me, that using a form of surface decoration or visual pattern might be a way to create a visual equivalent of one of the effects that occurs in *Ping* - the sense of the reader being ‘suspended’; caught within an ongoing process.

Gell makes particular note of the ‘beguilement’ caused by visual patterns that reverse figure and ground, which he says are: “very difficult to mentally follow”.30 The example he gives is a pattern where motifs of the same shape but opposite colours

30 Gell, *Art and Agency*, p.79.
‘glide’ on to one another, confusing the perception of positive and negative visual images.31 The particular difficulty here is that the reversal of figure and ground goes against the expectations of one of our basic processes of visual perception. To comprehend any image involves a process of visual parsing, wherein we separate object from setting in order to see the object as a coherent whole, distinct from its background. When the object (figure) and setting (ground) are reversed or confused, this presents a difficult challenge to visual comprehension/perception. In this situation we are unable to definitively set object and setting and are trapped, constantly switching between the two possible positions for both motifs. According to Gell, the reversal between figure and ground therefore can be said to act as a ‘hook’ for the viewer, drawing them into attempting a resolution of these kinds of patterns that is not in fact possible.

It seems to me there are interesting parallels here between the confusion of figure and ground in such patterns and the difficulty experienced in distinguishing and consolidating images in reading Ping as a result of blanks in the text. The manipulation of figure and ground might therefore be a useful strategy for creating a visual equivalent of the structures and effects of Ping.

2.6 Ping as Trap

Combining this identification of cognitive resistance in the text - effecting a kind of captivation - with the gaps of Ping as performative ‘blanks’: gaps that ‘do’, we have a sense of the text as kind of a machine of captivation: a textual “mind-trap”.

31 See fig. 6.5/2, p.80 in Gell, Art and Agency. (Other examples of this visual form can also be seen in many of the works created by the graphic artist M.C Escher (e.g. Metamorphose I (1937) and Verbum (1942), where they are used to create a similarly beguiling effect.)
To expand on this idea, it is useful to consider another work from Alfred Gell: *Vogel’s Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps*. Here, Gell suggests that in the object of the live animal-trap (the physical structure with bait for attracting prey, a trigger mechanism and a capturing/holding space) there is room for more metaphorical investigation. He thus expounds on the more complex *psychological* nature of the trap, ultimately proposing some key elements that it has in common with artwork.

Central to Gell’s reinterpretation is that the animal-trap is both a functional implement, and an embodiment or “representation of human-being-in-the-world”. This comes about due to its inherent relationship to *absence*; the trap is designed to function in the absence of the hunter and to attract the (as yet absent) animal. The trap, therefore, contains/embodies elements of *both* protagonists’ characteristics, for example, as Gell explains:

…the parameters of the animal’s [victim’s] natural behaviour, which are subverted in order to entrap it…

And:

…the hunter’s [or trap creator’s] skill and knowledge are truly located in the trap, in objectified form, otherwise the trap would not work.

As a functional device which is a metonymic representation of the two parties, in Gell’s view, the animal-trap may thus be conceived as a “working model” of *both* the creator of the trap and the subject to be trapped.

If we apply this to the text of *Ping* as a conceptual framework, then aspects of the text structure can be reinscribed as an embodiment of the behavioural characteristics of the reader. Indeed, it might be said that the textual structure effectively anticipates the characteristics of the reader’s response when faced with a literary text. In my

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opinion, through the use of textual blanks, Ping knowingly exploits the reader’s natural meaning-making behaviour; his/her propensity for assemblage and consolidation, desire for resolution, the culturally conditioned response to and expectations of literary texts. As in Gell’s structure, these characteristics are embedded (as knowledge) in the text by way of subversion. The cumulative blanks undermine traditional approaches to reading, ‘trapping’ the reader in a cognitive loop (as in Gell’s patterns, described earlier); an unending attempt to consolidate the text and complete the aesthetic object. Viewed from this angle, mimetic interpretation which ‘closes down’ the text to reach a singular ‘meaning’ (e.g. Lodge, discussed in chapter 1), in fact says more about the (generic) reader - about trained interpretative responses to text and instinctive readerly desires - than it does about the Ping text itself.

In this configuration, the reader is the ‘trapped’ and the author is the ‘trapper’ – the creator of the ‘trap of Ping’ (undoubtedly, Beckett’s ‘skill and knowledge are truly located…in objectified form’ in the object as it appears on the page). There is furthermore, however, a sense in which the reader can also be positioned as the creator of the trap. As discussed earlier, Ping as an extreme exposition of Iser’s structure(s),36 the reader is positioned as a ‘creator’ in the reading process. The result of the reader’s creative activity is the aesthetic object, however, the fundamental irresolvability of its constituent images determines the aesthetic object of Ping as having a fluid, ever-changing nature, meaning that the reader is also ‘trapped’ within this process. The reader is therefore (unintentionally) in the paradoxical position of being both the creator of, and trapped by, the same ‘object’, i.e. generating and determining the ‘aesthetic object’, as well as being its recipient. Read in this way, the aesthetic object can be conceived of as the locus of the reader’s entrapment by the author, and as a trap itself, embedded within the reading process. I thus suggest that with respect to the aesthetic object of Ping, there is the sense in which the reader comes to represent both protagonists in the metaphoric structure; the creator and the recipient of the ‘trap’.

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36 Blanks in Ping’, p.44.
The trap was thus a useful way of consolidating and extending what had been learned from the application of Iser’s reader-response theory and Gell’s patterns, to Ping. As a visual and structural metaphor (and derived from a 3-D object) it was something I could take forward as a framework for the translation of the text into an artwork.

One particular application I felt it might have was as a way to structure the practice. Although trapping or being trapped is clearly not the intention of the reader, he/she is, I would argue to a greater or lesser extent conscious of the experience of both positions in reading. It struck me that this sense of assuming dual positions (as a response to reading Ping) has its parallel in the construction of an artwork. Throughout the creative process the artist is similarly split between two positions: ‘maker’ and ‘viewer’ of the work, as he/she alternates between physically creating and reflecting on what has been made. This suggested to me an appropriate strategy for looking at the activity of the reader in Ping. By adopting a conscious process of alternation between making and viewing of my own artwork, my actions might reflect that of the reader interacting with the structures of Ping, whilst also allowing me insight into this process.

The trap structure also suggested ways to consider other features of the text. If Gell’s animal-trap structure allows us to locate the reader in the metaphor of Ping as trap – cast effectively as both the ‘hunter’ and ‘prey’ - then it would seem that other elements of Ping might also usefully be accommodated by the metaphor. For example, the indeterminacy of the text appealing to our desire for resolution within reading could be conceived of as the ‘bait’ of the Ping-trap, and the psychological (meta)space between text and reader - where we try to create the aesthetic object – the ‘holding-space’ that one becomes ‘caught within’. The blanks or negations in Ping can in this light be considered as the trigger-mechanism in the ‘Ping as trap’ metaphor. Like the trap-trigger, negations and blanks are central and active features of the Ping trap - mechanisms that are key to its working, and hold a kind of energy or dynamic potential to effect reader activity, that ultimately result in the reader being suspended or ‘trapped’.
2.7 Pings as blanks

One key feature of the text that has not thus far been discussed as to its functioning, is the frequently repeated “ping”. As a seemingly central and active element (performative, as suggested by Hill/Watson in Chapter 1), it seemed to me the idea of the trigger-mechanism might also throw some light on the effect of this feature within the reading process. Thus, I considered the idea of the pings as blanks and negations – triggers in the ‘Ping-trap’ metaphor.

“Ping” appears 35 times in the text (including its use as title), and is a word that stands out in its incongruity. It is an onomatopoeic word invoking a sound (noise) and a kind of movement. The Oxford English Dictionary definition includes “an abrupt ringing sound, such as that made by a rifle bullet in flying through the air” and “the ringing of an electric bell”, highlighting also its mechanical connotations. Indeed, a typewriter bell signalling the end of a line springs to mind. Knowlson and Pilling suggest it is “all that remains of what was once a fully automated mechanism”, 37 which if so, would prompt further questions; what was and where is the machine from whence it came? Brienza notes that early usages of the word included ‘to prick, to poke or to urge’, suggesting an associated action or movement. 38

One of the first things I noticed about the word, was its obvious parallel with words that denote a verbal action or process via the suffix “-ing”. This in itself suggested that an instance of ‘doing’ might be signified by, or embodied in the “ping”. The sense of the (physical or else psychological) movement bound up in the word is of abruptness. Thus it might denote a sudden appearance, change between states or perhaps realisation in the text – a ‘ping’ as the sound equivalent of the moment when a light bulb goes on above a character’s head in a cartoon. Beckett apparently

37 Knowlson and Pilling, Frescoes of the Skull (London, 1979) p.169. Beckett’s rejected “pfft” may be considered in the sense of the phrase: ‘go pfft’, as meaning to fail to work properly or at all. This may perhaps have informed Knowlson and Pilling’s suggestion.

38 Brienza, 1987, p.177.
considered the exclamation “pfft” before settling on “ping”.\textsuperscript{39} To me “pfft” this suggests a sudden disappearance (into thin air), another possible sense for the “ping” in the text.

With these associations in mind then, how does the word read within the text? As a (mimetic) sound, it has no specified object or location from which it emanates. It is clearly not a sound that is ‘of the body’, and so the reader cannot aurally attach it to the “bare white body”. Similarly, the ‘landscape’ of “all white” and “white planes” do not provide a source. So straight away it represents another kind of gap for the reader; the mystery of its origin.

The difficulty of locating the “ping” as a sound prompts a closer look at the placement of the word. It features with regularity over the course of the text, and commonly alongside “murmur”, “bare white body” and “perhaps”. When “ping” appears with “bare white body” (in five instances), arguably, there seems to be a resultant ‘change’: a possible movement from “fixed” to “fixed elsewhere”.\textsuperscript{40} See for example in:

\begin{quote}
Light heat white planes shining white bare white body \textit{fixed} ping \textit{fixed elsewhere}. [\textit{My emphasis}]
\end{quote}

However, since how, where and why the body is “fixed” (if indeed, that is the object to which it refers) is not specified, one cannot gauge the ‘meaning’ or context of this change. Furthermore, changes in the text do not clearly emanate from the “ping”. It also occurs directly before “murmur(s)” (six times in the text). On the one hand this might hint that its appearance results in some kind of sound, however this is short lived, as the murmur is quickly muted by the phrase “only just almost never”.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{39} Brienza, 1987, p.168.
\textsuperscript{40} In contrast to the 5 sentences in which there is no “ping”, for example: “…bare white body fixed one yard invisible all known without within…”
\textsuperscript{41} The case in all instances except one: “Head haught eyes light blue almost white fixed front ping murmur ping silence.” The connotations of this are discussed further in Ch.4: Second Revisiting the Text – Sounds in \textit{Ping}’.
A “ping” often precedes the phrases that are prefixed with “perhaps” – “perhaps an image”, “perhaps a nature”, “perhaps not alone”, or “perhaps a way out” – those that are suggestive of the possibility of progression (a semblance of life, or a way out). To me the appearance of the “ping” with these phrases, suggested that it may somehow generate this possibility.

The fact that the enigmatic “ping” is a gap and potentially active (prompting an action) suggests to me that Iser’s theory of ‘blanks’ may be a key to the working of the pings in the text. With no clear referential effect (meaning) within the text, the “ping” is certainly, like the gaps in the text previously discussed, an interruption to smooth reading. As a recurring gap in the text, the pings establish a persistent (and central) site of ongoing questioning for the reader: What do they represent? From where do they emerge? …and so on. In other words the pings prompt reader activity; one forms ideas around the word as we try to fill in its (referential) gap.

It is clear then, that “ping” works in the manner of a blank (as in the ‘simple’ syntactic and pragmatic blanks described earlier); as an interruption and catalyst to reader activity. Its connotations of movement and sound have, however, additional effects for the reader of the text. As suggested by Hill and Watson (see Chapter 1) the “ping” functions beyond the descriptive or referential: it is “performative”. Under the dictionary definition of this term, this would imply that it “performs an act or creates a state of affairs by the fact of its being uttered” (OED). Looked at in this way, each “ping” effectively is a sudden sound/movement: by its very appearance, the word ‘enacts’ (performs) a ping. In the context of reading then, as a sudden (incongruous) sound/movement, it actively cuts through the text, creating a kind of hole - a space of difference - in the reading process. Thus, it is a blank both referentially (through the gap around it), and also performatively: by its appearance it ‘performs’ a blank (an act).

According to Ruby Cohn, Beckett considered ‘perhaps’ to be “an important word” for him. Ruby Cohn, A Beckett Canon (University of Michigan, 2001) p.101.

The sense in which the “ping” denotes and embodies a hole in the reading process through its appearance, and also regulates (starts and stops) reading, means it can, therefore, be seen as a form of punctuation in the text - a kind of alternative full stop. Indeed following the telegrammatic sense of the text (short words used, lack of syntax, etc.) the “ping” might readily be replaced by the ‘stop’ used in telegram messages to form: Bare white body fixed STOP fixed elsewhere. Reconceived within the mechanics of film, to me this recalls the way that an edit functions; a rupture in the flow of the images, that ‘cuts off’ one scene, whilst at the same time moving the film on with the beginning of another. An edit is thus a kind of visual switching mechanism that enables movement and is fundamental to the workings of film. It seems to me, therefore, that this could be one way of re-constituting the “ping” - a key mechanism in the text - in moving-image, that is, as edits in film.

Finally, I return briefly to the premise suggested at the end of the last section, that the idea of the trap is useful in positioning the “ping”. Functioning as a structural blank, in several ways, the “ping” can be said to be ‘trigger-like’. Like a trigger, it is ‘an active device’: it effects action (in the reader), and it is also in itself (performatively) an action. The mechanical quality of the word (sound) further adds to the sense that it relates to (and is perhaps a component of) a working model or machine. As a feature that is itself an action and holds the potential to effect movement in reader, the “ping” embodies a kind of energy of potential; the possibility of change and of moving forward, and is thus one element that seems to drive the narrative on. In this way, the pings represent a central performative spring or trigger with respect to the reader/text interaction of Ping.

2.8 ‘Hearing' Ping

Beckett wrote in 1929 about Joyce’s Finnegans Wake:

Here form is content and content is form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read – or rather it is
not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something it is that something itself.\[44\] [Emphasis mine]

Although he was discussing another author’s work, we might consider these words just as readily in relation to Ping. Whereas in most prose we can bypass the text’s connection with the sound of its words, with Ping this is not the case. As discussed earlier, the disconnectedness of the words, together with the absence of (a traditional) plot etc., reduces their representational ability. In this context, the general effect on the reader is a new focus on form; the focus on a mimetic picture that is generally expected in prose fiction is substituted with an emphasis on the power and aurality of the individual words.

The many consonantal words (e.g. “white”, “body”, “head”, “fixed” and “joined”) in Ping, word-sounds that might be described as having an aural ‘solidity’, foreground a re-conception of the words themselves. Distinct from their expected function - of signs that convey meaning - they impress rather on the reader as ‘things’, with the ‘weight’ of being objects in themselves. The semi-disengagement from word-as-text (words conveying meaning) in Ping, apparently in favour of word-as-sound, ultimately gives an impression of the words as more like irresolvable ‘sound-objects’ that hang in the air (an interesting concept for attention within a visual/sound translation).

Beckett’s choice of word pairings and pervasive use of repetition also foregrounds this heightened ‘aural’ sense in the text. As well as the repetition of words and phrases (approximately one hundred different words repeated to make up a total of just under a thousand), the text contains a wealth of internal sound repetitions.

Frequent alliteration, as in “white walls”, assonance (vowel repetition as in “feet heels” and “hands hanging”) and repetition of initial or final syllables or consonants – see for example in: “traces blurs signs”, “hands hanging”, and “light heat white” - are scattered throughout Ping. The repetition of this type of already internally

repetitious short phrases also creates a rhythm (albeit irregular) to reading, which provides a certain sense of the text ‘going on’.

The prominence of the repetition means that not only are we consistently made aware of the sound of the text, but also therefore of the process and action of ourselves reading. In the Beckett scholar and cultural theorist Steven Connor’s words, it is a feature of language that:

[To] read the same word twice or more is to catch ourselves in the act of hearing… or to read ourselves reading.45

Thus reading Ping is a peculiarly self-conscious activity; we are effectively ‘split’ - undertaking both reading activity and ‘watching’ (or indeed hearing) ourselves undertaking that activity. This experience is more like that of reading aloud (see next section) than of being ‘lost’ in fictional plot, as in traditional prose.

2.9 Speaking Ping

An obvious way to approach the reading of a difficult text is to voice the words, either internally or indeed out loud. Based on the idea of speaking Ping as a route to a better understanding of its properties, I made some preliminary recordings of myself, and a small number of other non-performers reading the text aloud.46

This experience seemed to me to suggest that the labour Beckett put into writing short prose (see Chapter1 – ‘Beckett and his work’) is directly transferred to the reader in this piece. Beckett’s reduced syntax and punctuation, and the pings, mean that labour intensive reading is clearly required. The “ping” presents a particular challenge when performing a reading of the text; one is torn as to how to say the

46 These were recordings of a small number of non-actors reading Ping aloud as a monologue. This was undertaken with the technical assistance of a sound engineer, Colin Gateley MSc. who was later to work with me on the sound for the final work.
word, as word or as sound. With its distinctive qualities, it feels as if it should be uttered in a different voice and seems to urge its expression more as a sound. However, it is not typographically differentiated from the other words of the text - defined, say by speech marks as specifically spoken or heard. As an incongruous word embedded into the sentence structure, then, it has a peculiar status; part of the discourse but at the same time separated from it. Thus speaking the text means the “ping” stands out even more. In its difference from the other words it provides (at least on a first reading) a momentary departure for the reader from the rest of the text, reinforcing the idea suggested previously of pings as effecting a kind of ‘blank’.

The effort of reading is made particularly evident (and is converted into physical form) when one tries to read the text all the way through out loud. In the recordings I made, this obviously took some considerable concentration and physical effort from the participants. This is because the natural response here is to attempt to parse and then intonate the words in order to communicate meaning, but the lack of connection between phrases and sentences and minimal punctuation in Ping makes this kind of oral reading near impossible. The result is frequent mistakes, fits and starts.  

The Beckett actress Billie Whitelaw makes particular note of the physical effort of performing Beckett’s words in early read-throughs. She writes: “I had to work out where I was going to snatch a breath. I was hyperventilating like mad and often became dizzy…” Under instruction by Beckett, the mode of delivery adopted by Whitelaw and fellow actor Beckett David Warrilow for Beckett drama, was based on treating the text as a kind of score and employing the idea of “less colour” (a common directorial phrase of his, meaning to reduce emphasis or tone). According to Bryden, for these seasoned performers:

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47 The stopping and starting of the reading process revealed in oral form.
The voice became not so much an interpreter of a Beckett text, as a musical instrument.  

In my experience of observing others reading the text aloud, and ‘performing’ it myself, taking inspiration from *this* mode of delivery turned out to be a more successful way of ‘speaking’ *Ping*. Reading the text aloud in a manner more akin to playing a succession of single notes, i.e. working *with* the staccato of the words, as opposed to trying to construct meaning by varying intonation, made it easier to read it right through as a full piece. This approach appears to be necessitated by the design of the text; the combination of limited conjunctives, punctuation and verbs means that in order to read the text out loud without stumbling, you have to let the words ‘hit you’ one by one. A striking analogy can be made with Beckett’s passage about time, in *The Unnamable*:

[The seconds] they arrive, bang, bang, *they bang into you, bounce off*, fall and never move again…  

Reading the text aloud thus brings to the fore a performative effect of the lack of grammatical connection between the words; one must deal with each word (or short phrase) in isolation and as it comes up. Rather than treating the words as regards to their meaning(s), one effectively functions as a kind of siphon for the *flow* of the words.

This suggested that one suitable approach to adopt for moving-image work based on *Ping*, is to be sympathetic to this paratactic sense of the text. According to the Beckett scholar Ted L Estess, in other of Beckett’s short texts the use of “untied” or indeed *unfixed* words and things that sit alongside each other, links with the lack of linear narrative progression in Beckett.  

Considered in relation to *Ping*, this implies that more understanding of how *Ping* ‘goes on’ for the reader might be revealed by working with *unfixed* elements. A suitable strategy for the process of both making

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and for the design of the piece itself might thus be creating a flow of images/elements that sit *alongside one another*, rather than linking together in a traditional linear fashion.

Beckett’s idea of “less colour”, which I had used in directing readings of the text,\(^{54}\) seemed also to offer potential in terms of reflecting aspects of *Ping*. Billie Whitelaw’s interpretation of this stage direction was: “Put all [your] colours back in the cupboard. Just keep out the black, the white and the grey”.\(^{55}\) It occurred to me that if this instruction were followed *literally* in a moving-image translation of *Ping*, i.e. only monochrome colour were used, then *my act* of working with limited colour might reflect a feature of the reader’s activity in *Ping*, i.e. working with limited (textual) elements. Furthermore, *what is created* from this would be a kind of a visual equivalent to the images the reader produces from the reduced elements of the text. A black and white piece would also subtly suggest its textual origins – *Ping* as writing/print. Limited colour would also be in keeping with the aesthetic of Beckett’s own visual work (both film and TV/stage drama). He took a minimalist approach to the colour of his images, commonly designing costumes and sets in black, white and grey (see for example *Rockaby*, *Ohio Impromptu* and *Krapp’s Last Tape*\(^{56}\)), and instead made creative use of lighting to create stark images with great impact and immediacy, such as the disembodied mouth coming out of the dark in *Not I*.

In the process of observing *Ping* read *right through* as monologue, I found that often there was a noticeable urgency arising towards the end of the text (e.g. an increased pace, and visible exertion by the readers). The source of this change in delivery is revealed when the text is printed with each sentence as a line, in the manner of a poem (see Appendix 3). One can then immediately see that the sentences get noticeably longer from approximately two-thirds of the way through to the end of the text. This textual structure becomes significant when read aloud, since the only

\(^{54}\) My instructions were: to read in one take with accuracy, and to read “without colour”. (The latter phrase is Beckett’s own, which he commonly used in dramatic direction to mean read without adding dramatic emphasis).


\(^{56}\) For stage directions see *Samuel Beckett: Complete Shorter Plays* (Faber: London, 1984) p.273, 285 and 55 respectively.
breath-stops available in the piece are the full stops. This means that the reader must hold his/her breath for a significant length of time in order to accurately complete the sentences as they appear in the text. The physical effect of this is comparable to that associated with suspense, as one might experience for example in a suspenseful film sequence, except here there is no resolution apart from reaching the end of the text. In film, suspense is normally instigated by the drawing-out of narrative, but here it seemed that the prose was creating a similar physical reaction – a ‘pseudo-suspense’ effect - in the reader-out-loud through sentence structure. The effect is a physical equivalent (an almost tangible embodiment) of the tension we experience when our narrative desire to understand and to end is suspended, thus arguably, is an embodiment of the ongoing effect of ‘becoming trapped’, discussed earlier.\footnote{See ‘Ping as Trap’, p.53.}

This building up of ‘pseudo-suspense’ in the text could thus be used in a visual/sound translation as mode for the piece to ‘go on’ for the viewer, outside of linear narrative progression. A growing ‘centrifugal’ sense could be created in the moving-image work, for example by the accumulation of ‘irresolvable’ images, of sound, or of speed over the duration of shots or cuts between them, to a kind of saturation point that nevertheless resists dramatic conclusion.

### 2.10 Chapter 2 Conclusions

In this chapter, as the first stage in my investigation of Ping, I have examined the text through the experience of the reader - shifting the focus from a mimetic interpretation towards its visual, aural and performative aspects. Through the application of literary and aesthetic themes not previously used in relation to Ping, I have identified key structures that allowed me to develop strategies for the next (practice) stage of the project.
Changing the focus of discussion to the performative aspects of Ping - what the text does in relation to the reader and what the reader does in return – allowed me to identify relationships between the text and the theoretical frameworks of Iser’s ‘blanks’, Gell’s ‘cognitive resistance in pattern’ and Gell’s trap. This process revealed the central textual structures for the reader of Ping - blanks and negations, repetition and a ‘paratactic sensibility’. It also allowed me to look closer at how these structures shape the reading process, for example by anticipating the characteristics of the reader’s response and working against his/her expectations, in order to prompt reader activity - the projection and rejection of images, and the stopping/starting of the secondary creation (i.e. re-creation) of the text. It, furthermore, made clear the way in which the reader is invested in the text through his/her desire for resolution, and, via the considerable reader activity in Ping, is positioned as a creator. This reinforced my original premise: that creating (an artwork) was an appropriate action to undertake in order to further unpack the reader activity in the text. By literally engaging in an act of composition, I would be approximating Ping’s “active participant”.

This process revealed the importance of the act of visualisation (visuality) and sounding the text (aurality) to the reader/text interaction of Ping. It is through gaps in these processes that (non-linear) movement enters the text.

Looking at aspects of Ping in combination with Gell and Iser generated a number of potential strategies for extending ideas of the reader-text relationship in Ping through art-practice. Firstly, Iser’s concept of the literary text as a set of ‘instructions’ for building up an (imaginary) object or image can be reinterpreted as a fundamental way to approach Ping. By my active construction of a moving image piece in response to it, I could approximate something of the creative process undertaken in reading Ping.

The identification of the gaps in Ping as Iser’s ‘blanks’ (i.e. gaps that mobilise the reader) revealed that these are a source (perhaps the origin) of movement in the text. The frequency of gaps in Ping implies an ongoing ‘blank effect’ during reading, thus
the type of movement produced is a kind of start-stop oscillation - the constant interrupting and prompting of reader activity by blanks. It is therefore in the reader activity of Ping that the dynamic movement of the text lies. This suggests a type of movement for a moving-image translation, a continual starting and stopping, which also might be effected through a form of visual blanks.

From Iser’s structure of negations, I was able to derive a concept of ‘pseudo-blanks’ in Ping, in that negations in the text that create blanks in fact ultimately prompt the creation of a kind of image. These ‘un-figurations’, a residue created from reading the text, might be reproduced as a kind of mode for images in a moving-image translation in order to look more precisely at how the aesthetic object of Ping manifests. By playing with ideas of negations in a visual idiom (i.e. in creating the images for the film), and further, by integrating the idea of the ‘seen’ and the ‘unseen’ into the moving piece, it might be possible to further articulate both the ‘pseudo-blank’ process (an aspect of the ‘non-narrative’ way the text ‘goes on’), and the ‘final’ effect this creates for the reader.

My setting of reader engagement with Ping alongside Gell’s theories concerning complex visual pattern suggested a way of duplicating something of the ‘work’ involved in reading it. Where in traditional fiction one might become engrossed in the narrative scene/plot, engagement with Ping is a combination of external contemplation of its form (a flow of words that refuse to link), and being caught and suspended in the (mental) processing and reprocessing of its elements. The mode of reading thus has parallels with the way Gell suggests we engage with complex patterns, i.e. those with ‘cognitive resistance’. Therefore, a translation of the text should hold this particular quality, and using certain elements of visual pattern might be a way of establishing this. An element of Ping that exhibits considerable ‘cognitive adhesiveness’ is the negations. Play with figure and ground struck me as a suitable way of visualising these, which might then prove fruitful in developing a Ping-like form of engagement in moving-image.
In addition to the visualisation process, the general focus of this chapter on the gaps of the text reveals a considerable aural aspect to the reader/text interaction in Ping. In Ping, the aural quality could even be said to supersede that of the words as (signifying) text and to constitute its most perceptibly concrete element. Due to the words’ disconnection from each other and their (internal and word-level) repetition, we apprehend the words more as sounds than signifiers and with their own ‘materiality’. This is in contrast to the lack of solidity/fixedness in the visualisation process.

Through the process of ‘speaking Ping’, I determined some possible strategies for translating these characteristics and their effect within reading the text. Working with limited colour, with repetition as a mainstay (in the creative process and in the final piece) and setting filmic elements along-side one another (rather than linking them together), could then create a effect parallel to how the ‘sound-objects’ in Ping ‘fall and simply pile up’, refusing to build up the expected narrative scene of traditional fiction.

Gell’s trap structure was particularly apposite for negotiating Ping; a text which exhibits significant qualities of ‘constructed-ness’ (we engage with it more like we would an (art) object, than a story into which we become absorbed) and, as is becoming increasingly clear, is also concerned with ideas of functional effect. In the constituent parts of the trap, we find correlates for effects (in particular the ‘suspension’ of its protagonist) that arguably play a major role in the reader/text relationship of Ping. Using the trap as a metaphor therefore suggested further ideas to pursue within a practice-based investigation of Ping. Combining the idea of the ‘pings’ as ‘blanks’, with that of Ping as a kind of (cognitive) trap, the recurring ‘ping’ can be situated in the text as a kind of trigger-mechanism – i.e. a central, performative feature that holds transformative potential. To develop an equivalent ‘ping’ effect in moving-image might therefore mean using an element (an image, sound or filmic mechanism) that punctuates the film, actively contributing to the movement of the piece.
Perhaps most centrally, the trap also represented a structure that could accommodate both the effect of the reader as a *creator* of the aesthetic object of the text, and as *suspended within* this process. The drawing together/consolidation of these two effects within a single ‘object’ emphasised their simultaneity – the fact that the reader adopts *two positions* in relation to the text in the action of reading. This, in turn, allowed me to derive a specific way to approach and structure practice work in relation to *Ping*: to consciously adopt the two modes in creative activity - making and reflection. This forms the basis for the next part of this thesis; the documentation of my iterative process of making, reflecting and re-reading *Ping* in the light of new directions these actions suggest.
Chapter 3: Creation of Images

3.1 Introduction

My deliberate practice was to alternate between the roles of image-originator/maker and viewer, and with the idea that both of these together emulate the peculiar situation of reader/image generator in Ping. I thus undertook a cyclical process consisting of: practical activity, viewing what I had created in relation to the previous work I had done, and then in the light of new ideas and directions these actions suggested, responded with further theoretical investigation where appropriate and a re-reading of the text. I followed this by embarking on the next stage of practical activity and so forth, repeating this process until I had created the moving-image installation piece that accompanies this thesis (documented in Chapter 5 and on the accompanying DVDs).

The documentation of this sequence of work is the matter of Chapters 3-5 of this thesis, representing the three major stages of the art-practice I undertook: the creation of images, the reprocessing and assembling of images, and the development of the film into an installation piece: multi-screen with sound. Within each, documentation of the practical work (‘Making’) is followed by two sub-sections: firstly my observations on the work produced (‘Viewing’), and then by new directions/further reflections back on the Ping text (‘Revisiting the Text’).

To keep track of my practical activity I made concurrent written notes. Extracts of these notes are included inset in italics in each section on ‘Making’, to provide detail of the actions I undertook.

The moving-image work produced in each stage is fully described in its ‘making’ and my subsequent ‘viewing’ of it. The work in its final incarnation is documented
on the accompanying DVDs by firstly a film-clip of the final set of moving-images with sound, and secondly film of the installation in situ. I suggest these be viewed following the reading of this thesis, or alongside my final ‘viewing’ (Chapter 5).

3.2 First Making

3.2.1 General Aesthetic

From the contextual and theoretical work I had done (Chapter 2), I had in mind a basic aesthetic for the moving-image work, which encompassed repetition, pattern, lack of colour and a perhaps mechanical feel or element. To build on this, I considered the appropriateness of my own aesthetic guides.

My own artistic-practice is based on drawing, photography and collage. I have been evolving a practice involving the abstraction of photographs through figurative and monochromatic drawing for a number of years (see fig 3.1). I have found this an interesting and effective way to create illustrative work inspired by postmodern texts; by playing with ideas of negative (visual) space and the reversals/mirroring this produces. More recently, I expanded this practice by working in the medium of moving-image to produce my M.Des. short film The Unnamable (1999)1, inspired by Beckett’s novel of the same name. In this filmic illustration, I used animation to make the images move, devising my own ‘lo-fi’ approach to creating the images and edits.

As a technique, animation is traditionally based on filming successive still drawings or object positions to create an illusion of movement; the effect of movement is created through gaps between images. On my first reading of Ping, I had been struck by its ‘stop-frame’ feel; to me it seemed as if the text was somehow constructed from ‘stills’, and the phrase “one second with image”, in particular, evoked the units of

1 See Jenny Triggs, The Unnamable (1999) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5QhtP8OZS0
‘frames per second’ employed in animation. I wondered, then, if this visual form could be used as an appropriate correlate with aspects of *Ping*.

![Figure 3.1 Left: Multiplicity (after Calvino), 1997. Right: Study for The Unnamable (1999)](image)

The centrality of gaps to the process of animating certainly seems to echo that of the ‘blanks’ in *Ping*; which as we saw in the previous chapter, are key to the reader-text interaction. What is more, the repetitive processing and re-processing of images this form involves (traditionally, drawing and re-drawing and digitising frame by frame, and then placing sets of frames alongside one another), is analogous to that undertaken by the reader in *Ping*. Together, these parallels suggested that both in its structure and in its construction, animation was an appropriate technique to employ in a moving-image transation of reading the text.

From my earlier analyses, it was clear that the moving-image piece should reflect the text’s construction from fragments (disconnected words/phrases etc.) and should play with the idea of unfixed images (see Ch.2 – ‘Speaking *Ping*’). Use of animation was
a way that I could respond to the staccato feel of the words in the text in a direct way; by translating these into a succession of separate images. This might be done, for example, by creating each digital frame of an animated sequence from separate physical images (each an independent object in itself). By making a limited number of stills and filming them, I could develop sequences that, when played, would reflect the sense of the flow of the words in reading Ping, i.e. distinct units hitting you one by one (as discussed in Chapter 2). Playing a small number of sequential stills over a fixed time duration gives a jerky effect (rather than the smooth ‘real-time’ movement that is produced by increasing the number of incremental images\(^2\)). It also shows the mode of construction, i.e. from individual still images. This technique thus evokes something of the flow, and also the ‘solidity’ and hermetically sealed nature of the words, as demonstrated earlier.

Many of the techniques I had invented for The Unnamable were designed to have resonances with Beckett’s own approach to creating images. For example, I used relatively basic (‘lo-fi’) methods to make images move on film, including stop-frame animation and rudimentary homemade ‘machines’ that spun and rotated the image, as a response to what I had learned about Beckett’s approach to creating his visual images for the stage and TV. (Billie Whitelaw gives an insight into the ingenious solutions used, for example, in order to create the effect of the disembodied mouth hovering above the stage in Not I, she was strapped to a high rostrum covered head to toe in black with only her mouth exposed.\(^3\)) I reasoned that in this current context - the translation of Ping, a further visual-response sparked by Beckett prose - the application of a similar ad hoc, homemade approach would, likewise, be appropriate. Similarly, in my use of ‘machines’ in the creation of The Unnamable (which I made to make some of the image sequences move), I was acknowledging the way in which Beckett embraced technology in his own visual and sound work. Beckett commonly used mechanical apparatus as key elements in his plays – for example, the reel-to-

\(^2\) As would be the effect filming 25 frames per second on digital video and playing back at the same frame rate.

reel tape recorder in *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958)⁴, an automatic mechanism employed to rock the chair in *Rockaby* (1981)⁵, and the spotlight in *Play* (1964) which prompts the characters to speak.⁶ This has relevance to the translation of *Ping* in a general sense - a ‘Beckettian’ aesthetic used in a response to a Beckett text - and also in terms of the ‘machine-like’ qualities of the “ping” identified earlier. Specifically, by employing older (analogue) technology in the work, I could engender a ‘lo-fi’ creative aesthetic, and also acknowledge *Ping’s* late sixties vintage.

Animation based on ‘lo-fi’ technologies and sequences of individual ‘objects’, also offered the opportunity to work directly with materials in order to reflect the ‘constructed-ness’ of *Ping* (something that became increasingly clear in my reading of the text in Chapter 2). As we have seen, the ‘thing-ness’ of the words (having no referent outside of themselves) and the text’s cognitive resistance, sets form above meaning in *Ping*. As a result, the text as a whole situates itself very much as an *artefact*. The reader thus contemplates *Ping* from the outside and is aware of themselves reading, rather than “entering” a description/story of human experience with which they readily identify or are lost in. By making a piece that ‘shows its edges’ - its means of construction - it might therefore be possible to convey something of this self-referentiality and self-consciousness in *Ping*.

Other techniques that I had used in my earlier work included cut-outs and shadows as images. There seemed potential in these too, to evolve the kind of aesthetic required in this piece: one that included play with notions of negation and blanks and ‘phantom’ images. (This idea I develop further throughout the following stage of making.)

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I could thus build on the aesthetic successes of *The Unnamable*: using aspects of its aesthetic sensibility, and re-appropriating some of my own visual techniques as visual and performative strategies with which to engage with *Ping*.

### 3.2.2 Visual elements

Turning first then to the content of the moving-image piece, I thought about the imagery that I could use to reflect reading the text. Based on the idea of the *Ping* text as ‘a set of instructions’, my first inclination was to create some ‘literal’ images to substitute for the repeating nouns (objects) of the text (body, eyes, etc.) and then subsequently some visual representations that might work in an equivalent way to the “pings”. The nouns seemed to fall naturally into four rough groups - body, eyes, eye and surfaces - with a further group of words/phrases that repeatedly appear with each of these in the text, and which could be considered their ‘attributes’ (Table. 3.1).

Although clearly a body-part, “eyes” appears 16 times, much more frequently than any of the other body-parts. It thus stood out from the rest of the text, as a persistent feature. I therefore, opted to categorise them independently from ‘body’.

The other key element is the “ping”. Unlike the other nouns above, this does not appear with other adjectival words. As discussed earlier, the “ping” is particularly distinct from the other words in that it is not associated with any specific thing, it has peculiar sound and movement qualities and machinic connotations, and it works in a performative way (creating a blank or punctuation point in the text). This suggested to me that it should be dealt with differently to the “body”, “eyes”, “eye” and “surfaces”. This is discussed later in the chapter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Elements’</th>
<th>‘Attributes’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>body</td>
<td>[bare white] [fixed] [fixed elsewhere]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hands</td>
<td>[hanging palms front]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feet</td>
<td>[white] [toes joined like sewn]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heels</td>
<td>[together right angle]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>legs</td>
<td>[joined like sewn]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>head</td>
<td>[haught]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nose</td>
<td>[white holes]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ears</td>
<td>[white holes]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mouth</td>
<td>[white seam like sewn]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nails</td>
<td>[given rose only just] [fallen white over]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hair</td>
<td>[long, fallen white]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scars</td>
<td>[white] [invisible same white as flesh torn of old given rose only just]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heart</td>
<td>[breath no sound]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eyes</td>
<td>[only just] [light blue almost white] [fixed front] [holes]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>floor</td>
<td>[white] [one square yard] [never seen]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ceiling</td>
<td>[one yard] [never seen] [one square yard] [never seen]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walls</td>
<td>[white] [one yard by two]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>planes</td>
<td>[shining white] [meeting invisible]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eye</td>
<td>[a little less dim] [black and white] [half closed long lashes imploring] [unlustrous]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.1 Elements and attributes in Ping.**

Having identified these five as main elements, I used them as a starting point for creating the moving image piece; developing images from each to build up a visual object of the text. Sticking to these five elements as the source for creating the images was a way of directly reflecting the *limited imagery* of Ping, which is then repeated throughout the text.
1. Body

As mentioned in Chapter 1, some critics have previously put forward very visceral interpretations of the text (Leslie Hill, 1984, Ulrika Maude, 2005). I would dispute these views, however, as any ‘bodily-ness’ we might attribute to the “bare white body” is persistently undermined. The body’s consistent ‘fading’ into whiteness, its negation, and its fragmentation into body-parts, creates an ephemeral, dematerialised sense to it. Moreover, phrases such as “legs joined like sewn” to me invoke a ‘puppet-like figure’ - something created as opposed to an embodied human character. On this basis, I sought to create body images that were fragmentary and less fleshy figurations.

![Figure 3.2 Examples of exploratory life-drawings.](image)

I first made a number of exploratory studies (fast intuitive pencil drawings) of different life-models changing their poses at short time intervals. This was a useful exercise to contemplate how to deal with the “body” visually, in particular, the kind of images that might emerge from its successive repetition over time. The sketches I produced were characterised by abstraction, fragmentation, multiples, and new shapes and forms that were created by overlapping (see fig 3.2). During this initial

7 The word “body” only appears in the first half of the text - thereafter there are only body-parts.
activity, it struck me that from my longstanding technique of abstracting from photographic images, I could derive a process that would render the effect experienced in reading the fragmented “bare white body”. By making images that ‘worked back’ from the ‘realism’ of the photographic image: a kind of aesthetic stripping away, this would perhaps begin to incorporate the negation in Ping (by the action itself and in the image produced). In addition, as a method to produce the body stills for the film, it would necessitate an act of reprocessing images similar to that in reading the text.

I decided to produce a set of photographic images that I could then use as ‘base images’: a starting point for a rolling process of recreations, what I term ‘re-castings’, each of which would create a new set of stills for use in the moving-image work. The word “re-casting(s)” was brought to my attention by Fitch (1989) as a way of describing the re-making from French that generated the Ping text (see Ch.1, p.13). I found this word particularly appropriate and evocative as a term for the process I was to undertake, as it denotes a calculated transformation (“presenting or organizing in a different form or style” [OED]). It is also relevant to visual art (in particular sculpture) and performance/film practices: in these contexts, to recast is to “give (a metal object) a different form by melting down and reshaping”, or “allocate the parts in (a play or film) to different actors” (OED). (The full implications of this idea of re-casting are teased out over the duration of the project.)

To visualise the “body” photographically certain decisions needed to be made, for example on the gender of the model. The only possible clues in the text are the phrases “long hair” and “legs joined like sewn”. “Long hair”, to me, instantly suggested female, but it is not a gender specific characteristic. Indeed, for Beckett, a number of his male dramatic characters, for instance those in Ohio Impromptu (1981), have “Long white hair”.8 “Legs joined like sewn” may imply castration (a desexualised male), but could instead simply add to the idea of the body being puppet/doll-like. Gender is not specified in any of the body-parts/elements in the text, yet it cannot be ignored because the ‘body’ is stripped “bare” and is presented to

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the reader time after time. Gender in *Ping* is thus ultimately another blank, which prompts projection by the reader. The idea of gender as a blank has its parallel in theories of feminine subjectivity. In psychoanalytic theory, this is epitomised by Freud’s controversial conception of femininity as fundamentally defined by its relation to masculinity, i.e. the psychosexual development of the female subject as based on a lack of visible genitalia. Feminist critic Susan Guber traces a long literary and cultural history of the feminine conceptualised in a similar vein – the feminine as a “blank page”. Gubar acknowledges the negative connotations of this as a literary and cultural metaphor – a position of passivity in opposition to the (male) authorial pen - however, points out that there is a positive angle in which this can be viewed, namely the “mysterious promise” of the blank page - it is blank that provokes creativity. Viewed in this light, the gap of the body’s gender in *Ping* might positively be represented by a female body in a visual translation. With this concept in mind, I made the decision to set a female anatomy within the film. It seemed also that this could shed new (certainly a different) light on the text, as issues of gender (gynocentric implications of the text) have not, to my knowledge, been considered in previous scholarly work on the text. I chose to depict my own body in the photographic images, as this offered the opportunity to begin thinking about ideas of self-reflexivity in *Ping*.

**Photographic ‘base images’**

To achieve the jerky effect discussed earlier, I needed to work with a small number of digital frames/second. I thus needed to produce a limited number of stills images where each still exhibited a subtle change from the next - some movement or difference, whilst adhering to the general lack of movement associated with the body

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11 Aside from the arbitrary assumption of the sex of the body (usually male) this topic has not been explored.
in the text (“body fixed”). I decided on twelve\textsuperscript{12} as the number of stills per sequence, which also determined the number of photographic base images of my own body I needed to create (one base image per still).

I set limits on my movement in this first sequence, by fixing the space in which I moved to “one yard by two”. The positions I adopted for each photograph were also roughly derived from ‘clues’ in the text.

\textit{I photographed several sequences of twelve stills of myself (nude) against a white background (from which I would later select the final ones). Each was made up of twelve intuitive poses, devised roughly in relation to ‘positioning’ words/phrases that appear with the body parts (body and “fixed”, “fixed elsewhere”, hands and “hanging palms front”, toes and “joined like sewn”, heels and “together right angle”, legs and “joined like sewn”, head and “haught”). These poses I held briefly whilst turning in increments within a “one yard by two” floor area.}

**First Re-casting**

To re-process the base images, I considered some of the body’s ‘associated’ words, i.e. “scars” and “holes” (see Table 3.1, .76). To me these suggested images of cut bodies; I thought first of something like the flayed human figures used to illustrate the workings of the body in early medical illustrations.\textsuperscript{13} These, however, have a visceral quality to them, antithetic to the ‘dematerialised’ figuration of the body I sought to create. I had used cut-outs in \textit{The Unnamable} as images, to suggest a subtext of simultaneous absence and presence (i.e. the figure was depicted by a hole, in contrast to the ‘negative’ space’ or ground, which was paper). It occurred to me that I could build on this with respect to \textit{Ping}, and use the \textit{act} of creating the cut-out to engage with the performative nature of the text – the text prompting \textit{action} in the reader/maker. I thus decided to develop the images of the body I had thus far created,

\textsuperscript{12} 12 stills was derived (arbitrarily) from 12 frames per second as the common rate for producing images in animation, although I was working more intuitively, in terms of the visual effect, rather than in frame rates as such.

\textsuperscript{13} See for example in Barbara Maria Stafford, \textit{Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine} (The MIT Press, 1993) p.60 (fig.26), p.62. (fig 28) and p.76. (fig.49).
by *actively cutting out*. As I said before, I felt that hand-made (as opposed to computer-generated) imagery was the best way to reflect the very ‘constructed’ feel of the text. I wanted to make imagery using materials in a way that pertained to the text, so in black and white (as Whitelaw advised just using “the black, the white and the grey”), and rather than the photographic image itself, I decided to use white paper as the arena for the cutting. As well as being visual presentations of “scars” and “holes”, the images created would then literally be a body of “holes” in “white”, thus embodying the sense of form in *Ping* I had previously identified: “it is not *about* something it *is that something itself*”.

With these ideas in mind, I devised a way of cutting out in order to develop the photographic sequence I had made into a set of new, abstracted *cut out* images:

*I selected 3 of the sets of 12 photographs*¹⁵ and covered each image in turn with a sheet of heavy weight paper, blanking out the image. Setting them on a light-box, I traced what I could see of each photo; the weight of the paper meant that most of the detail was masked, and I was forced to extrapolate from the traces I could see and what I could remember of the image. On the outline body traces I had made, I scalpelled away the new areas of shadow (see figure) so that I was left with the negative space (effectively everything but the body). I filmed the cutting out of the first image as documentation of my actions (see fig. 3.3).

![Figure 3.3 Cutting out the body.](image)

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¹⁴ A further sense that could be taken from the body as “holes” is the concept of ‘body-sieve’, as pertains to Deleuze’s concept of the postmodern (‘schizophrenic’) body. See Deleuze, Gilles *The Logic of sense* (1969) (Athlone Press: London, 1990) p.100.

¹⁵ I chose these three on the basis that they were the most interesting image sequences. The number was arbitrary.
This series of actions was made intuitively as a response to the images in front of me at the time, set in relation to the text. Subsequently the parallels between the process that I had undertaken, and the reader’s response to the blanks and negations in *Ping*, became clear: I had effectively *performed* a visual equivalent of a set of secondary negations. As reader/maker, I had negated (cut out and discarded) the positive space of the (photographic) body image that I had created in response to the word in the text, generating in its place a hole(s). Looked at in this way, each cut-out was *performatively* a secondary negation of the “body” in *Ping* and was also a visual representation of the reader process. Moreover, the resulting hole or ‘blank’ adds another degree of complexity, in that in addition to the ‘un-figuration’ left by the negation of the body, the hole is itself a new (visual) blank, thus has the potential to prompt the creation of further images related to the original.

I thought about ways to film the ‘negations’ I had created. When the cut-outs were set individually on white paper (making the ‘barely-there outlines’ described earlier), this revealed the visual potential of their edges for play with layering and overlapping. I layered the cut-outs up, and found that they formed a more intricate and more confusing image; a body-shape filled with body boundaries. This new layered image was an accumulation of (my visual) ‘secondary negations’ of the same element. This led me to think about the effect of the ongoing, *rolling* process of the primary negation of the same elements in *Ping*; the sense that the ‘bare white body’, for example, is *repeatedly* presented and then negated. The cumulative effect of this might be the reader reprocessing the ‘un-figurations’ he/she creates of these elements. This would certainly add complexity in visualising this element for the reader over the course of the text. By filming the cut-outs *accumulating* then, was one way to visually approximate something of the effect of cumulative secondary negations in the reading process.

*I filmed the cut-outs gradually building up frame by frame in order from first to last and then last to first, from a base of a blank sheet of white paper. This process was then repeated with no white paper background placing layers of glass between the original body cut-outs to create a slight shadow between each cut-out (fig 3.4.).*
Figure 3.4 Body – Layered cut-outs
Second Re-casting

Taking the series of cut outs I had made as visual embodiment of secondary negations - a series of new blanks in my visualising process - I next set about making another re-casting (reprocessing as a response to the blanks).

I thought about the possible ways that negative space (the gaps) in the cut-out images that I had created might be used to generate further ‘re-interpretations’ of the original (photographic) body image – an equivalent to the rolling ‘un-figurations’ produced as a result of each negation in Ping. Through this, it seemed that a kind of Chinese box-like structure of visual negations/blanks could be embodied in the (re-casting) process, and thus in the images produced. This could re-translate in an interesting way, when the images were embedded into the final artwork.

I experimented with changing what was behind the paper cut-out - to a contrasting background (black) or leaving nothing behind it (held parallel to, and raised from, a surface) - the image-shaped space was transformed into a material silhouette, or the source of a body-shaped shadow. This suggested further ways that I could use the cut-outs in order to create new image sets that would, like ‘un-figurations’, evoke their ‘original’: filmed as stencils to make material traces and as masks to project body-shaped shadows.

Second Re-casting - Material traces

A physical trace (a new positive silhouette image) from the cut outs was redolent of the idea of ‘un-figurations’ as a kind of ‘trace’ in the mind of the reader (Ch.2: ‘‘Blanks’ in Ping’).

Using them as stencils I found that I could create a range of charcoal, powder graphite and pencil ‘traces’ of the body. Each material left its own distinctive type of mark when applied through the cut out onto a separate sheet.
Through this action, the cut-out itself became marked with the materials used (a trace of my action). I found that these cut-outs could be then be re-used to create another set of images that emphasised the hole(s) in them, and thus the ‘negation’ I had performed (in ‘First Re-casting’).

*The stencil retained traces of the material around the edges of the cut out areas (front and back). When placed on a separate white sheet of paper, this then made an additional cut-out image, where the body figured as an ‘image-shaped gap’, i.e. emphasised as negative space. These were filmed layering up to create further sets of digital stills (fig. 3.5.).*

![Figure 3.5 Body – second recasting – material traces - Cuts-outs as stencils, single (left) and layered up (right).](image)

Looking again at the material traces I had created from the cut outs, I found that marks with interesting textures remained when the materials I had applied were rubbed out. This proved a way of generating yet more sets (re-castings), which I could again film, building up and rubbed away to the status of a ‘blank’ page (see figs 3.6 and 3.7.).
Second Re-casting - projected shadows

As discussed earlier, ‘un-figurations’ are by definition incorporeal. To try to encompass something of this quality, I explored ways of making sets of more ephemeral re-castings from the cut-outs using ‘non’- materials, light and dark (via projected light).\textsuperscript{16} I had tried using cut-outs to create shadows before in The Unnamable, however as the cut-outs were bound in a book I had made, it proved difficult to project light through them to cast strong shadows. With separate sheets, as I had here, this technique could be employed more effectively.

\textsuperscript{16} Another visual analogy for one of these traces might be something like a retinal image/imprint - a retained negative image of that seen.
I set up the cut-outs with directed lighting in various ways, to create projected silhouettes. Experimenting with various surfaces and angles, and mirrors to focus the light, I was able to produce a number of different shadows forms that were projected through each cut-out in order. Each of these was filmed in turn as a sequence of stills (fig. 3.8).

![Figure 3.8 Body – second recasting - Projected shadows images.](image)

2. Eyes

In some ways the “eyes” (plural) in Ping represent a more straightforward ‘image’ for the reader than the body; they are more persistent, are rarely negated,\(^{17}\) and appear “fixed front” throughout. Although “light blue” features alongside the word “eyes”, the sense of this colour is slight and transient: “only just” or “almost white”, or else “given blue” which as discussed earlier situates the colour as a dubious feature. The last two of the sixteen “eyes” appearances are in fact “eyes white”,

\(^{17}\) The negation of “invisible” appears only twice with the eyes.
setting a fade to whiteness as an apparent feature of the eyes.

The eyes commonly appear with “holes”. This word (in addition to “white”) also sits alongside “nose” and “ears” in the text (6 times), words that I had instinctively grouped with the “body” (see Table. 3.1, p.76). “Holes” thus potentially connects these two main elements of “body” and “eyes”, suggesting a similar treatment to that of the body images would be appropriate for the eyes. The fact that eyes are obviously in themselves literally holes (with respect to light) suggested to me that the first technique employed for the body - cutting gaps in the paper – should be used in order to generate visual equivalents for the “eyes”. Since negations in the text were not used as directly with the eyes however, I decided not to use the extended process of re-castings developed for the body (projections, traces etc.), instead using the cut-outs simply layered and filmed.

As the only element to appear with the phrase “fixed front”,¹⁸ this suggested a position in which to visualise the eyes.

*I filmed my eyes in close-up and selected a limited number of stills at regular intervals from this footage to export as sequential photographic images. I redrew and made cut-outs from 12 of these and filmed them as they were first layered up and then stripped away to a blank sheet (fig. 3.9).*

![Figure 3.9 Eyes cut-outs layered.](image)

¹⁸ 10 times and unchanging throughout. ‘Fixed’ does appear also with “bare white body”, again a possible link between the two as elements.
3. Surfaces

The ‘surfaces’ in the text - “floor”, “ceiling”, “walls” and “planes” – are, like the body, presented in a fragmented and ephemeral way. They feature repeatedly (as parts of a non-existent whole) merging into the white background; they sit most often alongside the words: “white”, “never seen”, and “invisible”. These surfaces, whilst hinting of a box or room (“floor”, “ceiling”, “walls” and those with dimensions: “floor one square yard” and “walls one yard by two” particularly), are never fixed as such in the text; the planes are not joined, indeed often their “meeting [is] invisible”. Thus the imaginative construction of a box (as Lodge discussed; see Chapter 1.) is an example of the text’s anticipation of the reader rather than an effect of its existence in the text; this contained space is not a given.

In terms of introducing the surface elements in the film then, a literal equivalent would perhaps be a depiction of planes (or boxes) that are barely there or else disappearing. I began experimenting with fragmenting or distorting some architectural perspective drawings and hand-drawn box-shapes with different types of lenses, to see how they might work on screen.

*I shot a number of still details from architectural images, from a variety of angles. I drew and shot some basic box-like shapes that might be faded into and out of ‘scenes’ that contained the body images (fig. 3.10).*

![Figure 3.10 Surfaces – architectural stills.](image)

19 These came from a collection of miscellaneous images I had accumulated over a number of years for their aesthetic qualities.
I felt, however, that there was more that could be teased out in the visual work with regards to the surfaces, in particular their negation to “never seen”. As discussed earlier (in Ch.2: ‘Blanks in Ping’) ‘un-figurations’ generated following this type of primary negation are particularly paradoxical and thus suggest a more intangible form for their actualisation in the moving-image piece. I considered using the technique of cutting out for the surfaces to reflect the negations of the ceiling, floor, walls etc. as I had for the body but decided to view the distorted architectural images and boxes I had created first (see ‘First Viewing – Blurred boundaries’ for further discussion), before further developing them.

4. Eye

Based on the technique I had developed for the body (photographing, ‘blanking’, tracing and scalpeling), I initially created a series of cut-outs of ‘eye’ images. However, after some consideration, I felt that the singular “eye” should in fact be treated differently from the other elements so far. It only appears twice in the text and is in some ways a more ‘solid’ image; it is “black and white” and not negated. Also, its associated words, “unlustrous” and “dim”, to me suggested a dark (perhaps blurred) image, in contrast to the “white” or “almost white” of the body, eyes and surfaces. I decided therefore to look at the “eye” later, once I had had the benefit of viewing the other elements’ sequences played in a timeline, and seeing how they interrelated.

5. Pings

A dominant feature of the text is the idiosyncratic “ping”. As discussed earlier it is clear that this word works differently to the others. Therefore it seemed that it should be treated differently to the other noun groups. I decided to start by experimenting with some provisional representations of its distinctive qualities – machine-like, active, a ‘trigger’, embodying a sound or movement etc. - that I had earlier identified (Chapter 2), to see how these might work on screen. Later, once all the stills were
strung together in a timeline, I could then see if any other possibilities emerged for translating the “ping”.

I first filmed and recorded the sound of fluorescent strip-lights flashing on and off. Subsequently, watching playback on a television screen in order to find the correct place on the tape to re-start filming, I observed visual on-screen feedback (generated because the camera was sitting too close the connected monitor). This flickering and flashing looked potentially interesting and relevant, and so was recorded too.

Additionally I used a basic sound recording package to generate a sound-wave of some different ‘pings’: the word spoken, the ring of a typewriter bell, a glass tapped with a spoon and so on, to see what they would look like. This in itself was not particularly revealing, however, whilst magnifying these sound-wave images in increments, in order to look at them more closely, I found that this action created an interesting concertina-like effect as the image expanded in increments on the screen. I recreated this expanding and contracting movement by putting together negatives of these images in increasing and decreasing sizes, to make a set of sequential frames. The way the image moved made it rather spring-like; forging suddenly into and out of the frame (see fig. 3.11). Rotated 90 degrees (to sit portrait) it had almost a tree-like quality, like branches ‘growing’ up into the frame.

![Figure 3.11 Pings – sound-wave graphic (horizontal) (Reads top to bottom)](image-url)
3.2.3 ‘First Making’ – summary

During these first ‘making’ stages the idea of creating/undertaking ‘re-castings’ was a key point in the evolution of the artwork and my method. Through this, I established a solid framework for my approach to making: serial performative actions within making that engaged directly with the text.

My re-casting approach in response to the “body” generated images in a way that mirrored the effect of the word’s appearance and negation in the text. It effected a proliferation of visual images, a suitable equivalent to the multiple images created when reading Ping. Considered in the context of the overall system of alternating between making and reflecting, re-casting was a processual technique, embedded within that of making. Extended through subsequent ‘makings’, I felt this would add an appropriate layer of complexity to my overall approach (as well as to the artwork it would ultimately produce), making it more reflective of reading the text. On this basis, I decided to adopt a version of the re-casting technique for each of the key remaining elements, the “ping” and the “eye” in my next phase of making (see Ch.4), in each case tailoring the recasting to the particular attributes of the element in question to each individual element.

After I had created and filmed these initial responses to the body, eyes, surfaces and pings as they appeared in the text, I imported all of the footage into a basic film-editing program (iMovie 3), in the order in which it had been filmed: the cutting out of the body, the sets of layered outlines (body), material traces (body), projected shadows (body), layered cut-outs (eyes), architecture images (surfaces), ending with the “ping” images (strip-lights, TV flickers, sound wave images). What I collected in this filmic timeline was effectively an actualisation of ‘un-figurations’, secondary negations and images that I had generated from reading the text: the beginnings of a
manifestation of the effect (and action) of reading Ping.

At this point, I decided to pause and reflect, viewing the work so far.\textsuperscript{20}
3.3 First Viewing

I had started the making process with the act of cutting out the body. I filmed this simply to document my actions, which means its setting at the start of the first film-rough was arbitrary. Nevertheless, this first scene (Fig 3.12) sparked a number of different thoughts and ideas about the moving-image work; how it resonated with Ping and how it might be developed.

3.3.1 Creator and created

Set in the new filmic context, the cutting out sequence took on a narrative significance. It provoked the idea of a ‘creator’ defining a potential ‘character’. The creator figure is established as such purely by the action performed: inscribing a human form, and is defined only by this function. Similarly the ‘character’ is a direct result of the ‘creator’s’ action, i.e. is specifically defined in relation to the ‘creator’. Thus, an initial ‘subject-object’ (co-dependent) relationship is set up in the film in this scene.

The visualisation of these narratological figures made me think about our natural tendency to think in terms of characters and narrators in prose, to read within narratological frameworks even when these frameworks prove to be inapplicable to the text, as in Ping. I had unconsciously created a (visual) ‘narrator’ and ‘character’ (of sorts), so considering the reading of Ping in relation to possible narratological figures could be a way of taking the moving-image work further.

In addition, I had originally set up the camera for the documentation shot of cutting out to film from my eye-line - the literal perspective of the maker. When watched back on screen it occurred to me that this is also the position in which the viewer is
set. Thus in this first scene, the viewer is effectively ‘brought into’ the work as a ‘subject’: the creator. This then began to comment on the reader-as-creator in Ping discussed earlier (Ch.2 – ‘Blanks in Ping’), and struck me as something that could usefully be further developed in and by the film.

3.3.2 Insides and outsides

The cutting hands viewed in the context of what follows in the rough-edit – a switch from the white body cut-outs to dark body shadows (see fig 3.13) – potentially brings in ideas of ‘control’ and ‘release’. There is a sense in which the body shown is ‘released’ from being delineated (the sharp lines carved by the cutting hand), into a more fluid un-“fixed” form.

In comparison to the flat surface of the white cut-out shots, in Fig. 3.13, the shadow imagery (with bodies projected in light) also has an interior feel. Thus, viewing the switch; from the former to the latter, it is as if we have ‘moved’ to an inside. In light of the transformative potential of the “ping” identified earlier (Chapter 2 - ‘Pings as blanks’), each ‘move’ of this type in the film could represent a place to situate a ‘ping’.

*Figure 3.12* Stills of the film’s opening scene.
To me, the ‘interior’ space also had the sense of a ‘womb-like’ enclosure. The shadow imagery feels more mutable than the cut-outs from which it originated, consisting purely of projected/reflected light, which means that the body outlines are often blurred. These shots could thus be described as having a more ‘feminine aesthetic’; in contrast to the more definite or ‘masculine’ lines of the white body cut-outs. This ‘gender change’ within the visual aesthetic prompted me to think more about the effect that my representation of the female body in the film had. First, with the female body being cut out, the viewer is cast as creator, and furthermore, in the traditional role of the male artist in relation to the female cultural object. As Gubar states: “In terms of the production of culture, she is an art object: she is the ivory…"
carving or mud replica, and icon or doll, but she is not the sculptor”.

Similarly, in the act of viewing a (nude) female body on screen (e.g. the white cut-out images, as in Fig. 3.14), what is effectively manifested, is the ‘patriarchal’ system of “the male gaze” as defined by the Feminist film-theorist Laura Mulvey (1973).22 With the figure of the woman on screen the spectator assumes a masculine (and active) subject position, with the female image as the (passive) object of desire. In these two sequences, the female body thus reinforces traditional gender (and viewer) relationships in visual culture. In light of this, however, the later ‘releasing’ into a more fluid form (black shadow images, Fig. 3.14), can be interpreted as a kind of erasure of the female body as created and viewed object. Implicit in this, is a concurrent destabilising of the creator-figure’s (and thus viewer’s) position as creating/‘male’ viewing subject; perhaps signifying a dissolution of traditional (gendered) subject-object relations. As a potential relationship and scenario in the film, this led me to think about reader subject-object relationships with respect to Ping and their potential for change during reading (see following sections: ‘Eyes as viewer’s’ and ‘First Revisiting the text’).

3.3.3 Blurred boundaries

Playing through the raw images in sequence I noticed that, from the first shot onwards, there were a number of instances of 2 and 3-dimensional ‘box’ shapes. These had emerged by chance rather than by design: the white rectangles of the page, and a variety of box-like forms produced by the reflected light in the ‘shadow’ sequences (see examples in fig 3.14).23 All of these were also encased, of course, within the additional rectangular frame of the screen. Play with the film frame is a theme and technique that is commonly used by experimental filmmakers to play with ideas of reflectivity (see for example, David Hall’s TV Interruptions (1971) and

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22 Laura Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (1973) (First published in Screen Vol.16, no.3 (1975) pp.6-18)
23 These are in addition to small number of box-like shapes that I drew and filmed as part of ‘First Making - Surfaces’.
Michael Snow’s *Portrait* (1967)\(^{24}\). It struck me that I could develop the embedded ‘frames’ I saw in the film to similar effect, and this could be a further way of encapsulating the self-reflexity in reading *Ping*, in a visual form.

In addition, the ‘planes’ and edges of the box in the shadow sequences often were, or else became, somewhat unclear, and so the ‘box’ lost its integrity as a fixed shape or container. This suggested another visual structure that might be brought out in the piece, which might also have relevance to *Ping* - boxes within boxes but permeable or subject to slippage. Such a subtext, for example, might be considered in the light of the box that the reader tantalisingly attempts to construct (from the white walls, white ceiling etc. as discussed earlier. As we saw (Chapter 1), the text never specifically says there is a box, or that the bare white body is *inside* it, but the human tendency to assemble, prompts us to construct this temporarily as an image during reading (see ‘First Making – Surfaces’). The surfaces from which this box might be ‘created’ are, like the ‘body’, apparently characterised by whiteness (or a fading to white),\(^{25}\) for example: “white floor never seen” and “white planes shining white”. Thus for the reader attempting to visualise the text, the body and box effectively become intermingled. Further to this, the white (body-box) ‘figure’ in *Ping* is also set against white ‘ground’ (as suggested by the repeated phrase “all known all white”). This means that the body and surfaces, as re-created by the reader, are effectively involved in a kind of ‘telescoping effect’. Since the boundaries of the imaginative images created are indistinct, conceptually the body ‘expands’ to fill the ‘box’, and this ‘body-box’ further ‘expands’ (melding with the white background) to fill the frame of the imaginary (aesthetic) object created by the reader.\(^{26}\) The meta-structure created, therefore, is one that combines confinement (the creation of a confined space), an outwards expansion and a blurring between ‘surface’ and ‘depth’.

Through this structure, the status of the body and surfaces as separate elements is, for

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\(^{25}\) Also, the primary negations “invisible” and “never seen” only appear alongside the surfaces and the body elements in the text (in all but one case near the end: “eyes white invisible”), perhaps linking the two.

\(^{26}\) Of course the physical ‘frame’ of the object of *Ping* (as with any prose) is its printed form. Due to its minimal punctuation, typographically *Ping* is a dense rectangular box of printed text which, it is interesting to note, is similar in shape to the rectangular “one yard by two” of one of the planes that it describes.
the reader, put in doubt; something that to me also suggested other elements in the
text may similarly be fused or blurred in the process of reading. (This is explored
below in ‘First Revisiting the Text’).

Earlier, I identified play with figure and ground as an appropriate strategy for
reflecting effects of cognitive resistance in reading Ping (Chapter 2, ‘Ping as
Pattern’). The cognitive resistance, in attempting to distinguish body from surfaces in
the reader’s imaginative images, could easily be converted into a visual form in the
film by an equivalent visual confusion of figure and ground. Mirroring the images
for the body element, for example, would further increase the number and
complexity of the depictions in each frame. This would be particularly marked in the
projected shadow body images, where some of which already contained doubles of
the body (see Fig. 3.13.) and in each case, present more of a challenge to the
viewer’s visual perception of ‘a body’ or ‘a surface’27 (I used this technique in the
next stage – Ch.4: ‘Second Making’).

In light of viewing these ‘boxes’ in the film and the subsequent ideas of the blurring
between elements in Ping that this provoked, it occurred to me that something of the
effect of reading the ‘surfaces’ in the text was already integrated within the images I
had produced.28 As discussed in Chapter 2 (‘Blanks in Ping’), ‘surface’ elements are
consistently negated in the text and in response to these, ‘un-figurations’ are
produced by the reader. These might well be visualised/conceptualised as taking the
form of images of an unstable ‘box’ i.e. a ‘container’ without structural integrity,
such as I had observed in the moving-image work so far.29 In addition, the sense that
the body and surface in the text become melded together was embodied in the
permeable “white planes” that constituted the cut-out body images.

27 This would have a particularly, marked effect with the layered body cut-outs (see ‘First Making – 1.
Body: ‘Layered Outlines’), which with their internal edges already had a significantly confused sense
of ‘body boundaries’.
28 This is in addition to the images created specifically for ‘surfaces’ described in ‘First Making -
surfaces’.
29 Embodied in the body re-castings I had performed (a process of negating using two-dimensional
surfaces) was a visual equivalent of the ‘never seen’ negation structure that in Ping is used
specifically with ‘surface’ elements (see ‘First Making – 1. Body: First re-casting’).
3.3.4 Eyes as viewer’s

Viewing the ‘eyes’ as filmic sequences revealed further connotations of their presence in the text. Close-up and ‘looking’ directly out from the screen (“eyes fixed front”) the eyes (see fig. 3.9.) were a representation of a viewer on screen, and thus I was (literally) confronted with my own action of viewing. This reflects the self-consciousness of reading Ping – the reader made aware of his/her activity in re-processing images and sounding the text (see Chapter 2 – ‘Hearing Ping’).

It also seemed to me that the appearance of the eyes in the film represented a change in position for me as its viewer. Here by virtue of being ‘viewed’, I effectively became the ‘object’ in relation to the eyes on screen. Thus for the duration of the scene, it is as if the viewing-subject is integrated (as an ‘object’) within the discourse of the work; temporary objectification of the viewer destabilises their expected

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This is particularly the case when viewed on a small screen, where the eyes appear approximately life-size.
(external) position of ‘viewing-subject observing screen-object’. If the viewer/maker is equated with the reader of Ping, then the effect of my filmic visualisation of eyes suggests that the “eyes” in Ping might prefigure the ‘presence’ of the reader in the processes of the text. In light of this effect, it seemed to me that if I set eyes images at intervals throughout the piece, repeatedly bringing the viewer ‘into’ it; ‘split’ between an inside and outside position, then I might be able to imbue the moving-image piece with two effects of reading Ping previously identified. Firstly, it would recreate a sense of the reader’s self-consciousness (aware of oneself reading) in film, and secondly an experience of the ongoing adoption of dual positions in negotiating the text. The sense of the viewer as a creator\(^{31}\) was first suggested in the initial cutting-out scene (with the viewer as a creator), but by also setting viewer as its ‘object’ at intervals, it might start to bring in the idea of the reader as inscribed or embedded into Ping as an element (the simultaneous recipient of the Ping ‘trap’).\(^{32}\)

To me the idea of the ‘eyes-as-reader’ generated by this viewing, also suggested the possibility that other elements in the text might also represent the reader of Ping. (This is discussed further in the following section: ‘First Revisiting the Text’).

### 3.3.5 Eyes as pings

In addition to the ideas discussed above, it struck me on viewing the eyes sequences, that the movement of the eyes on screen - blinks - worked well with idea of the ‘ping’ discussed earlier (Ch.2, ‘Pings as blanks’). As a physical action, a blink enacts a literal gap in seeing images, thus the ‘open-shut-open’ of the eye is a suitable equivalent to the way each “ping” blocks the reader’s attempt to ‘see’ (or build up) an image of the text.

Recreated as a specific image within the film - images of eyes cropped to ‘open-shut-open’ - the blink could work in a general sense as a way of playing on the

\(^{31}\) See Chapter 2 – ‘Pings as blanks’ and ‘Ping as Trap’.

\(^{32}\) See Chapter 2 – ‘Ping as Trap’.
importance of gaps in visual processes of the text. Placed at intervals in specific relation to the other elements (for example, between an ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ body image), the images of eyes are then reconfigured as recurring “ping” effects; blanks performed in the film that interrupt the flow of filmic images and suggest a potential change.

3.3.6 ‘First viewing’ – summary

By pausing to view and reflect I was able to get a fresh perspective of what I had created in relation to the text: a sense of it as a new visual ‘text’ that might be ‘read’ by an external viewer.\textsuperscript{33} It also provided the opportunity to think, in detail, about how the “ping” and the “eye” might be further realised.

This first viewing suggested some relevant textual and visual structures to integrate and/or further develop in the final moving image piece: the viewer/reader as subject \textit{and} object; ‘insides’ and ‘outsides’; blurred boundaries between the elements; surfaces acting as boxes within boxes and the blink as a possible “ping”. Moreover, since I had effectively created a ‘visual narrator’ and ‘character’ in response to \textit{Ping}, it made me even more aware of my conditioned readerly instincts, in particular the instinct to generate narratological figures and define how these interrelate.

As a visual medium, moving-image clearly has the propensity to show, but at the same time, also \textit{to hide}. It struck me that I could exploit this to provoke questions around narratological elements in a manner not unsimilar to the way we do in reading \textit{Ping} - \textit{visually} establishing potential narrative figures/relationships, then later denying or disrupting them.

Before resuming the making process, then, I returned to the \textit{Ping} text and looked at some of the possibilities raised in reading with regards to \textit{potential narratological figures}.

\footnote{The moving-image work is a visualisation of \textit{my} ‘aesthetic object’ of \textit{Ping}, but also a recasting of \textit{Ping} (a new work) from which a new viewer might similarly create their own ‘aesthetic object’.}
3.4 First Revisiting the Text

3.4.1 Tracing figures in Ping

The Beckett scholar Stan Gontarski notes that Lodge, in his struggle to situate Ping within a more or less traditional and realistic frame, does not address narratological questions in relation to Ping, including:

Who is the figure to which all is “known”? By whom is the image described “never seen”?: to whom is it repeatedly “invisible”?\(^{34}\)

Clearly, Ping is problematic when analysed within the confines of traditional narratological frameworks; arguably there are no characters, narrators etc. in the text. Nevertheless, these frameworks are still the basis by which we are conditioned to read (and write). As a text that plays with reader expectations (see Chapter 2 – ‘Ping as trap’), Ping actively provokes this type of narratological questioning, through its blanks. Whilst stopping us from generating fixed characters, the ambiguity that arises from textual blanks, combined with our readerly instinct to try and define the parameters of the narrative, means that we project a constantly changing series of potential options. Viewing my first set of images on film and the sense of character/narrator they seemed to suggest revealed the importance of considering narratological possibilities in Ping.

Thinking then, in terms of possible figures in the text, the central questions raised are: who speaks? and about whom does the ‘story’ tell? What follows is a look at how the reader might negotiate these questions via the elements that might most obviously constitute figments of character/narrator - the fragmented “body”, the “eye” and the undefined ‘voice’ of the text. Whilst aspects of some of these have been examined before (Chapter 2, p.39), the focus here is on the implications for possible narrative figures on Ping.

The body - ‘(un)character’

As demonstrated by my first phase of making, the words denoting body-parts in Ping (falling roughly into groupings of “body”, “eyes”, “eye”) work as a prompt for us to try to ‘see’ a figure or figures. The bare white body perhaps represents the most obvious subject of the text, but efforts to properly contextualise and consolidate its fragments as a fixed ‘character’ are thwarted. As we saw in Chapter 2, the ‘body’ is continually presented as fragmented and with scant detail (simply ‘bare’ and ‘white’), whilst primary negations (“invisible”) block our visualisation of it as a stable unified figure. The body is ‘dehumanised’ and thus de-characterised in a sense, when it appears with “fixed” and “legs joined like sewn”, suggesting a static, puppet-like figure rather than a true ‘embodied fictional character’.

However, though a unified mimetic image of character is denied the blanks do, paradoxically, reinforce the potentiality of character: the image of a body projected by the reader in response to the word persists in his/her mind, re-cast as an ‘un-figuration’. Although phantom, it represents a figure of sorts, and so for the reader retains the potential to be a character/narratorial figure. It is also a site of constant questioning with regards to its relationship with the other elements (eye, eyes etc.).

The ‘voice’ of the text - ‘(un)narrator’

With no personal pronouns in the text, there is no clear speaking figure that we can conclusively set either inside or outside the diegesis, in order to contextualise the body fragments that Ping presents. There is, however, a semblance of voice; simply in the sense of that which ‘speaks’ the text. The ‘voice’ of Ping, then, is undefined aside from being an agent of the discourse. In light of this, our readerly expectations most readily lead us to draw parallels between this ‘voice’ and the figure of a distanced omniscient narrator, the nearest equivalent in traditional fiction to this apparently functional and impersonal mode of ‘telling’:

All known all white bare white body fixed one yard legs joined like sewn.
In adopting this as an assumption, the reader puts the ‘speaker’ of Ping outside of the diegesis, purely engaged in the act of presenting the ‘scene’ and as the figure to whom “All [is] known”. The latter sense, is however, almost immediately turned on its head. In the first sentence (above), the words “all white” directly following “All [is] known” suggest blankness or nothingness; thus what is known, effectively, is ‘nothing’. The presumed narrator’s status as teller and knower in Ping, is therefore, not assured. This illustrates something of the instability of the ‘narrator’ as a figure generated by the reader in the text.

‘Perhaps’ a narrator/character?

A further example of this sense of (un)character(s) and (un)narrator is demonstrated by an effect of the ‘perhaps’ phrases in the text - “perhaps not alone”, “perhaps a nature” and “perhaps a way out”. As described earlier, these phrases suggest a desire for a figure (or another figure), or a way out (Chapter 2 - ‘Traces blurs no meaning’). With their emotive edge they disrupt the impersonal quality of the text, and raise the question of where or from whom they originate. In response to this question, the reader might on the one hand conjecture that the desire for a way out or another presence originates from the ‘body’, as the most obvious subject in the text. However, as emotive phrases, they seem to demand a suitably human/unified fictional figure to which they can be ‘attached’. They are not easily attributed to the “bare white body” whose story we might expect is being told, since, as discussed earlier, the latter is a fragmented representation and is more object than character. Furthermore, at points, it seems that the body is an inarticulate figure, its “mouth seamed like sewn”. Alternatively, then, one might instead project the ‘yearning’ for a “way out”, “a meaning”, “a nature” onto the discourse agent from which the words originate. If this approach is adopted, then as a result the ‘voice’ of the text is inscribed as a more solid figure - a ‘character’ in the diegesis - by the reader. This, however, is at odds with the impersonality and un-embodied nature of the ‘narrator’ (as described previously), and furthermore, its lack of clear connection with the other elements means it cannot be properly integrated as a subject in the text. By attributing this emotive expression to it, the reader is projecting a ‘human’ quality
onto the ‘voice’ that is not determined in the text.

Ultimately, the origin of these phrases is left uncertain. There is incongruity between the emotive ‘perhaps’ and both ‘voice’ and “body”, which means the desire cannot definitely be attached to either. Alternatively, one has to contemplate the possibility that the “bare white body” is the ‘voice’ of the text. At each “perhaps”, the identity of the ‘voice’ is, in my opinion, emphasised as an issue. Each highlights the ‘voice’ as a particularly unfixed element - not conclusively attached to any other. Thus, for the reader it fluctuates between his/her conceptions of ‘narrator’ and ‘character’ in the text. These phrases ultimately highlight the indeterminacies and the reader-projected nature of notions of ‘character’ and ‘narrator’ in Ping. Instead of denying their existence as figures, however, in my experience this encourages the reader to switch between potential options – to look for and create new links between the different elements.

Eye (‘character’, ‘narrator’ or reader?)

The introduction of the solitary “eye” (twice) in the latter part of the text adds another level of complexity and another set of possibilities with regard to narratological figures. As discussed earlier (‘First Making – Eye’), by its singular and “black and white” nature, the ‘eye’ is set apart from the “eyes” in the text. An eye singular, suggests the ‘all-seeing eye’ of an omnipotent narrator. It may also evoke for the reader a further character, the ‘other’ figure implicit in the phrase “perhaps not alone” with which it appears. This is perhaps the most obvious explanation, however, as we saw, the figure to which it is ‘other’ is also not clear (Ch.2 - ‘Traces blurs signs no meaning’).

In both occurrences the “eye” appears alongside the emotive word “imploring”, which like the ‘perhaps’ phrases, evokes desire. As a desiring eye (“long lashes imploring”), and also a possible pun on ‘I’, it might like the ‘perhaps’ phrases, represent the desire of the body or voice (and thus of a possible ‘character’ and/or

35 Following Lodge’s idea of the text as representing crucifixion scene (in Ch.1: ‘Review and Discussion of the Literature: Ping’, p.18, footnote 45), it might denote God.
narrator’) – desire, for a unified (embodied) ‘I’, or perhaps for the “way out”,
“nature” and “meaning” that is hinted at throughout the text in the ‘perhaps’ phrases. According to the composer Jean-Yves Bosseur, Beckett suggested to him that the ‘blings’ throughout the (French) text are (amongst other things) “like the image of a begging eye”, binding the two elements. In Ping, the association of desire with both elements – the eye via “imploring” and the “ping”, via its association with the ‘perhaps’ phrases already suggests to the reader a link between the two. Furthermore, its sudden and unexpected appearance late in the text is also arguably comparable to the way that the “ping” operates; it ‘punctures through’ into the reading of the text.

An additional possibility emerges when the “eye” is considered alongside the idea of the reader as an integrated element in the text. In light of the moving-image piece, the eye might reflect the reader’s desire in the text. In other words, our characteristic desire as readers to “possess” the text, to locate an end/narrative plot, a unified character, a clear textual meaning, may potentially be expressed in Ping as one of its main elements: the “eye” as reader. Like the body and voice discussed earlier, the eye is not clearly defined in terms of narratological figures or in its relationship. Instead, it carries a floating set of associations, which allow the reader to make a variety of links in the manner that I have done here. As is becoming clear throughout this thesis, this complexity is a key effect of reading the elements in Ping.

3.4.2 ‘First Revisiting the Text’ - summary and implications

Narratological questions are raised but not answered by the text, and the negotiation of these questions constitutes a central part of its ‘narrative’ for the reader. Ping leaves its narratological options open and consequently the relationships between potential figures generated in the mind of the reader are subject to flux and change. Blanks in the text lead to the reader switching between potential perspectives, linking, discarding and re-linking the elements (body, eyes, eye, ping, ‘voice’ etc.) in

37 Ch.2: ‘Pings as blanks’.
the process of reading the text.

It seemed to me, therefore, that a ‘switching between’ potential positions and perspectives should play a part in the moving-image piece, to retain the sense of ‘un-characters’ and ‘un-narrators’, and the essential ambiguity around such figures. Figures of this type could be built into the moving-image piece by, for example, setting up relationships between visual elements (as in the opening scene, where the cutting hands metonymically suggest a kind of ‘narrator’ creating a ‘character’) in order to then disrupt them (by, for example, ‘releasing’ the ‘character’ from being delineated, as discussed in ‘First Viewing’). This would also reflect the temporary and reader-projected nature of narrativity in Ping. To suggest the sense of moving between perspectives, the idea of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ shots suggested in the moving-image work so far could be developed and arranged into a structure, to convey something of an ongoing moving in and out of ‘figures’ (different ‘spaces’ and ‘heads’) over time. The potential identified in the “eyes” shots - to alter viewer subject-object relations - could also be used to set up further changes in ‘positions’. The viewer could, intermittently, be ‘brought into’ the work as simultaneously ‘viewed object’ by open eyes looking out from the screen, resuming the position of ‘viewing-subject’ through the same eyes closing.

The linking and re-linking of elements in the text is a result of the simultaneous rapid-fire suggestion of many relationships between them and a concomitant blurring of their boundaries. One way to reflect this visually, would be to suggest more than one element in one image and thus effecting a kind of visual ‘condensation’, as in fact was already the case in the body images I had produced in which aspects of the ‘surfaces’ had emerged (see ‘Blurred boundaries’, p.96-97). This approach (a re-casting technique) could be used in future making to create images for the ‘eye’ and the ‘ping’ that would suggest possible links between these elements in the film. A further possibility was suggested by the idea of re-casting; its sense of “presenting or organising in a different form or style” (OED). By re-ordering the sets of images I had created based the main elements, it might inaugurate a further concentration of the imaginative ideation in the work, by allowing the viewer to create additional
connections between them. This could be done by repeating them in different permutations, then joining and separating using film-transitions (e.g. the conventions of fade-to-white/black, jump-cuts and dissolves). I adopted this as the basis for my next major recasting step – ‘second making’.

To develop and apply what I had learnt so far, I embarked on the second cycle of practice-work (the matter of Chapter 4); beginning with the activity of ‘making’.
Chapter 4: Reprocessing and Assembling

4.1 Second Making

The general principle for my activity in this second phase of making was to continue the ongoing ‘reader process’ I had undertaken - creating/re-creating and attempting to consolidate sequences of irresolvable images. Thus, I began by producing some further re-castings of the “body”/“surfaces”, and creating filmic-images for the effect of the “ping” and “eye” in the text. Having then created most of the basic components of the piece, I focussed on time-based aspects of the film: the order of the sets of images I had created; movement between ‘scenes’; and the effect of the images over time. My aim was to assemble the shots in a way that made sets of potential and transient connections between the elements of the text.

4.1.1 Re-casting the ‘body/surfaces’

In the first film-work, play with multiplying and abstracting the body images – to further fragment and deliberately confuse the viewer’s perception of their ‘figure’ and ‘ground’- was revealed as one way to visually establish unstable boundaries between elements, similar to those found in reading Ping.1 To further explore this, I now made some image sets of multiple bodies, from the previous base images, and constructed a lo-fi ‘machine’ to make the images move.

I redrew the photographic body ‘base images’. These re-drawn images were first filmed individually as a set for later use. I next cut around each figure creating a set of cardboard cut-out bodies.2

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1 Ch.3: ‘First Viewing - Blurred boundaries’.
2 As cardboard cut-outs, these body images are also a nod to the characterless nature of the body in the
These were then bound in sequential order to make a kind of book.

To make these images move, I opened it up so that the front-page was turned back to sit next to the back-page (a book with no beginning or end), and set it vertically on a record player. The construct could then be rotated at different speeds. During rotation, when viewed from a particular angle the still figures on this carousel animated into a moving sequence (like an automatic flick-book). Filmed, the flicking of the ‘pages’ and multiple shadows thrown by the body-shapes constituted more of the image than the drawn bodies (and the movement, to me, also began to suggest the fluttering of eyelashes). With increased speed, blurring formed the major part of the image (superseding the drawn bodies on each ‘page’).

I also filmed just the shadows of this moving construction against a black screen. The dark background produced shots of dark blurred projections. Whilst filming I noticed some additional chance reflections of equipment and materials that sat near to the set up, in the shot. These materials included a roll of celluloid film (this is discussed and pictured later in my ‘viewing’).

Following this I also looked at the potential of mirroring images to further this effect:

I experimented with (digital) mirroring effects on the body images (the cut-outs, shadow, re-drawn and carousel sequences). Mirroring the cut-outs horizontally and vertically in different combinations, created sequences of interesting shapes and patterns, that hinted at a body whilst being more difficult to (visually) parse. I selected the most interesting of these abstracted body images for inclusion in the film.

The mirrored images that I produced (see fig. 4.1) reminded me visually of Rorschag ink-blots. This was apt because of the premise of projection and subjectivity on which this psychological tool are designed to work. As abstract images, my mirrored body images were similarly suggestive.

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3 A technique I had used in creating *The Unnamable* (1999).
5 Rorschag ink-blots were developed as a psychological tool used to analyse subjects’ perceptions and they have also been used as an example to demonstrate the subjective projection involved in visual parsing. See Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, p.89. Interestingly Rorschach (along with Escher) was used as a visual metaphor by Gontarski with respect to the later stories (post *How It Is* in 1964): “Taken together the stories suggest the intertextual weave of a collaboration between Rorschach and Escher”. Gontarski (ed.), Intro to *Samuel Beckett the Complete Prose*, xxx.
I next experimented with ways of abstracting the body images with some digital effects. A scratch effect mimicking that in old film on the re-drawn body images, and filming original body stills with different distorting lenses (fig. 4.2), created some further sets of obscured body images. (These were later included in the film.)

Finally, I played with further abstracting the mirrored and distorted images, using pin-holes. I felt that from this I might create more obvious visual pattern in the work (thus extend the strategy discussed in Chapter 2\(^6\)).

\(^6\) Ch.2: ‘Ping as pattern’, p.51.
I rebuilt the series of ‘base images’, tracing the areas of shadow with holes pierced through the paper. Each of these perforated sheets could be filmed backlit, used (as a mask) to project light through; producing a series of white dots which made up an abstract image), or else photocopied generating a positive image, which could then be filmed (see fig 4.3). These perforations created a raised Braille-like texture on the underside of the sheet. With careful lighting I found that I could capture this on film, to generate yet another version of the original image. I tried this technique with mirrored versions of the cut-outs (stills exported from the first film edit).

![Figure 4.3. Examples of pin-hole images (mirrored).](image)

I decided not to use the sets of pin-hole images in this instance, as the previous ‘body/surfaces’ recastings had sufficiently abstracted the body images. This activity did however provide a useful demonstration of how my recasting technique/processes could be extended indefinitely, to produce endless sets of images (some further images made by applying a sequence of recasting techniques are included in Appendix 4). The pin-hole images were, nevertheless appropriate and
visually interesting, and had, I felt, potential for use in future work (see discussion in the conclusion of this thesis).

4.1.2 Re-casting the “ping”

In my first viewing of the filmic-images, it had struck me that the elements of the “ping” and “eyes” could both be located in the image of a blink (Ch.3: ‘First Viewing – eyes as pings’). Thus it seemed to me that by recasting images of eyes I had previously made, I could generate a ‘new’ image that could embody both textual elements, and add to the sense of the fluid interrelationship between elements in the film, reflecting those found in Ping.

I edited various sequences of eyes to ‘open-shut-open’ and ‘shut-open-shut’, to form blinks.

These were used later to interrupt and signal potential change in the film (see later section - ‘Final Assemblage’).

I had previously identified the effect of the “ping” as analogous to the way edits work in film: an integral mechanism that interrupts as well as driving the work on (Ch.2: ‘‘pings’ as blanks’). Thus in addition to the eye-blinks (and a sound-wave graphic and light flash made earlier) that I had created to use as “ping” effects in the piece, I began to explore medium-specific ways (filmic interruptions) of doing this.

In film, edits can be used to both create continuity and to disrupt the narrative. One straightforward way of introducing visual punctuation within film and thus reflecting the effect of the “ping” is by the interjection of black or white screens, which creates a temporary break in the flow of images. I used this as a technique when finally assembling the film (see later section - ‘Final Assemblage’). I also at this stage considered integrating textual elements into the piece, in the form of film intertitles between some of the scenes. Intertitles are title screens within the main body of a film that provide dialogue, information and continuity. They were developed in the
era of silent film to fill in missing dialogue or narration in order to make (narrative) sense of the events shown. They are still used in this mode today in mainstream cinema, commonly included to denote a change of location or the passing of time.\(^7\) They have also (post-1970) been used self-reflexively in film as a stylistic element, for example in the work of Woody Allen.\(^8\)

Although the original usage of such textual-inserts in film was to assist narrative \textit{continuity}, at the same time, despite the best efforts of expert practitioners to fit them into the rhythm of the film, the intertitle is a literal interruption of the action (echoing the “ping” in the text). Visually, the intertitle ‘page’ – traditionally, a black screen with white text - is an image distinct in type and effect from the rest of the film. It struck me that this incongruity had the potential for effective subversion in relation to \textit{Ping}. If the words on display worked counter to the usual informative content of the intertitle text, this could emphasise viewers’ awareness of the counter aspect of the intertitle: a disruption in the flow of images. With this in mind, I made a short test piece using some of the images I had already created, with intertitles inserted. This was as a brief visual investigation of the possibilities of using text in film to interrupt figuration (see description in Appendix 5). The visual experiment suggested some interesting ideas to explore in future work (see discussion in the conclusion of this thesis). However, I decided against using text-inserts directly in this piece, in order that the words did not dominate and overtly guide the viewer. Bringing textual reading back into my work could, I felt, detract from the idea I was working with, of \textit{visually} approximating reader-text interaction in \textit{Ping}.

A useful outcome from this ‘experiment’, which I did take forward in the moving-image work, was that contradictory or unexpected combinations of \textit{sound} (or silence) with images could prove fruitful in developing the piece. This I reserved for later use in developing a soundtrack (see ‘Second Revisiting of the Text’).

\(^7\) See for example Martin Scorsese’s \textit{Raging Bull} (1981).
\(^8\) Allen frequently uses intertitles in his films. He includes quotations as the text, which may not immediately relate clearly to the scene, but are used for comedic/ironic effect, rather than the straightforward communication of plot. See for example \textit{Hannah and Her Sisters} (1986).
4.2.3 Re-casting the “eye”

In light of the floating set of associations surrounding the “eye” in Ping, I sought to create an eye-image that also connected with those created in response to the other elements, in particular the “ping”. Also, early on in the project, I realised that bringing attention to the work’s mode of construction and including older technology in the film were suitable strategies for reflecting on the text. It occurred to me, therefore, that a moving-image ‘apparatus’ as an image within the frame could encompass both of these concepts. In avant-garde film the inclusion of film apparatus in the image is a commonly used technique. One example is the projector shots in the ‘prologue’ of Ingmar Bergman’s 1967 film Persona. This led me to consider the zoetrope - a 19th-century optical device and precursor to film - as a form that might be suitable in constructing a visual image for this element.

The mechanism of the zoetrope consists of a cylinder with slits around the top and a series of pictures on the inner surface. When viewed through the slits and with the cylinder rotating, it gives an illusion of a continuously moving image. According to the visual theorist Rosalind Krauss, the exposure of the illusion is central in viewing this form of moving-image. As she points out in her essay The Im/pulse to See (1988), the mechanics of the impression of movement created by this system are clear to the viewer and yet the illusion it creates remains intact. Thus, in viewing the zoetrope one effectively adopts a dual position; the “visuality effect” of having the sense of being both ‘inside’: absorbed in the illusion, and ‘outside’; aware of its construction. To me, this effect correlates with the sense in which the reader of Ping is simultaneously set both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the text as discussed in Chapter

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9 Ch.3: ‘First Revisiting the Text - Eye’.
10 Ch.3: ‘First Making - General Aesthetic’.
11 Bergman, Persona (1967) (AB Svensk Filmindustri: Sweden and United Artists: USA). The prologue to Persona can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LYzGtgzxo
12 Rosalind Krauss, ‘The Im/pulse to See’ in Hal Foster [Ed.], Vision and Visuality (Bay Press: Dia Art, 1988)
13 This impression of being ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ is different from the viewer’s physical positioning in relation to the activity, where, if you look inside of the mechanism you see the basis of its construction and the images rotating, and if you look from outside-in through the slits you see the ‘moving’ image, e.g. a figure running, a bird flying etc.
the idea of reader as creator and at the same time ‘captured’ within a self-conscious process. Furthermore, the mechanism that unites and enables these two viewer positions in the zoetrope is the “on/off on/off on/off” effected by the successive oscillation between images and gaps (blank spaces).\textsuperscript{15} In this form, then, a mechanism of the ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ of images in combination with the human eye, results in the dual positioning of its participant. This parallels the effect of the successive blanks and negations in reading \textit{Ping}, including the “pings” of the text. In the zoetrope, as in \textit{Ping}, the (visual) blanks are central in enabling movement and the simultaneous adoption of positions.

From this, I reasoned that a sequence in the film based on a zoetrope could incorporate ideas of being inside/outside, and some of the characteristics of the “ping”, i.e. its function as a blank and negation, its mechanical feel and connotations of movement. In addition, the images placed inside the zoetrope could be used to suggest both an eye and relate to further elements and ‘\textit{(un)}figures’ in the film, thus creating a suitable form for re-casting of the “eye” in the text. I decided to construct a working zoetrope that I could then film, using imagery from my previous re-castings for the internal images of the device.

\textit{I made a rudimentary zoetrope using a single eye (blinking) extracted from the original sequential photographic stills of my eyes (used earlier for the cut-out eyes), mounted on a strip and set inside a cylinder cut with slits. Using a record player to create the spinning movement, I then filmed footage looking from outside into the cylinder at different speeds. The shots I created were designed to be monochromatic and predominantly dark, reflecting the eye’s attributes of “dim” and “unlustrous” (see fig.4.4.). Whilst the zoetrope was set up, I also experimented with some body images inside it. (I used the redrawn body created for the carousel shots earlier.)}

\textsuperscript{14} Ch.2: ‘\textit{Ping} as Trap’ and ‘\textit{Ping} as Pattern’.
\textsuperscript{15} Rosalind Krauss, \textit{Vision and Visuality}, p.51. Krauss terms this the “pulse”. 
As noted earlier, the “eye” could be a factor in the reader’s forming of narratological ‘(un)figures’ and/or an embodiment of the reader-in-the-text. With this in mind, in a similar dark vein to the zoetrope eye, I constructed a second ‘eye’ image using the source footage of my eyes from which I had previously created the eyes cut-outs. I had in mind the haunting atmosphere of the eye shot at start of Beckett’s *Film*.

*I digitally edited and lighting-corrected the original ‘eyes’ footage (a digital-video head shot that filled the frame of the screen), to make a new, dark film-sequence that included blinks.*

This was a photographic face image; a more ‘human’ figuration made with the idea of the “eye” in *Ping* as potentially representing an additional ‘character’.

### 4.1.4 Ordering the images - A play of positions and perspectives in moving-image

Having begun to develop the idea of unstable boundaries between elements within individual images in the film, I thought about appropriate ways to reorganise the totality of shots collected, based on the potentially unstable switching between positions and perspectives I had identified following my first stage of making.

I first considered deriving their order from the chronological appearance of their

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16 *Film* can be viewed online at: http://video.google.com/videosearch?client=safari&rls=en&q=film+beckett&oe=UTF-8&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=9OKLSuuZAzO6jAeGwYTICw&sa=X&oi=video_result_group&ct=title&resnum=4#
corresponding’ elements in the text. Replicating the order of words in *Ping* was, however, limited in its scope for illuminating the reader-text interaction. The five main elements I had isolated in the text might be read one after another as *words*, but as had become clear through my subsequent experiments, the ways in which they coalesce and interrelate in terms of the reader’s aesthetic object is radically different—fluid, non-linear and not tied to the textual chronology. Thus, rather than simply substituting ‘image for element’, I decided instead to use and develop existing relationships I had noticed—viewing the film (between consecutive shots and individual images) in order to develop generate a sequence for the shots.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Outside” (element grouping)</th>
<th>“Inside” (element grouping)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>layered cut-outs (body)</td>
<td>projected shadows (body)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>material traces (body)</td>
<td>carousel body (body/surfaces)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut-outs (eyes)</td>
<td>mirrored projected shadows (body/surfaces)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>architectural images (surfaces)</td>
<td>mirrored carousel body (body/surfaces)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>re-drawn body images (body/surfaces)</td>
<td>blurred projections (surface)(^{17})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mirrored cut-outs (body/surfaces)</td>
<td>zoetrope eye (eye)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mirrored layered cut-outs (body/surfaces)</td>
<td>dark face (eye)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mirrored material traces (body/surfaces)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mirrored re-drawn body images (body/surfaces)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>body distorted with lenses (body/surfaces)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eyes-blinks (ping)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.1 Classification of ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ images.*

\(^{17}\) Described in ‘Re-casting the ‘body/surfaces’.

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During my first viewing of the sequences in a time-line, for me, the images had begun to fall into contrasting ‘types’ based on their visual characteristics: light/dark, two-dimensional surface/‘three-dimensional’ space, delineated/fluid. It was contrasts of this type between sets of body images that for me evoked the ‘movement’ between a sense of ‘outside’ and an ‘inside’ in the film. The replacement of light 2D cut-outs by dark ‘3D’ projected shadows, for example, seemed to signify a change from ‘surface’ to more enclosed ‘depth’ (‘First Viewing - Insides and outsides’). It struck me that I could develop this theme as one element of a ‘visual grammar’ for the piece: an alternation between ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ images. As a kind of switch between ‘positives’ and ‘negatives’, this would visually reinscribe the process of switching between positive and negative images that I had undertaken earlier when creating my visual secondary negations and un-figurations.$^{18}$ The designation of images as ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ could be applied to all of the images I had produced thus far (see Table 4.1.). To my mind, with suitable transitions between them, alternation between these ‘types’ of image over the course of the film could create the impression of moving into and out of (indeterminate) imaginative spaces.

4.1.5 Transitional shots - inside-outside

The sense of moving into and out of ‘spaces’ could be translated most simply through camera-zooms. I experimented with making shots that encompassed this movement.

*I filmed a collage of perspective drawings I had made of a road surface, zooming from a wide-shot into the vanishing point of the image. These were mirrored horizontally to create an image of a kind of ‘tunnel’. These ‘tunnel zooms’ could then be used played forwards (zooming in) or in reverse (zooming out) to make shots that had an in or out movement.*

I had started to visually integrate the idea of self-consciousness in the reading of

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$^{18}$ Ch:3 - ‘First Making – 1. Body’.

Chapter 4: Reprocessing and Assembling

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Ping in different ways: via the use of stills, through the eyes on screen,¹⁹ and using the zoetrope image, and it occurred to me that I could extend this idea in further transitional shots. In avant-garde film, the lens as an eye is a common trope. Superimpositions of the eye and the lens have been used in numerous films, such as Man Ray’s Emak Bakia (1926), Dziga Vertov’s The Man with a Movie Camera (1929), and Stan Brakhage’s Song I (1964). That the camera as a device encompasses the mechanics of seeing is well known. When we see the lens on screen – the ‘camera-eye’ turned on the viewer – we understand it as a visual reflection of our activity, and also as representing a reversal of viewer subject-object relations: conceptually, we are being viewed. Thus to extend the theme of self-consciousness in my film, I made some in/out zoom shots that incorporated the ‘eye’ of the camera in the image.

*I filmed an analogue-camera lens and viewfinder, zooming in to the centre of each object. Again, these could also be used in reverse to also figure a move ‘out’. (These are pictured and discussed in the following section ‘Second Viewing’).*

4.1.6 Transitional shots - eyes

There seemed also to be potential by means of my eyes images to exploit visual suggestions of ‘outsides’ and ‘insides’ in the film; in particular to suggest moving ‘into’ and ‘out of’ a head. The idea of eyes as the proverbial ‘windows of the soul’ - a ‘way in’ to the psyche behind – is a familiar one. It is alluded to in Beckett’s Endgame, in which the character Clov periodically peers out two small windows in a bare room,²⁰ suggesting the stage-space can be interpreted as the inside of a head. Eyes are a ‘permeable border’ between the outside (the other) and the inside (the mind). Thus by developing some of my screen eyes into images that signify going ‘through’ for the viewer, and setting them before and after inside/outside shots, I might be able to reframe them as a permeable border that enables the viewer to

¹⁹ Ch.3: ‘First Viewing - Eyes as viewer’s’.
‘see/move through’, into the (head) space behind.

In visual representation, eyes closed (particularly in close-up) render the face a blank screen for the external viewer; a site for projection. In contrast, open eyes inscribe the surface of the face with ‘holes’; this is conceptually understood as an image which we might look ‘through’ as well as ‘at’. This idea of eyes as constituting contrasting ‘surfaces’ and ‘holes’ has a textual parallel in Ping - in the phrases “eyes white” and “eyes [as] holes” - so it felt appropriate to refer to this in the film. Previously, I had found that my choice of background literally transformed cut-out images into ‘holes’ as well as ‘surface’.21 Thus by filming eyes opening and closing on a different (dark or no) background I could add to the eyes as surface I had made earlier (on a white background) with eyes as holes, thus creating a ‘penetrable surface’, to set before and after inside and outside sequences.

I filmed the eyes cut-outs in their original sequences, layered and singularly, whilst laid over a black background (see fig 4.5). I edited the resulting shots in various combinations of ‘open-shut-open’, ‘shut-open-shut’, ‘shut-open’ and ‘open-shut’ etc.

![Figure 4.5](image_url)

*Figure 4.5* Transitional shots - Eyes over black background (singular).

Together with dissolves, these new eyes shots were later integrated into the piece, before and after sequences I had designated to be suggestive of interior and exterior spaces (see following section - ‘Final assemblage’).

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21 Ch.3: ‘First Making - 1. body - Second re-casting’.
4.1.7 Final assemblage

From the work I had done thus far, it was clear that a moving-image piece based on reading Ping should be characterised by a sense of continuous creation and recreation. A result of encountering the same elements repeatedly presented and negated in the text, is that the reader repeatedly creates, recreates and attempts to consolidate sets of phantom images. This suggested a general visual structure along the lines of: repeated loops of images, which are ‘blocked’ before or just at the point at which they become clear or unified. Such a structure could be used in my film by repeating my re-castings of the various elements in cycles throughout the piece - in varying combinations and, where possible, disrupting the physical stability and/or continuity of the ‘objects’ shown in each sequence. The latter could be done, for example, by fading the ‘objects’ out, making them appear more abstracted over time, interrupting them with other shots or alternating between different types of ‘action’ in each set, such as layering up and stripping away.

Earlier, when making the sound-recordings of individuals reading the text, I found that that the approximate time taken to read the text aloud is between 6 and 7 minutes. I set this as a rough target length for the moving-image piece and began to set the re-castings I had created alongside one another, repeated in various combinations, over this duration.

Keeping the ‘hands cutting out’ scene at the start, I arranged the rest of the images to form a basic schema of: (sets of) outside – inside - outside - inside etc. The inside and outside sets were flanked by ‘through’ shots that I had made from eyes images or by zooms shots. Within each of these sets ‘single’ re-castings preceded multiple (mirrored) ones, and where possible I alternated between directions of movement, for example switching between carousel shots that rotated clockwise and those that rotated anti-clockwise, and eye-zeetrope shots where the eye moved from left to right then right to left on the screen.

The multiple body and surface images created in the work described earlier in this chapter were set after single body images in the film, with the intention that more unified/clear representations of a body (e.g. the single body cutouts and projected shadows) were not sustained, i.e. were consistently made to appear then become more visually complex and abstruse. I then
placed the eyes ‘through’ shots (derivatives of the eye-blink ‘ping’ image) preceding and following zooms to mark a ‘change’ between the internal and external images (as in Fig. 4.6). With their movement ‘into’ and ‘out of’ the screen-space, I hoped these would also add to the sense of multi-directional and/or changing movement over the duration of the film.

|--------------------------|----------------------|------|--------------------------|------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|

Figure 4.6 Section of rough edit using eyes transition shots (through-shots).

I combined the ‘scenes’ I had made using a mixture of straight-cuts, dissolves and fades to black and to white (see Fig. 4.7). In Ping the ‘trigger’ (and other ‘trap-like’ elements) occur repeatedly throughout the text, transforming the ‘dramatic springing’ of the trap into an ongoing process. In response, I created pauses (ruptures) in the ‘flow’ of the sets by interjecting with ‘interrupting’ shots, i.e. straight-cuts to light flashes, eyes-blinks, soundwave ping graphics etc. I also cut short some sequences with fades or cuts to white or black screens. It was intended that, as blank screens, these would literally block viewing, and thus visually represent the blanks and (secondary) negations created in reading Ping. On the other hand, to create a sense of visual continuity between images of distinct elements (body, eyes, surfaces etc.) I used filmic ‘form dissolves’ to bridge between some sequential scenes where the end frames of one and the start frames of another contained similar shapes, textures or lighting contrast. These included the sequences of ‘mirrored shadow bodies - tunnel zoom-in’, ‘cut-out bodies - cut-out eyes’, and ‘mirrored shadow bodies - zoetrope body’ (fig. 4.7).

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22 The clear opposition of the two states of “suspended time, the empty time of waiting” and the “sudden catastrophe that ensues as the trap closes” of Gell’s trap (Although, as Gell points out, the temporal structure varies with the kind of trap.) Gell, *The Art of Anthropology*, p.202.

23 A cut from one object to another that is similarly shaped. For the viewer one object is replaced by another similarly shaped object, with the result that a connection may be made between the two.
To render the in-out pattern less regular I varied the switches between in and out. For instance I set the zoom-in between the first outside and inside, and then marked the move to the following outside by another zoom-in, rather than out.

As discussed earlier, the appearances of the “eye” in Ping are infrequent (only two), and are set amongst the longest sentences of the text towards the end. This gives them a certain sense of importance when read. Thus, the images I had made in response to the eye element – the dark face and zoetrope eye – also appear less frequently (in contrast to the repeated cycles of other visual material) to maintain their visual impact, and late on in the work.

4.1.8 ‘Second Making’ – summary

In this re-casting of the film, I made and assembled images based on a series of possible connections between elements and potential narratological ‘un-figures’ found within reading Ping. I also integrated some relevant visual structures into the
work (‘insides’ and ‘outsides’, multi-directional movement, cycles of imagery etc.),
which might prompt the viewer to make multiple connections between the images.

Having made this new incarnation of the film, I once again stepped back from the
work to view the cumulative effect of the new images and arrangement of scenes.
4.2 Second Viewing

4.2.1 ‘Movement’ start to finish

The film overall had a deliberately cyclical aesthetic; an effect of the accumulation of repeated image sets, of rotary movement in the shots (e.g. the clockwise and anti-clockwise rotation of the carousels and zoetropes) and oscillation between dark and light scene-sequences. In addition, the mirrored (shadow) body images (fig. 4.1) had a feminine symbolism and sensibility to them, adding to sense of fluidity throughout. On viewing I felt the result was appropriate to the reader-text interaction in Ping. In addition, the fits and starts created by cuts and interruption shots echoed the stop-start sense in reading a text peppered with blanks and negations. The abrupt appearance of the eye-blink punctuated the viewing (mimicking an effect of the “ping” in reading) and its open-shut-open action represented a visual block, thus as intended the blink embodied a performative blank in the film.

The sense of ‘going on’ despite a lack of linear narrative in reading Ping was, I felt, successfully represented in the repeated cycles over the (6½ minute) duration of the film. Also, I had introduced the dark face and zoetropes that I had made in response to the “eye”, which itself appears late in the text, towards the end of the film. When I watched the piece back, in the context of the other repeated sequences these new images seemed to bring in the possibility of progression; the sense that something may have changed in the latter half of the film.

Although ultimately the end of the film did not bring resolution, I realised, however, that the idea of “unfinished business” and the related sense of being trapped within re-processing images (Ch.2: ‘Ping as Trap’) could be further strengthened in the piece. One way of achieving this could be to play it on a loop. Another would be to

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24 For full shot list see Appendix 6.
find a way to show the work so that it literally surrounds the viewer. In a video-installation – a film-based work made to be shown in a gallery context - the looping of films is an integral element. This is so that the work can be entered (and indeed exited) at any point. Rather than the fixed start time and static viewing position of a cinematic film-showing, an installation set-up would allow a freer way of viewing the film, which would perhaps make it more sympathetic to the fluid and cyclical experience of reader-text interaction in Ping. The loop could also offer the opportunity to suggest a ‘resetting’ action in the work. As with any repeated viewing (or indeed reading) of an artwork, the participant can make new discoveries and re-form ideas on the piece through this action (not least because one brings a different perspective to the experience each time). A film that can be re-watched was thus an appropriate format to encourage the kind of interpretive and ideational multiplicity in reading Ping.

Curating a film for the art-space rather than for cinema/television viewing, also opens a sculptural aspect to the work in question; the physical space becoming part of the artwork. Using this principle with respect to my moving-image work, there was the potential to expand the space of the encounter, to one that the viewer is literally inside.

4.2.2 Viewer Inside and Outside

In contrast to the relatively fast rotation of the carousels and zoetropes, and the pulsing of light flashes and eye-blinks etc., the slow movement of the zooms ‘into’ and ‘out of’ the screen-frame to me allowed some space for contemplation when viewing the film; not least to consider the zoom’s effect. The impression communicated by the zooming-in on the camera lens (Fig. 4.8) was of a camera zooming in on its subject, furthermore, as it was ‘looking’ squarely out from the frame there was a sense that this subject was me, the viewer. Thus, like the eyes-effect in the previous viewing, this camera-eye also signified a ‘reversal’ of the viewer’s traditional subject-object position; the viewer is ‘viewed’ thus made a ‘viewed-object’ of the film.
In a more general sense, as an image of film apparatus, it drew attention directly to the structures behind the visual medium. Thus, it was made clear to me that I had participated in and contributed to an aesthetic process *by viewing*.

![Figure 4.8 Stills of camera lens zoom](image1)

I found this awareness similarly provoked at points where the camera-viewfinder zooms, zoetrope sequences and hints of celluloid film were seen on screen, although more subtly in this latter case (Figs. 4.9, 4.11, 4.12 and 4.10 respectively). All of these contained visual references to the apparatus of the moving-image medium.  

![Figure 4.9 Stills of camera-viewfinder zoom](image2)

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25 The celluloid film can be seen in blurred projection shots in the second half of the film (see shot list – Appendix 6).
When I watched the eye-zoetrope (Fig. 4.12) again, the blocking of the eye image (with black) was as prominent in the frame as the apparently moving eye. This was a result of the slower shots that I had used in the edit (arbitrarily): ones filmed moving at the slower record player setting. The effect was that in these sequences the hiding (or blanking) of the image was as much a part of the piece as showing of the imagery itself. Thus the gaps between images that lie at the heart of the moving-image medium (enabling the viewer to see the image ‘move’) were presented centrally.²⁶

This zoetrope image also made manifest particular ideas concerning filmic viewing.

²⁶ This exposure is not traditionally done in cinematic film. In fact it would usually be guarded against: filmic cuts concealed to maintain the filmic illusion. Further discussion can be found in Kaja Silverman, ‘Suture: The cinematic model’ in Paul du Gay et al [ed.], *Identity: a reader* (Sage: London, 2002) p.80.
Since this eye was seen through a gap in the surrounding blackness, it created a peephole effect on screen; it became a peeping eye. The voyeuristic aspect of film-viewing: the desiring look of the viewer usually hidden behind the ‘two-way mirror’ of the screen, was thus turned back on me, mirrored in the image I saw. In this, then, the zoetrope eye became an image of the viewer’s ‘desiring eye’. As I had intended, by using the same visual source, this eye was identifiably similar to the eyes images (the eyes of a possible character) and (more subtly) to the eyes of the dark face image (a possible new character). This zoetrope sequence, then, reflected a number of the connotations of the “eye” in the text: as potentially a character (the body), a new character and/or reader (viewer). Like the “ping” in the text, it also evoked the idea and movement of desire.

4.2.3 Multiple connections

As well as the connotations and references I had ‘designed’ in my second phase of making, when viewing the film as a whole I found additional links that I had not anticipated. These were a product of the way in which the images/scenes were physically situated in the edit and the subtle visual relations that could be made between them. One example is the effect of viewing the carousel body shots edited into scenes in which their ‘pages’ turned in alternate directions. These suggested to me the fluttering of lashes or movement of an eyelid, and thus added another layer of significance to this image sequence, signifying both bodies and a blinking eye or eyes.

A key connection I made in this viewing of the piece was between the dark face at the end and the hands at the beginning (Fig. 4.13). As two discernably ‘human’ images (i.e. realistic depictions of body-parts) both set within a black ‘space’, the images had an aesthetic similarity. Visually linked in this way, to me they then had an interesting book-ending effect: the dark face could be seen as that of the ‘creator’ unveiled, as well as the new ‘character’ that I had had in mind when making the image. Furthermore, when viewed in the context of the whole film the face image also had other connotations. Though the darkness of the image inaugurated
difference between *its* eyes and the white cut out eyes images (‘through shots’, blinks etc.), at the same time, since they were created from the same source images the two did bear an intrinsic resemblance to each other (see Fig. 4.14). Thus the suggestion that they represented the same figure in the film was inferred, but subtly and with ambiguity. Both ‘look’ straight out from the screen, and thus the disruption of the expected viewer/viewed dynamic effected by the white cut-out eyes\(^{27}\) was also an effect here. In my opinion, however, this particular (dark face)‘look’ had an added power. The photo-realism and filmed nature of this scene (exhibiting smooth movement as opposed to the jerkiness of the animated stills) meant that there was a greater sense of human ‘presence’ in this shot. The impression of being looked at - ‘made object’ – was thus to me, suggested more strongly. The dark face appeared to be involved in a kind of visual and performative interplay with the gamut of eyes images (i.e. the blinks created in response to the “ping” in the text and the eyes ‘through shots’), the ‘figure’ (‘creator’) in the opening scene and the viewer whose action it mirrored. These ‘interactions’ in the film therefore appeared to parallel some of the connections suggested by the eye in *Ping* (discussed earlier): as representing the narrator, the ‘character’ of the bare white body, a new character, and/or the reader in the text.\(^{28}\)

![Figure 4.13 Dark face image (end) and cutting out scene (start)](image_url)

\(^{27}\) As discussed in Ch.3: ‘First Viewing – Eyes as viewer’s’.

\(^{28}\) Ch.3: ‘Revisiting the Text - Eye’.
When I saw the configuration of dark ‘interior’ imagery prefixed with eyes ‘through’ shots: ‘blink – dissolve – zoom – dissolve – inside’, these eyes became conceivable as the exterior of a head, into which the viewer then ‘moves’. Thus as I had intended, the ‘inside’ scenes were therefore reframed as images of psychological space. In viewing this sequence of shots, I found that questions were posed: to whom do these eyes/this ‘head’ refer, how does this ‘un-figure’ relate to the other images and to the other potential figures in the piece? As white cut-out eyes, I first identified the images most readily with the similarly white cut-out body images, and thus with the ‘character’ that is created by the hands in the opening scene. As discussed above, however, the eyes cut-outs also resonated with the dark face at the end which one may read as the ‘creator’. Therefore there was the suggestion that these also could be the eyes of the ‘creator’. In addition, as discussed after my first viewing, the eyes ‘looking out’ from the screen were a visual representation of a viewing-subject, and by implication, of my eyes as viewer on screen. In this viewing, the cut-out eyes thus represented a more condensed image - they had the sense of ‘attachment’ to the ‘creator’, the ‘character’ and/or the viewer, and subsequently it was conceivable that these figures were interrelated or interchangeable. This sequence of images, thus had the performatve effect of prompting me to create a complex and unresolvable interconnection between ‘figures’, reflecting the multiple possibilities created by the ambiguity of the “body”, the “eyes”, the “eye” in the text. In addition, when viewing

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29 This is outwith the fact that, as maker, they were literally images of my eyes.
these transitions I found that I naturally tried to consolidate the sequential ‘insides’ and ‘outsides’ into a consistent linear movement and form a fixed spatial structure over the duration of the work. The effect of this attempt was rather disorientating. Although it is possible to construct a basic spatial structure from the interior/exterior images (see fig. 4.15), this is confused by the irregular pattern of the zooms. For example, in the first move back from ‘inside’ (dark) to ‘outside’ (white), by my design there is a zoom in, and not the logical zoom back out to the exterior eyes. This worked against my desire as a viewer, and instead rendered a sense of sets of ‘impossible spaces’ that could not be resolved. The combination of ‘through’ shots and ‘insides’ and ‘outsides’ thus successfully visually reflected the fluid subject-object positions and spaces created in reading Ping, and the impossibility of consolidating its text into a fixed aesthetic object.

4.2.4 ‘Second Viewing’ – summary and implications

Repeated reviewing at this point revealed to me some additional effects of some of the new images I had created, e.g. the carousel body, dark face and zoetrope eye shots. These represented a kind of condensation beyond that which I had designed – the dark face, for example, related visually to a number of elements thus embodied: a
character, the ‘creator’ (visual narrator) and the viewer. This had an effect on the moving-image work as a whole: increasing the complex associations and interconnectivity across the images that it creates during viewing. As created from images which were a direct response to the elements and gaps in Ping, I felt that the filmic image associations and networks of relationships accumulated over the two re-castings had their equivalents in those created in reading the text (between the figurative elements and projected narratological figures created by the reader in Ping). Thus, the numerous visual connections that I now made viewing the film, extended the idea that reading the text produces a fluid aesthetic object consisting of multiple coexisting links - effectively a complex web of possible links.

I felt that something of this web ‘shape’ was already reflected in the series of fluid and non-linear links I could see in my film so far. However, I also thought that by enabling the film to be ‘read’ in different directions (building on the principle of cross-references and ambiguity through which I found the film worked), this could be encouraged to emerge more overtly; allowing the viewer could to a more sophisticated and representative meta-structure. One way of doing this, which would also physically place the viewer inside of the work, was to develop the idea of curating the film as an installation, as discussed earlier.

I had the opportunity, around this time, to contribute work to a public art exhibition. Therefore, to think about this idea, I set up the moving-images looped on a small monitor in a gallery space. Although the looping and space altered the viewing experience: the viewer could re-watch and move around, the single screen did not explicitly address the sculptural possibilities of installation. I felt that it too closely resembled the television/cinematic viewing experience, and the installation form could be used to fuller advantage. I wanted, rather, to expand the space of the work, for example, as in the work of Filmaktion, a group of artists who integrated the

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30 The carousel images I had created as a response to the blurring of body and surface in the text also suggested and eyes or an eye, and the zoetrope eye sequences suggested my ‘desiring eye’.
31 ‘Second Viewing - ‘Movement’ start to finish’.
33 Filmaktion included William Raban, Malcolm Le Grice and Gill Eatherley, proponents of the
viewer into the film projection as the participant of an event, rather than simply showing it. One way of doing this would be to design a multiple-screen installation set up. In multi-screen works where different sets of moving-images are shown at once (such as David Hall’s 101 TV Sets (1972-75) and Progressive Recession (1974)\textsuperscript{34}), this inevitably encourages cross-comparison and cross-pollination of images by the viewer. Applied to my film-work by, for example, staggering the playback, this could transform the way one watches the film, encouraging a multi-directional form of viewing. The viewer could then form and reform a greater number of connections between changing sets of images and sequences. In this way, the work would then better engage with the non-linear characteristic of the reader’s interaction with imaginative images, when reading Ping. Multiple screens would, additionally, enhance the self-reflexive sensibility of the film, giving space for it to work with/against itself, across the space. As a way forward, a multi-screen installation could thus both integrate the viewer into the work’s construction in a way that echoed reading the text, and go some way to enabling in moving-image the kind of multi-directional nexus that is the result of the reader/text interaction in Ping.

Another possibility to expand the experience of viewing the film was through sound. There is generally an interiority associated with our experience of sound. We perceive sound from the centre of a ‘sound-landscape’ that reverberates all around us.\textsuperscript{35} An audio element could thus (sensorially) extend the film-space of the work to appropriately ‘surround’ its viewer in a way that is appropriate to reading the text. In response to this idea, I added a pre-existing repetitive ambient music track to the gallery exhibition of the film (described above), to gauge the effect. This created a generally more rounded sensory experience, however, the music track added an emotive effect, which directed its interpretation. I felt there was more potential and fluidity in the addition of an audio element to the work that was specifically designed and film-sound not music. The power that sound has to add to the impression given

\textsuperscript{160}s/70s idea of ‘Expanded Cinema’. Detail of some individual works can be found at: www.tate.org.uk/britain/artistsfilm/programmel/filmaktion.htm  
\textsuperscript{34} Stills of these works and an artist’s statement can be found at www.davidhallart.com/id2.html. See also works by Gary Hill including Suspension of disbelief (1991-1992) and Circular Breathing (1994) pictured online at www.sfmoma.org/exhibitions/204  
\textsuperscript{35} For further discussion see Michael Forrester, Psychology of the Image (Routledge: London, 2002) p.38.
by a moving-image is well known, not least in its ability to dramatise and orient shots. Sound has potential to convert images into events, processes and actions, instead of or as well as representing places, patterns and objects. In the words of composer-filmmaker-critic Michel Chion: “[sound] dramatizes shots, orientating them toward a future goal, and creation of a feeling of imminence and expectation”. 36 Creating a soundtrack that accommodated this potentiality (i.e. film-sound) could therefore be a key way of furthering the sense of process and a ‘going on’ in the images I had, thus far, created.

In addition, since I had found that reconstructing the elements of Ping as filmic visuals was a productive way of revealing and further reflecting the effects of Ping. It seemed then, that a re-consideration of the text through sound (film’s other main aspect), and an aural reconstruction of effects found, might prove similarly fruitful in relation to revealing aspects of the reader-text interaction in Ping. Before moving on to the construction of the work as installation, I therefore returned to the Ping text to consider these ideas.

4.3 Second Revisiting the Text

4.3.1 Sounds in *Ping*

The words that might denote sound in *Ping* are: the mechanical “ping” (discussed in chapter 2); “murmur/s”, which are apparently “brief” and “only just almost never”; and then “silence”/“no sound”, which either appear with body-parts and “within” or with “elsewhere”. Though their referential sense is of quietness – a tendency towards silence – the performative effect of these ‘sound-words’ is rather to emphasise that silence is *not* achieved. The idea of no sound/silence, for example, is one that is impossible to properly conceptualise. Experientially it does not exist, as at the very least we are always privy to the sound of our own physicality (our own hearts beating etc.). Thus in the text the words “silence” and “no sound” function like the negations previously discussed, they create blanks that produce a kind of ‘unconfiguration’ for the reader (Ch.2 – ‘Blanks in *Ping*’). “No sound”, for example, has this ‘double-negative’ effect. To deny or suppress sound at the same time generates the idea that there previously was sound, “within” the fragmented body or “elsewhere”. This suggested to me that my mode of creating visual secondary negations - blanking/cutting out etc. - could be reconceived in sound to construct an element of audio for the work, and, furthermore, that sound made to suggest insides and outsides might form part of a strategy for developing the soundtrack.

The sense of ambiguity around ‘sound’ in the text is continued with the use of “murmur(s)” in the text. “Murmur(s)”, like the “ping”, is an onomatopoeic word – containing a sense of sound and action. Indeed it often directly follows a “ping”, such as in: “Head haught eyes light blue almost white fixed front *ping murmurmurmur ping silence*”. In this particular form, by virtue of the interjections of “ping” between

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“murmur” and “silence”, then “murmur” is set in contrast to “silence”, as if the “ping” is a prompt for, or else its appearance inaugurates, an aural change within the text states. Murmur thus seems a more straightforward (albeit unspecified) description of a sound.

The dictionary definition of murmur includes “a low continuous background noise” (OED). Thus in phrases such as “brief murmurs only just” and “ping murmur ping silence”, its use might translate for the reader (and thus into my film-sound) as a kind of background noise interjected with ‘silence’. Alternative definitions of “murmur” include “an almost inaudible utterance” or a “subdued expression of a particular feeling”, which could be ascribed to one or multiple sources. Using either of these latter definitions, a human presence is felt - the originator of the utterance or expression – and once again, the reader is prompted to try and locate potential narratological figures in the text.

In this sense, “murmur(s)” seems, then, to relate to the ‘semblance of voice’ (prompted by the “perhaps”) which emerged earlier. This element in Ping is particularly fluid as to its potential source and thus ‘moves’ between projected narratological figures in the mind of the reader - the body, eyes, eye and so on. A murmur could be, for example, the sound emitted from the “mouth seamed like sewn” that we might associate with the body or ‘character’ in the text. It could, alternatively, be the narrator’s recounting of the ‘story’, or else represent the reader; mouthing the words as he/she struggles with the condensed syntax and repetition. It is an unfixed voice. The “murmur(s)” in the text are arguably another embodiment of this phantom voice. Like the ‘perhaps’ phrases, they prompt readerly activity: the consideration and projection of figures to which they can be attached.

From this, therefore, it seemed I should start by using the idea of the unfixed ‘voice’ in reading Ping in creating the sound for the work. The most obvious way to

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38 A murmur also denotes a potential sign of disease or damage in the heart. This sense may have contributed to Lodge’s interpretation of Ping as representing a figure at the end of his consciousness (Ch.1: Review and Discussion of the Literature: Ping).
39 Ch.3: ‘First Revisiting the Text’.
facilitate the re-casting of Ping’s voice in film-sound would be to use *actual* voice. With this in mind, I considered what relevant structures there might be in the cinematic deployment of ‘voice’.

### 4.3.2 The unfixed voice in film

The composer-filmmaker-critic Michel Chion discusses voice in modern (i.e. post ‘talkie’) French and American cinema in *Voice in Cinema* (1982).40 Here he outlines a function of voice in film which works in contrast to the accurate synchronisation of voices to bodies that we expect as film-viewers. What he terms the “complete acousmêtre” in film is a phantom “presence” experienced by the viewer, created by an off-screen voice. Chion describes the acousmêtre as being:

> Neither inside or outside the image. It is not inside, because the image of the voice’s source - the body, the mouth - is not included. Nor is it outside, since it is not clearly positioned off screen in an imaginary “wing”...and it is implicated in the action, constantly about to be part of it.41

This filmic voice generates a presence that is everywhere and nowhere, because it is not clearly attached to a visualised figure but nevertheless carries this with it as a possibility. It is this ambiguous relationship with the image that sets this voice apart from other types of ‘bodiless’ voices in film. As viewers we understand the voiceover of the detached narrator (as we might experience in a documentary film) as situated firmly outside of the diegesis. Similarly it is clear that the voice of a character who speaks temporarily from outside the visual frame, is *inside* that diegesis. For Chion, what sets the acousmêtre as “neither inside or outside” of the filmic-diegesis is the combination of its technical treatment and invisibility. As he explains, in film, the unseen voice with sound-filtering (such as reverberation)

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conforms to audio conventions that establish a sound as subjective or ‘unreal’. As viewers, we recognise its difference in sound from natural spoken voice (its distorted quality, for example, such as one would hear in a voice heard over the telephone), and relate to this unseen voice as “an object voice”: one that is anchored inside of the film-space, rather than an external subject such as a detached narrator. In a situation, however, where this subjective voice continues to not be ‘given a face’ over the course of a film, as in the complete acousmêtre, it assumes a power and a mystery; its presence is palpable, yet its relation to figures in the images is a question for the viewer. For this reason, the acousmêtre is a commonly adopted technique by directors of mystery and suspense films. One example is Hitchcock’s Psycho (1960), where the mother’s off-screen voice haunts the narrative yet she is never clearly seen. This allows an ambiguity around her as a figure with which Hitchcock plays to lead and mislead the viewer, ending with the revelation that the mother has not been alive throughout and is rather a voice and possessing force in her son’s head. The rupture between sound and image that the complete acousmêtre, such as this, represents, proves irresistible to the viewer’s instinct to assemble and consolidate (to ‘nail voices to bodies’), and the search for the location/origin of the voice in the visuals becomes a perpetual process or focal point in the viewer’s activity. This application of sound suggests a human presence distinct from (visual) elements, which thus ‘moves’ the viewer to project and switch between different possibilities.

The parallels between the effects produced in the viewer faced with the film-acousmêtre and the reader faced with the unfixed prose voice in Ping, then, are clear. The gaps between the ‘sound’ and images in each medium draw both subjects into an attempt to reconcile indeterminate elements; projecting and switching between possible relationships and (changing) narratological figures. From this, it seemed then that play with conjunction/disjunction between elements of the sound and images could be usefully employed in accommodating the effect of Ping’s unfixed voice into the film I had made.

44 Chion details the use of the acousmêtre in Psycho in The Voice in Cinema, pp.140-151.
45 “Nailing down” is apt phrase of Chion’s that he derives from Marguerite Duras in India Song. See The Voice in Cinema, p.130.
The examples of complete acousmêtre that Chion gives are most often from narrative film - the Wizard of Oz before he is unveiled in the eponymous film (1939), Mabuse in Fritz Lang’s film The Testament of Dr. Mabuse (1932), or the mother in Hitchcock’s Psycho (1960) as discussed above. This does not mean, however, that the dynamic of the voice he describes and the effect it creates for the viewer cannot be transferred to more experimental non-narrative forms of moving image. Indeed, a number of (in particular female) experimental film practitioners (e.g. Yvonne Rainer, Sally Potter and Bette Gordon) have employed the principles of the acousmêtre centrally in their more avant-garde works. Within the moving-images I had produced, where there are a number of figurative elements that could conceivably be ‘inhabited’ with voice but that we do not see speak, then it should also be possible to replicate something of the complete acousmêtre by using actual voice with reverberation.

Alternatively, the sound/image rupture that is key to the acousmêtre might be created and utilised in my film in other ways, for example, by distancing sound from image physically; playing the sound from locations that are separate from the screen either through earphones or from a number of different speakers. Another option might be to treat the sound I create in such a way as to suggest its fluctuating between audio ‘insides’ and ‘outsides’, and to synchronise these to work counter to the visual insides/outsides. This might reflect something of the (aural and) spacial ambiguity created by “silence” and “no sound” discussed earlier.

4.3.3 ‘Second Revisiting the Text’ – summary

‘Sound’ in the text thus appears to function in a similar way to other features I had previously explored visually - as blanks provoking reader response, and prompts to

46 Chion details the use of the acousmêtre in The Testament of Dr Mabuse in pp.31-47.
the projection and questioning of potential figures in the text. This dictated that sound in the installation piece I was to create should aim to reinforce the effects of the moving-images and furthermore that it might be appropriate to create individual sound elements using methods similar to those I had developed for the visual material.

The cinematic-sound mode of “acousmêtre”, as identified by Chion, provides a model for the recurrent ‘play with voice’ that is an effect of reading Ping. From this, then, generating acousmatic presences in the film or creating a rupture between sound and image were suggested as possible ways that I could recreate an unfixed voice and its effects in a visual translation of reading Ping.

To develop and apply what I had learned, I returned to ‘making’ in the third and final cycle of work (Chapter 5).
Chapter 5: Installation Piece – Multi-screen with sound

5.1 Third Making

In this final phase of making, I looked at suitable ways to conceive the piece in multi-screen installation form. I wanted to develop and construct appropriate sound to work with this format, consider the number and size of screens/projections, and the physical situation of the viewer in relation to the work.

5.1.1 Sound

To create the sound element of the multi-screen work, I first developed sound for the moving-images I had assembled in their current (single-screen) form.

Voice-over

Having seen something of the potential of actual voice to create effects analogous to those in the text, I began by playing some of the recitations I had recorded earlier,¹ over the film to see roughly what effect this would have.

In a similar way to visually representing a body, as discussed earlier, the presence of a voice carries with it specificity: the gender, age and so on of the speaker. Bearing in mind that I had opted to use a female image (my own) for many of the images, and I sought to develop the idea of disjunction between the sound and moving images, I first tried a number of recordings from both male and female participants.

¹ See Ch.2: ‘Speaking Ping’.
I roughly cut together a mix of male and female voices fading in and out of one another, and played this over the film a number of times, so that each time different voices coincided with the various sets of images.

Some of these recordings had been made (arbitrarily) very close to the microphone and so the mouth and breath sounds were clearly discernable. As a result, the physical aspect of voice which roots it in the body for the listener - what Roland Barthes termed its “grain”\(^2\) - was very clearly communicated in these particular versions. When I heard these particular recordings in conjunction with the film, they had something of the sense of Chion’s “object voices”, appearing to be anchored within the film rather than being ‘external’ detached voice-overs. (A quality that would be further heightened if reverberation was added.) Each new voice prompted me to try to associate it with the figurative elements in the film, and to create different and changing configurations of narrators and characters. For example, being as many of the images were denoted as feminine (were of a recognisably female figure or else had a feminine symbolism to them\(^3\)), the male voices, seemed to lend themselves most clearly to association with the ungendered creating hands at the start. This suggested a male creator/narrator figure in the work. A male voice with the images thus reinforced a potential subtext of the film raised in my first viewing: the traditional gender roles in film of male creator/viewer set in relation to the female body on-screen - the objectified subject of the male gaze.\(^4\) I found that female voices on the other hand, by virtue of their gender, were more easily attributable to the on-screen body, the eyes, the dark face at the end and the creating hands. They disrupted traditional gendered subject-object relations, as here the elements (and thus figures) were rendered interchangeable, offering more fluidity in the way that I could construct relationships between them.

From this, given my original choice of a female body, it seemed that female voice had more potential for reflecting the multiple connections and possibilities that can be made in reading Ping. In addition, it struck me that by using female voice there


\(^3\) The ‘insides’ as discussed in Ch.3: ‘First Viewing – Insides and Outsides’ and mirrored images in Ch.4: ‘Second Viewing – ‘Movement’ start to finish’ and ‘insides’.

\(^4\) Ch.3: ‘First Viewing – Insides and Outsides’.
could be scope to explore and render the ambiguity of the voice in the text; does the body ‘speak’ the voice or does the voice ‘speak’ the body?\(^5\) If reverberation were added to sections of female voice(s) then the extent to which they registered for the viewer as ‘object voices’ might vary throughout the film. In narrative terms, this could create uncertainty as to whether the voice was the screen-body’s interior voice recounting her story, or the voice of a figure independent of the screen-body - a narrator describing and thus creating the image of the body.

However, although an interesting premise for some future work,\(^6\) I decided not to pursue this idea in this instance. As with the written word earlier,\(^7\) I found that applying recitation of the text to the re-cast images brought with it an issue of the spoken words taking precedence over the visuals and directing the viewing. One inevitably makes direct associations between the images and words spoken, and even with voice laid over other sounds; one cannot avoid the natural tendency to focus on the spoken word.\(^8\) Like the intertitles discussed earlier, I felt that including the actual text (in the form of sound) could detract from the idea of approximating reader-text interaction with which I was working. Furthermore, *Ping* as spoken word was too prescriptive, as it necessitates its parsing by its reader, thus narrowing the possible interpretations for the listener. For these reasons, I decided not to use a clear reading within the film, but to consider a broader, more abstract approach to ‘voice’ for inclusion in the work. From this experiment, I did however take forward the ideas of using multiple, changing sound components; for the fluidity in interpretation that this could produce, and to develop a sense of ‘voice’ for the work that would create maximum associations, as the female voices had started to do here.

**Abstracted Voice**

I next looked at some ways of using female voice that distorted the words:

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\(^5\) Ch.3: ‘First Revisiting the Text’.

\(^6\) Further discussion of this and other ideas for future work can be found in the conclusion to this thesis.

\(^7\) Ch.4: Second Making - Re-casting the “ping”.

I laid a number of identical tracks of my own recitation of the text (which had been recorded close-miked) staggered over the film to gauge the effect. The multiple voices created a slow build up of sound. The resultant overlapping of words formed a kind of ‘white noise’ with some considerable intensity.

The layered recitations of the text created a shifting, shimmering audio-effect. The words quickly became inaudible “murmurs”, and indistinguishable from a background of rhythmic buzzing. The culmulative effect of multiple layered voices, was that it was increasingly difficult to parse individual sounds. This was, I felt, an aural equivalent of the ‘blurring’ between figure and ground previously identified as appropriate for articulating the indeterminacy in Ping.9

However, although the layering produced an interesting, and in some senses appropriate, audio-effect, the sense of human presence that I sought to create in the sound was lost in the buzzing. This to me, made this option unsuitable for translating the unfixed voice effect. Instead, taking forward what I had previously learned about ‘sound’ in Ping previously in my second re-visiting of the text,10 I focused again on my mode of creating (visual) secondary negations (blanking/cutting out etc.) to construct the audio for the work. I thought about ways to reconceive this process in sound that might also convey human physicality/presence. In discussion with the sound engineer,11 the idea of cutting the words out of the recordings and using only what remained, emerged.

*The sound engineer cut words out from my recitation of the text, creating a condensed track of just the breath/mouth-sounds and pauses I had made in speaking the text.*

The sound clip produced here was an actualisation of the gaps in reading the printed text and the residue of words negated. Although, what was ‘said’ (the legible parole) was effectively negated, the residual close-miked sound retained a strong sense of physicality and vocal ‘grain’, and it did not carry the gender specificity of the earlier

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9 Ch.2: ‘Ping as Pattern’.
10 Ch.4: ‘Second Revisiting the Text – Sound in Ping’.
11 Colin Gateley, MSc.
voice-overs. Heard in conjunction with the images, this sound offered the opportunity of association with the gamut of figurative images in the film: the hands, the dark face, the eyes etc. This was thus a strong contender for an element of the sound for the piece, as it introduced a subtle human element distinct from the images (prompting the viewer to attempt to consolidate the two) whilst at the same time denying the assignation of voice to a specific source.

The most significant outcome of this particular experiment, however, was that it demonstrated the possibility of encompassing the ‘unfixed voice’ effect in Ping in sound in a way that bypassed the dominating effect of the spoken text on the moving-images. In addition, it suggested that there was further potential in the idea of translating my visual processes more generally.

Process Sounds

From this experiment - deriving a way to create appropriate sound from a single visual process - I had the idea of creating the soundtrack non-vocally; from a set of sounds based on the gamut of processes I used in the making of the filmic-images – recordings of my physical actions such as cutting, drawing etc. This, I felt, was another means of introducing a human element into the work. Furthermore, by re-employing the general process I had undertaken to generate the moving-images, i.e. the re-casting of elements and their setting alongside one another, such a soundtrack overall would represent another kind of extension of the effect of reading.

Sounds produced from interacting with tools and materials might, in addition, contribute (in an aural way) something of the physicality and effort that is part of the process of reader-text interaction in Ping, and in their materiality, reflect something of a key effect I had identified in reading the words in Ping – the sense that they form irresolvable ‘sound-objects’ that hang in the air (almost above their status as textual signifiers). I concluded, then, that I could develop a kind of ‘sound vocabulary’ of my processes, which could be assembled to create a montaged

12 Ch.2: ‘Hearing Ping’.
soundtrack.

I provided a list of processes to a sound engineer, who then recorded a collection of appropriate sounds. These included recordings of cutting, drawing, rubbing out, handling paper, feedback,\(^\text{13}\) rotating ‘machines’ etc. – sounds made with the materials I had used (pencil, scalpel, paper, camera etc.). These were created by physical actions where possible\(^\text{14}\) and were recorded close-miked to emphasise their grain.

### 5.1.2 Sound Assemblage

I next considered how these sounds could be combined appropriately with the film. To enable me to think further about how sound worked generally in conjunction with the moving-images, I first played the film with various pieces of pre-existing music. This was purely to research issues of pace, rhythm etc., since I did not intend to use musical-sound per se, as I wished to avoid the emotive effect that musical accompaniment inevitably brings to images.\(^\text{15}\) I felt this emotive effect would direct the perception of the images and narrow the interpretations that could be made of the final installation. The choice of music for this exercise was, therefore, arbitrary - based on classical music I had to hand - with different paces, rhythms, complexity levels and phrase repetition.\(^\text{16}\)

Playing music over the film, I found that lasting notes or sounds created some aural continuity between disparate shots, suggesting that their content was linked in some way. Where there were repetitions and cyclical phrasings in the musical pieces,\(^\text{17}\) these strengthened the sense of cycles that I had built into the visuals.

\(^{13}\) As used in creating visuals as a response to the pings. See Ch.3: ‘First Making - Visual elements - 5. Pings’.

\(^{14}\) For practical reasons, some sounds were sourced elsewhere (e.g. the background industrial drone which was added later).

\(^{15}\) Ch.4: ‘Second Viewing – summary’.

\(^{16}\) These included works by Arvo Pärt and Philip Glass.

\(^{17}\) For example in Arvo Pärt’s *Cantos in Memory of Benjamin Britten*, where there is a repeated tolling bell, and multiple overlapping descending scales.
I also found that (as with any piece of sound played over imagery) sound and image synchronised at various points throughout. Each instance of synchronicity gave additional power and emphasis to the particular shot, or cut between shots, where it occurred. Rapid punctuating sound that synchronised with briefer shots i.e. the visual ‘blanks’ in the film meant that these elements of the visual design were more strongly marked. This suggested to me that if I were to structure the process sounds in a similar way, i.e. a mix of some sounds cut to be sharp and sudden, and some as more enduring, repeated in cycles, then the audio-track could reinforce the structures I had built into the visuals.

Furthermore, I noticed that where there was movement in the images, as in the carousel bodies, this was emphasised by the corresponding temporality of the music. In light of the substantial activity generated in the reader-text interaction of Ping – the cyclical re-processing of images and the start-stop of visualisation effected by the blanks and negations - movement was a key quality that I sought to bring out throughout the film. In Audio-vision: Sound on Screen (1994), Chion describes the temporalising effect of sound in combination with images. He argues that if an image either has “a particular movement of its own” or else is “static and passively receptive”, sound can be used to create or add to a sense of movement/temporality within it. Since my intention was to underscore and complement the visual movement I had created, I considered how my images related to the conditions he lays out for sound to influence an image in this way. The body shots (cut-out and shadow projections) and carousel images, for example, had their own regular rhythmic/cyclical movement, so according to Chion, this can be strengthened by the use of sound. In contrast, the dark face image was essentially static, however, it does contain tremors and subtle light changes that were an effect of it being a speeded up real-time shot. It thus corresponded to the “general fluctuation” that Chion states is a key characteristic of ‘passively receptive’ images. In relation to sound creating maximum temporalisation (animation, succession and orientation in time), Chion suggests that in general, sounds with uneven or fluttering audio-sustain, unstable

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tempo or that are rich in high frequencies, are amongst the most effective. He proposes that changing, irregular (and thus unpredictable) sound over time creates more animation in visuals (and is more unsettling) than sound that exerts a regular pattern. Since it corresponded with the qualities and intentions behind my moving-images, I therefore used Chion’s schema in determining how sound should be combined with the visual shots in order to create maximum movement in the work, and to form a general approach for the overall design of the tempo: changing and irregular.

The disjunction between image and sound identified earlier as a strategy for integrating the effect of the ‘unfixed voice’ in Ping provided a further framework for assembling sounds and images. The process sounds could be juxtaposed with images that one would not expect to create sound (the blinks for example). Where there were physical actions performed in the visuals (e.g. cutting out or rubbing out), some of these could be synchronised with the sound of an ‘opposite’ action. For example, the sound of drawing an image (making) could be matched with a visual image of rubbing out (an un-making action).

These ideas I provided as direction for the sound engineer, who then assembled the process and breath/mouth sounds in a timeline, to coincide with particular shots in the film (Table 5.1). Following this he created a kind of industrial drone to emulate the continuity between disparate shots that I had found lasting notes or sounds provided when playing instrumental music over the images previously. This he then faded in and out on a separate track behind the process sounds, further treating sections with reverberation, layering etc. This created more of a pulsing, or uneven sound accompaniment for particular shots, suggesting a kind of audio interference or a wind-like tremoring noise. It gave an irregular unpredictability to the design of the audiotrack as a whole. The intermitant reverberation, created a subtle sense of changing audio ‘spaces’ across the track; a series of aural ‘insides’ and ‘outsides’.

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19 Ch.4: ‘Second Revisiting the Text’.
20 The drone was created from a randomly mutated combination of two pre-existing sound-effects of mechanical noise.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Image</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper handling</td>
<td>eyes (blink) images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratchet</td>
<td>carousel images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scribbling</td>
<td>rubbing out body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback noise</td>
<td>ping graphic/white noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>cutting out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breath/mouth sounds</td>
<td>eye zoetrope/dark face/cutting hands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5.1 Alignment of sounds with images (C.Gateley)*.

Having generated a 6-7 minute audio-track for the film, I then turned my attention to the set up of the work as an installation.

### 5.1.3 Multi-screen Installation

To develop the film into a multi-screen installation work, the issues I had to consider included: the number of screens that would be used, their size, how they should be positioned in relation both to one another and to the viewer, and the number and location of speakers.

In respect of the ‘boxes within boxes’ found in reading the text, an even number of screen-images (four or six) seemed the most natural choice. Initially, I thought about projecting onto the sides of a (one-yard square by two) box, or showing the film on a split screen (divided into four or six smaller screen-spaces). However, I quickly discounted these ideas, as neither would create a space that the viewer could be inside of, and I felt that the box, in particular, would crystalise the piece into too fixed and physical an object. This would be in complete contrast with the fluid aesthetic object of *Ping*.

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21 Ch.3: ‘First Viewing - Blurred Boundaries’.
Instead, reflecting on the idea and effects of the zoetrope earlier, I felt there was further potential in the zoetrope’s structure to translate ideas and processes in the text. I considered the *spatial* structure of this device as a possible model for a screen set-up for the film. If the screens were set, like the images in this device, around a space and facing inwards (see fig. 5.1), this would begin to create a form that the viewer is unmistakably complicit in, i.e. the viewer *literally* situated within the artwork, and thus within its processes. It would set the viewer in an appropriately dual position: both *inside* the installation and *outside* the film.

Four facing screens would give an impression of a box-like space, but not an enclosed container, whilst also offering the opportunity of different connections being made, by the viewer *across* the work (between adjacent and facing images). This set-up could also enable specific effects based on the imagery of the piece. At the appearance of the eyes in the film, for example each screen would, effectively, be ‘observed’ by itself – the film looking at the film from a number of angles. Furthermore, the repeated eye(s) images could potentially create the sense for the viewer of being ‘observed’ by the film from a number of angles (thus becoming the object).

![Figure 5.1 Arrangement of monitors](image)

As regards the screen sizes for the installation piece, larger projection screens might create an appropriate sense of disorientation in the viewer; particularly the

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22 Ch.4: ‘Second making - Re-casting the “eye”.'
progressive zooms in and out on a large scale. Enlarged, the switches between bright and dark sequences in the film may also have greater impact. The stark contrasts on a large scale might also conceivably effect retinal afterimages in the viewer, which would be an interesting visual equivalent of the traces Ping generates. On the other hand, a small screen/projection would perhaps create more impact in relation to the effect of the eyes and eye images in the film. If the screen-eyes were life-sized, then the screen would more obviously act as a ‘mirror’, and thus the switches from viewer to ‘being viewed’ might be particularly discernable. Furthermore, due to the intimate scale of its ‘window’, the sense of voyeurism on the small screen is arguably greater than in cinematic film. (Indeed, Beckett himself called television a “peephole art”. 23) Where these levels of expression had previously been brought out in the film – in the zoetrope eye and the eyes images 24 - it might, then, better retain their impact to limit the scale of the images.

I also liked the idea of smaller images for the close viewing they would necessitate, which reflects the attention and concentration that reading the text commands. I therefore decided first to use four small monitor screens and review the results.

I next thought about the ways in which the film and its soundtrack might be integrated in the installation. Layering of sound could create effects that were interesting and appropriate to Ping, as shown in my earlier experiments, where multiplying a voice recording had resulted in a rhythmic buzzing; a kind of aural blur (“blurs no meaning”). If, in the installation, the film was started at different times then this would also multiply the accompanying soundtrack, which could result in a similar polyphonic effect - increasing the complexity of the overall sound and making individual sounds more difficult to parse. At the same time, the staggering of the images that this would necessitate, seemed also to be appropriate, since in the manner of the literary cut-up (a surrealist technique in which text is chopped up and rearranged to create a new text 25), it would introduce aleatory effects into the work:

24 Ch.4: ‘Second Viewing - Viewer Inside and Outside’.
25 The cut-up technique was a staple of surrealist (literary and artistic) avant-garde practice in the
instances of *chance* synchronisation between image and sound. This could bring a
new set of potential connections to the work,\(^{26}\) as well as proffering a non-linear way
of viewing the work.

The final variables to consider were how the sound should be outputted in the space,
and the-location of the sound sources within the installation. If the multiple tracks
were heard from a single central location (i.e. layered through the same speakers) the
sounds would be made more difficult to attribute to a specific visual source, and thus
courage the viewer to look for and make new sound-image associations. One
option available here, was to play the sound through earphones located/suspended in
the centre of the space. The sound would be placed inside the viewer’s own head
rather than with the images, creating a kind of physical rupture between the sound
and the images, where it would be left up to the viewer to ‘attach’ sound to images.
This was an interesting idea, however, on reflection I felt that this would make the
experience physically static for the viewer. I envisaged a rather more fluid viewing
experience, where the viewer could move around the piece without constraint. In
addition, by playing the sound from a central location the structures I had designed
into the soundtrack (sound-image disjunctions, aural ‘insides’ and ‘outsides’ etc.)
would be lost. For these reasons I decided not to go down this route, and instead, to
think about playing each staggered audiotrack from a separate source.

If each of the four films played had its own sound source, this would open up the
relationship between the images and the sound allowing the viewer scope to ‘attach’
sounds to images (was thus a means of integrating the strategy of rupture between
image and sound identified in Chapter 4\(^{27}\)), whilst also retaining the audio effects and
structures of the soundtrack. Four separate sound sources would allow the sound to
combine in the centre of the space *and* to vary subtly depending on the viewer’s
location. Using this set up, I could take full advantage of the more active engagement
(visual, aural and physical) that multi-screen installation can produce, as the viewer
would be encouraged to move around, switching attention between screens and

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1920s, but was popularised in the 1950s/1960s by writer William S. Burroughs.

\(^{26}\) In addition to those between visuals across multiple screens.

\(^{27}\) Ch.4: ‘Second Revisiting the Text’. 
hearing different combinations of sounds.

In summary, after considering the options, I decided to use four screens facing one another, each with their own sound source, and to initially use small screens.28

I set up four monitors (each linked to its own DVD player) on plinths so they sat approximately at head height. These faced each other (see Fig. 5.2) to form a square area large enough for a viewer to stand inside of.29 One could also walk around and between the screens to view from different angles. The surrounding space was unlit apart from the light emitted from the monitors. The monitors’ speakers provided the multiple sound sources for the piece.

![Figure 5.2 Test set up of installation](image)

Whilst it seemed to me in the second ‘re-casting’ of the moving-images (‘Second Viewing’) that there was already a sense of the work ‘going on’ without traditional narrative, I had felt that the looping of the films would further reinforce the sense of irresolution and suspension within perpetual process. The single screen edit of film with synchronised soundtrack was thus set to loop automatically and burned onto four duplicate DVDs.

Aside from being looped and staggered, there were a number of options as to how

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28 Approximately 15 inch monitors.
29 Approximately 1.5 metres square.
the DVDs could be played, for example: started simultaneously, with sets of staggered start times, or at random intervals. Each of these options could have different visual and sound effects that resonate with what has been revealed so far about reading Ping. In light of this, I decided to test out some variations, to see what effects they had on the viewing and hearing experience:

1. **Simultaneous** - played through with all four DVDs starting at the same time.
2. **Random** - the four DVDs started at random intervals.
3. **Five-second staggered** - each DVD started in rotation with a five-second delay.
4. **In pairs (ten-second delay)** - facing screens starting at the same time; the second pair of monitors with a delay of ten seconds after the first.

The effect each of these is discussed in detail in the next section – ‘Third Viewing’.

5.1.4 ‘Third Making’ - summary

In this phase of practical activity I generated sound for the piece that was an extension of the reader-text interaction in Ping, and which was designed to reinforce the idea of process in the audio-visual work. Further to this, I developed an installation format - a four screen set-up each playing their own looped DVD – which could integrate the viewer physically into the processes, and expand the scope of the work to reflect the fluid subject-object relations in reading Ping.

Following the idea that discontinuity between image and sound works as a prompt for viewer activity and projection (identified through looking at Chion’s theory\(^{30}\)), I engineered some disjunction between the images and the soundtrack on the single film edit, to create a similar effect. I also had in mind that multiple staggered playback of the film in the installation format could extend this idea. With multiple staggered sound-sources, the sound could effectively create and move the viewer within a diversified collection of connections (the effect of chance synchronisation),

\(^{30}\) Ch.4: ‘Revisiting the Text - Recasting the Unfixed ‘Voice’

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Chapter 5: Installation Piece – Multi-screen with Sound
which would correspond to the experience of reading *Ping*. I therefore designed a number of options for the playback of the film on multiple screens with which to test my theory.

In the next section of the work (‘Third Viewing’), I ‘tested out’ the installation format I had devised to see how it translated when viewed.
5.2 Third Viewing

Each of the permutations in which I played the DVDs (Simultaneous, started at random, in rotation with a five second delay and paired with a ten-second delay) had different effects and degrees of success in relation to reflecting and furthering ideas of the reader-text interaction in *Ping*. What follows is a description and discussion of each version.

5.2.1 Simultaneous playback

As a baseline test of the installation set-up and audio-track I had created, I first viewed simultaneous playback of the film on all four screens. In this version, the sound element played out as if it was a single track. It functioned in more or less the same way as it would with a single-screen viewing of the film.31 The background ‘industrial drone’ provided a subtle background atmosphere throughout the duration of the images, and a suitable aural equivalent for the dispelling of ‘silence’ effect of the ‘sound-words’ in *Ping* discussed earlier. The process sounds I had designed contributed a sense of physicality to the piece as a whole. They also prompted me to think about the idea of creating and created figures throughout, as where these sounds had been ‘attached’ to particular sequences the images gained more immediate impact. Of these, the carousel body shots and eyes-blincs, in particular, stood out for me. The sound accompanying the carousel shots (of a ratchet being turned) reinforced the idea of a process being repeatedly undertaken, and the sense of cyclical movement in these sequences. I found that the paper-handling sounds edited to fit the short eye-blink sequences were reminiscent of the turning of a page. This sound suggested the idea of a change: moving on or starting afresh. Its abruptness and unexpectedness (being, as designed, a ‘solid’ sound coinciding with a ‘sound-

31 The single-screen film with sound can be viewed in the film-clip on the first of the accompanying DVDs.
less’ image) added to the interrupting effect of the blinks, so that as sound-images they seemed to ‘cut through’ the viewing in a manner analogous to the effect of the pings in reading the text. Thus, the blinks with sound formed a very successful audio-visual metaphor for the punctuating ‘blank’ effect of the pings in the text.

Clearly, the same images appeared all around the installation in this simultaneous playback. As a result, the visual effects I described in my first and second viewings were, I felt, reinforced here. For example, where previously “eyes” images on one screen transformed the image-space into a ‘mirror’ for the viewer, here, the eyes were a similar scale to my own and ‘looked at me’ from all around. This communicated more strongly the impression of being observed and undertaking the same action as the figure on screen.32 Similarly, the ‘blanks’ created by completely white screens, and the ‘frames within frames’ in the film33 were more discernable when multiplied around the work, and thus had a greater impact. When these structures manifested visually across the four facing screens, in a sense what emerged in the installation was a three-dimensional unfolding of textual meta-structures in Ping.

As well as magnifying existing effects, the duplication of the images around the space generated new effects and senses in the work. One such impression was of being ‘closed-in’ by the images, which was particularly noticeable when white images briefly surrounded the space. To the eye, the white film-screen34 is perceived as a solid surface, rather the transparent ‘window’ we expect to look through. Set among moving-images, as it was here, its appearance therefore had the potential to temporarily bring the image-space ‘forward’. The four surrounding screens, meant I felt this claustrophobic effect strongly – the images of cut-outs of bodies, blank paper etc. in the film generated the sensation of being enclosed within four ‘walls’.

Considered in conjunction with Ping, this physical situation in the installation is a representation of the temporary imaginative image that the reader may construct

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32 This was also perceptible in the paired playback (discussed later) though in a slightly less intense manner.
33 Ch.3: ‘First Viewing - Blurred Boundaries’.
34 The lit TV screen or the cinematic light projection that is not given dimension by the celluloid images that usually mask it.
during reading, of a body inside an unstable box,\textsuperscript{35} except that here, the viewer figures as the “body”. For me, this effect in the installation brought together two consequences of the re-processing of textual images (the surfaces) by the reader (creator) of \textit{Ping} in one concrete image: the formation of an image of confinement, and the suspension of the reader in perpetual process. If the imaginative ‘box’ we generate as readers is also the ‘space’ in which we are ‘trapped’, then by association, the “body” in \textit{Ping} could also represent the reader.

In addition, where sequences of body cut-outs (i.e. my images of body and surface elements combined) appeared on all four screens, the image of a body made up each surface of the ‘box’. The (cut-out) body-surface melded into the box-like frame of the work, as marked by the four screens, in a three-dimensional equivalent to the blurring between body, surfaces and frame of the text that I had identified previously when reading \textit{Ping}.\textsuperscript{36}

In contrast to the claustrophobic effect of a white screen in film, we perceive an all black screen as endless or voluminous space: “dark volumes in process of being constituted”.\textsuperscript{37} Thus, the black screens on all sides in the installation (e.g. shadow body images, fades to black etc.) had an opposite effect to the white ones: temporarily ‘pushing back’ the screen surface, and thus changing the perceived space. Simultaneous zoom shots (in or out), extended this sense of fluid ‘space’, giving the impression that the interior space of the work (between the four screens) was either closing-in or expanding-out around the viewer.

Simultaneous looped playback meant that the DVDs finished each cycle at the same time, and so gave a definite feeling in the work that an action/process (albeit unresolved) had occurred. Another benefit of the looping was that I registered the aesthetic similarity between the creating hands and the dark face (two ‘human’

\textsuperscript{35} Ch.2: ‘First Making – Surfaces’.
\textsuperscript{36} Ch.3: ‘First Viewing - Blurred Boundaries’.
photographic images) more strongly than I had in the single-screen viewing. The image of the creating hands appeared soon after the dark face as the films started on their next cycle, so I made an association between the two more readily.

A major drawback of the simultaneous approach, however, was that it made for a physically passive viewing experience. Since the images were on all the screens for the full duration of the piece, I needed only to focus on one screen in order to take in all of the moving-images in the film. This meant that, basically, I remained stationary during viewing. This version, therefore, did not encompass the degree of active engagement that I had envisaged in the installation or that I felt was appropriate to express that in reading Ping.

5.2.2 Random

When each film started at arbitrary times, the layered sound created a more interesting and variegated soundscape. Different images and sounds happening all around created a definite feeling of a cycle ‘going on’.

Chance synchronisation between the four sets of moving-images and four layered tracks, and the subsequent new connections that I had thought this would bring, was not, however, very much in evidence. I found that instead, the sound created physical movement in me as a viewer. Since different sound originated from each of the four monitor speakers, then throughout I tended to turn and watch the screen that was emitting particularly resonant sounds such as the ratchet, or abrupt sounds like the page turning. The fact that sound triggered my movement (as viewer) was commensurate with the unfixed voice in Ping prompting ‘movement’ in the mind of the reader. However, in this screening with four sets of these sounds the effect was over-dominant. It meant that the frantic sequences of the film (e.g. the carousel images) took precedence over others, and the viewing experience was extremely fragmented. Although the reader-text interaction of Ping is far from unified and linear, this manifestation was, I found, verging on the chaotic: there was almost too

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38 Ch.4: ‘Second viewing- Insides and outsides’.
39 This was achieve by starting the DVDs manually at random times.
much going on sensorially, and I was constantly turning from one screen to another.\textsuperscript{40} There was very little ‘space’ for psychological activity during the viewing, unlike the experience of reader-text interaction where blanks do provide this space.

In general, the sound in the random playback overrode the structures I had sought to bring out in the visual editing of the single screen film. The alternation between dark and light imagery built into the single screen edit, for example, was less discernable, and the zooms were also lost; since they were not accompanied with loud sound, one’s attention tended to be drawn elsewhere when they occurred. The sound in this set-up, therefore, had a rather dominant directorial and chaotic effect, which led me to discount this version for the final installation.

\subsection*{5.2.3 Five second staggered}

The relatively spare make-up of the single soundtrack worked well when the four films were played at five second intervals and staggered. The sounds mixed, rather than jarring or overwhelming the viewing experience. Here one was able to hear more of the subtle sounds, and take in more of the images than in the ‘random’ version. This version was less chaotic, which meant there was thus ‘space’ for making connections between images or between images and sounds. However, actions happening on one screen and then again very shortly afterwards on each successive screen meant that the structure of repetitions around the work was made very obvious, and in the end over-awareness of this dominated my viewing.

The repetition of sequences reinforced the idea of reprocessing elements in the work. At the same time, it meant that the film was perceived as starting and ending four times in each looped cycle. Watching this version, I felt also as if there were four ‘presences’ (or actions) around me. (This differed from the set up of four films playing simultaneously, where despite the multiples of images the sense was of one body shown on different screens.) Together, these conditions awarded a degree of

\textsuperscript{40} The obscuring effect of sound in this playback may have been lessened had the four staggered tracks instead been played through a central overhead speaker, however, one would then not get the sound interruption effect.
significance to this particular number (four) that had no correlate in the reader-text interaction of Ping.

5.2.4 In pairs (ten-second delay)

In this fourth version playback on facing screen began simultaneously, with the second pair of screens starting ten seconds after the first. The result was that, in comparison with the five-second staggered and random playback, this version gave a much stronger feeling of a ‘performance’. I felt that I had witnessed an action/process. Even with the duplication of the film in the second pair of screens, I was able to experience the contrast between the cyclical movement of the images and the final “over” of all of the screens going black at the end of each cycle. The delay between the two sets of films starting meant that I could fully focus on the initial cutting-out scene before the second set of films started; and, when the first set was finished, on the end scene of the dark face. This had previously only been possible in the simultaneous screening. Here the cross-connection between the two sequences – the hands and face being parts of the same creator or character figure – was much clearer. I had marked the end of the film with the dark face image. In this paired staggered viewing, it appeared twice: at the end of the first film and for a second time in the ending of the second (delayed) film. This happened to neatly reflect dual appearance of the black and white “eye” in Ping: near and at the end of the text.

With only two sets of different images and sounds playing, the general effect was significantly less chaotic than in the random viewing. I could get a sense of both calm sections and rapid movement, a contrast which meant that the abrupt images (e.g. the blinks and blank screens) had an appropriate power and emphasis to them. In addition, a level of reflection was possible that was not available in the other staggered versions. Here, for example, the ‘process’ sounds prompted me to think about the idea of creating and created figures (as in the simultaneous playback).

41 The filmclip on the second of the accompanying DVDs shows something of the effect of paired images. This was filmed projected on screens rather than on monitors in order to compensate for the difficulties of filming video-monitors. This version does not include sound.
42 Ch.3 – ‘Second Viewing - Multiple connections’.
Instead of the clashing of sounds in the random playback, the two staggered soundtracks intermingled. Sounds appeared less fixed to the images they accompanied in the DVD edit, and I could therefore better relate sounds from one set of monitors to the imagery seen on the others. As a result, I instinctively tried to attach sounds to images across the work, in a correlative way to how one responds to the unfixed ‘voice’ in Ping - by trying to attach it to elements and projected ‘figures’ in the text. A notable juxtaposition that emerged from this was my connection of the breath/mouth sounds, synchronised in the single edit to ‘human images’, with ‘non-human’ images. This evoked a different sense of presence inside the piece. As well as potential creators/characters in the work (the result of ‘human sounds’ synchronised with ‘human’ images), here there was the sense of an unseen viewing subject integrated within the diegesis. By opening up the relation between the (multiplied) visual object and the soundtrack, this particular staggering of the DVD playback increased the number of possible figurations that I could make, as a viewer of the work.

As in the random playback, I found that here the sound stimulated physical movement. Louder or more abrupt sound from another screen could attract my attention and prompt me to switch to the other set of images. With just two sets of sounds playing, however, there were less of these than in the ‘random’ and five-second delay versions, and so overall, this effect was less dominating. As a result, I felt more in control of the way I viewed the work. I could create my own ‘cuts’ between screens as well as responding to interrupting sounds from adjacent screens. Subsequently, it became apparent to me during viewing, that my decisions/actions were key in determining the relationships and ‘figures’ that I then created from the piece. In the act of viewing this version, therefore, there was a self-consciousness and the sense that I as viewer was also a ‘creator’ of the work.

I found that with only two sets of images played simultaneously, the structures that I had worked with in assembling the moving images: repeated body images becoming more complex/abstruse, visual continuity disrupted by ‘interrupting’ shots and
moving between insides and outsides,\textsuperscript{43} were just as discernable as in the simultaneous playback described earlier.\textsuperscript{44} The repetition of images and sequences in the film meant that, also like the simultaneous version, there were times here when I was surrounded by all cut-out or shadow bodies, eyes or white surfaces; occasionally of identical sequences in fact. I was therefore, able to experience the visual effects found in the simultaneous playback, e.g. the intensification of the effect of the screen-eyes, the connection of the dark face to the creating hands, and the sense of enclosure versus a fluid space etc., in this version too.

Often, I found that the paired sets of images here extended these effects. The sense of being set in a kind of enclosure described earlier, for example (a result of surrounding white images/screens), was physically reinforced in this screening. Watching the paired films from the centre of the four screens, I felt very aware of my physical orientation in relation to the work. Due to the paired sound – the same on facing screens – each time I moved I felt compelled to position myself with screens directly to my left, right, front and rear, i.e. with the source of visuals and sound directly in line with my visual and auditory sensory organs - ears side and eyes front. This struck me as a kind of embodiment of the ‘trap’ of Ping previously discussed - the idea of the recipient of the work being drawn and ‘caught’ within a conceptual space.

Another example of the extension of Ping effects in this version was created by the frequent appearance of two predominantly white images alongside and two predominantly black images: ‘outsides’ and ‘insides’ seen simultaneously (as in Fig. 5.3). In this combination of images, two facing screens functioned as ‘windows’ into a space (the dark ‘insides’), and the other two as flat surfaces (‘outside’). The effect for me as viewer was third and different perceptible space from the white enclosure or endless space of all black screens described earlier. Here, the viewing-space instead had the illusion of an elongated tunnel-like space - both appearing to extend out into the two facing ‘inside’ screens and stopping at the surfaces of the ‘outsides’

\textsuperscript{43} Ch.4: ‘Second Making’.
\textsuperscript{44} Here the ‘inside-outside’ alternations occurred between the two adjacent sets of screens (see Fig.5.4), as well as over time as happens on a single screen.
on the other two sides. The alternation between these three permutations of screen combinations over the duration of viewing created the sense of a constantly transforming three-dimensional space – a representation of an unstable ‘container’, an equivalent to that which the reader might construct in reading Ping (Ch.3: ‘First Making - ‘Surfaces’). This sense was further strengthened by the concurrent ‘zooms in’ and ‘zooms out’ which, it emerged, coincided on facing screens. In contrast to the same zoom shots all round in the simultaneous screening, this effectively constituted a concurrent ‘expansion’ and ‘contraction’ of the perceptible space of the work.  

The paired images also generated new effects in viewing when, for example mirrored and single body cut-outs appeared concurrently (Fig 5.4). As well as creating a kind of enclosure, it was clear that these images were singles and doubles of the same form in different positions. Thus, I got the impression of seeing the body from two different viewpoints simultaneously – a visual equivalent to the simultaneous perspectives the reader can adopt with respect to the elements and figures in reading the text.

More generally, in this version it was often the case that two quite different types of images - either in their figurative content, their lighting contrast or their movement - were perceptible simultaneously. Their differences encouraged me, as a viewer, to make comparisons between the images and look for connections between them. For example, the shapes of the ‘tunnel’ zoom in and those of the mirrored shadow sequence that was seen alongside it (Fig. 5.6) struck me as being particularly alike, such that they could appear to be positives and negatives of the same set of images. I found that their similarity made me further contemplate their ‘feminine’ shapes and fluid sensibility. A consequence of this was that I then noticed these as traits throughout, and fluidity and multiplicity was emphasised as a theme in the work. In some cases, this was revealing about the processes behind the work and thus the structures embedded it. When the body cut-outs appeared with projected shadow bodies (as in Fig 5.3), for example, the similarity between the kinds of shapes in the cut-out and those projected was clearly visible during viewing. Thus, it was possible

45 Ch.3: ‘First Viewing – Blurred boundaries’.
to make the connection that one set had been created out of the other. The chance pairing of images in this case reflected processes I had undertaken in creating the work. A visual similarity could also be discerned in the viewfinder-zoom and redrawn (mirrored) body images as they appeared together here (Fig 5.5). The same faces were visible in both images, implying there was a link between the two. One sees the faces through the camera viewfinder in one pair of screens, and can also apparently see them filmed in the other. Thus in viewing the two sequences in parallel one is both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the film apparatus (as one is in the zoetrope): in the position of the creator and viewer of the work.

Figure 5.3 Adjacent images: body cut-out and projected shadow body (paired play-back - 10s delay)

Figure 5.4 Adjacent images: mirrored and single layered body images (paired play-back - 10s delay)

46 Ch.3: ‘First Making – 1. Body’.
47 Ch.4: ‘Second Making - Recasting the “eye”’. 
This screening also created chance pairings where it seemed that the film was interacting with itself. For example, in several instances the body and eyes images were shown adjacent to one another (as in Fig. 5.7). From the central space, this could be perceived as eyes ‘viewing’ bodies across the work. Some of the re-drawn body images with digital film-scratch effect happened to appear alongside the camera-lens zoom (Fig. 5.8). Here, the zoom-in to the camera-lens that I had made gave the effect of a camera zooming in on its subject, at the same time the redrawn bodies were shown in increasing closeup. In this juxtaposition too, then, there was the sense that the one image was ‘viewing’ the other. As a camera lens, rather than eyes, it also related to the redrawn body image as its originator; the filmed image it produced. At the same time, the lens points directly out from the screen. Effectively trained on the viewer, the implication is that the viewer is its subject. The viewer is thus cast in the subject-position of the objectified body on screen, a clear shift from the sense in the first (cutting-out) scene of being in position of the creating subject.

This pairing, therefore, constituted a dynamic of multiple ‘looks’ and subject-positions. It effectively embodied the look of the camera recording the filmic event (camera-body relationship), the viewer’s voyeuristic look at the image, a look

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48 Originally created to make carousel body images (Ch.4: ‘Second Making - Re-casting the ‘Body/surfaces’) and later treated with a digital film-scratch effect to look like old film footage (Ch.4: ‘Second Making – Recasting the body’).
49 Also, in the absence of the viewer it is trained on itself, thus forming a self-reflexive dynamic.
50 See Ch.3: ‘First Viewing – Creator and created’. 
exchanged within the diagesis (the on-screen camera at the body), and additionally the screen ‘looking’ back at the viewer.

Figure 5.6 Adjacent images: zoom in and body shadow projections (paired play-back - 10s delay)

Another example of ‘interactivity’ between screens in this version occurred with some of the eye-blink images. Blinks often happened on one pair of screens immediately before image changes in the adjacent ones. This gave the impression that the blink was what effected these changes. Of these ‘blink effects’, the ones that stood out to me were: the fading to white of carousel body sequences, the rubbing away of the charcoal body trace, the white interrupting flashes and the appearance in and out of the frame of the sound-wave graphic. All of these were either visual-erasures or else interrupted the viewing, and preceded the appearance of a different type of image set. In the simultaneous playback and single screen viewing, the eye-blink represented and performed a blank by its appearance: its open-shut-open action enacted a blank and the shot interrupted viewing. In this version, the blink on one screen also then apparently provoked a further action on the other: a secondary visual negation and the appearance of a new image. This paired screening thus extended the sense in which the blink worked as a visual translation of reading a “ping”, by encompassing the negation performed by its appearance (Ch.2: ‘Pings as blanks’).

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52 Ch.3: ‘Making – 1. body - Second Re-casting - Material traces’.
A further visual pairing that suggested interactivity between screens occurred in the final moments of each looped cycle. Once the first film had finished, the second (ten-second delayed) film showed the image of the dark face. This happened just as the first face and full set of filmic images disappeared. Together with the intensity of the image – a human face peering out of the darkness - to me, the second face seemed to represent a figure contemplating the black of the film that has just ended; perhaps willing its return. This further reinforced the idea of this image as a response to the imploring “eye” in the text. I could also see this second face faintly reflected in the

*Figure 5.8 Camera lens zoom and ‘filmed’ body*
black of the two adjacent screens, giving the impression of an afterimage or residual trace left by the appearance of the face in the first film. This communicated the idea of a presence/figure that was split: as if the two images on two pairs of screens represented constituent parts of the same figure.

These ‘internal’ (self-reflexive) relationships that I had observed were the result of chance adjacent image-pairings that occurred with this particular time-delay, together with the increased opportunity for reflection that having just two sets of images to follow created. In light of this, it struck me that by keeping this (paired) playback structure (paired) but altering the delay, there was the potential to determine specific pairings of images that could strengthen some of the previous connections and relationships between images I had made in viewing the single-screen film (Ch.4). For example, if it were engineered that the dark face image and an eyes image were seen simultaneously then it would be more obvious that the eyes images (blinks, through-shots etc.) came from the same origins as the dark face. Thus, the idea that the two images could be representations of the same element or narratological figure in the film could be reinforced for the viewer of the installation. Similarly, the idea that the creating hands and dark face could constitute parts of the same creator or character figure could be made yet more manifest if these images were seen together, rather than following one another by way of the looped DVDs. This could again be built in by lengthening the delay between the two films starting. However, although changing the time delay might reinforce certain relationships in the work, others would be lost. The change in delay would inevitably create a different set of chance pairings to those I have discussed here, which I felt successfully reflected key aspects of the reader-text interaction in Ping. In light of this, I decided against changing the ten-second time-delay between pairs of DVDs, although it might be an option to consider for future development of the work.

Overall, this version of playback within the installation seemed to me to be the most effective of the variations I had tried. It seemed to ‘achieve’ most in relation to reflecting the experience of reading Ping, enabling figurative elements of the film to

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53 Ch.4: ‘Second Viewing – Multiple Connections’.
be connected more readily and in more ways than in the other multi-screen versions. I decided that this was the most appropriate format for the final piece.

5.2.5 ‘Third Viewing’ – summary

Viewed in this new incarnation – on multiple screens and with multiple sound sources – to me, the film had a different impact and a new vibrancy. The addition of surrounding sound and multiples of the visual material extended the film out into and across the installation space, thus further incorporating the viewer into the work. The experience of viewing the moving-image work was thus sensorially and conceptually altered to encompass a spatial aspect for the viewer – becoming an event that one is ‘inside of’.

On repeated viewings of the work, it was clear that the multi-screen installation format expanded the capacity of the piece to reflect the reader-text interaction in Ping, through the interactivity across multiple screens, the self-consciousness/reflexivity and the ‘transforming’ space it created in the work. It extended Ping effects discernable in the single-screen film: the ‘movement’ between inside and outside; the bringing of the viewer into the work as a ‘viewed’ subject; the ‘frames within frames’; self-reflexivity; and the eye-blink as a performative blank/negation. It also created new effects, such as the sense of being inside an unstable ‘container’ (‘trapped’ with in its processes) and the impression that, as its viewer, I was implicated in the processes of creating the work, as both its viewer and active creator (just as the reader is reader/creator in the act of reading Ping).

Furthermore, played in this staggered manner, the film and sound built up a suitably complex image and soundscape. This reflected the complexity that is, paradoxically, generated by reading what is a minimalist text.

The chosen format created a particular set of concurrent images, and sounds and images, which I found prompted me to make some new connections between the figurative images. Perhaps the most significant way in which reading the text was
reflected in the multi-screen format was in its staging of the viewer as a central figure in the work. As a viewer, I mediated the visual ‘blanks’ in the work, switching between the possible relationships amongst elements that the different pairings of images suggested to me. In this sense, I undertook an equivalent activity in viewing the work to that in reading the text. I was further integrated into the work as a result of the amplification of the changing status of the screen in the film - between ‘mirror’, ‘window’ and ‘surface’ - that occurred with multiple screens. Sets of images that had previously altered my sense of the (single) screen (e.g. eyes images creating the sense of a mirror, and white screens that of a surface), in the installation altered my perception of the viewing space, making this a more fluid arena.

The subject-object positions I assumed as viewer of the installation were more varied than those in relation to the single-screen work. The reinforced image combinations effectively set me in the position of the screen body, the eyes and the dark face at various points in the screening. As well as further ambiguating elements in the film, in the installation, my own subject-object position was fluid: I was ‘split’ during viewing, repeatedly adopting different positions simultaneously - viewer and creator/object/‘character’ etc. - over the course of the work. As spectator I was integrated as an element in the work.

Through this viewing, I was able to finalise the mode for the final piece: pairs of films played with a ten second delay. The work I had produced also offered the potential for further development. For example, I could easily have continued reprocessing the images by ‘testing’ them in further permutations of playback (with different time-delays etc.). This might have produced additional relevant effects, as different sets of images were allowed to ‘interact’.

In my last ‘revisiting of the text’, I returned finally to reflect on the relationship between the piece I had created and the reader-text interaction in Ping.
5.3 Third Revisiting the Text

5.3.1 The ‘shape’ of reader-text interaction

Nexus

Watching the installation, I saw new links among the film’s figurative elements (over and above those identified in earlier stages), between the screen-body and the viewer, and the viewer and the dark face. Thus, in the translation in its final incarnation, the nexus of relationships that could be created became yet more complex and comprehensive. As with those I had made in viewing the two previous ‘re-castings’ these found their equivalents in Ping. The viewer in the position of the body in the installation, for example, ‘viewed’ and ‘enclosed’ in a box-like space, suggests that the “body” could potentially represent the reader. In this way, through the accumulation of such associations over the course of the artistic development of this piece, I had built up a picture of numerous relationships that the reader of Ping can make, between the textual elements, and between figurative elements and projected narratological figures. A diagrammatical representation of these (Fig. 5.9 and 5.10) gives a sense of the complexity the text augurates. Furthermore, it demonstrates the potential inherent in the ambiguity of the text, and the reader’s unmistakable place in Ping - integrated as an element in the work. From my third viewing, therefore, I was able to re-read the text with a full sense of the complex network of connections and narrative positions possible in its interpretation.
Splits and Joins

I found, ultimately, that my relationship with the installation-work as a viewer unfolded through a series of splits and joins: viewing multiple images simultaneously, assuming positions of subject and object (‘viewed’ and viewer, creator and viewer, etc.), and being made conscious of my own activity throughout. In addition, by virtue of the multi-screen format and the internal interactions that this creates, it seemed to me that the work is itself characterised by instances of splitting. For example, each time the eyes appear, the work is effectively ‘observed’ by itself, temporarily splitting the images into subject and object, before resuming its former state. The image of the dark face ‘perceiving itself’ suggested a split creator or character figure inside the work. Over the work’s duration, it thus divides into different ‘subjects’, each of which both ‘perceives’, and are themselves perceived, from different angles. The visual blanks (blank screens, blinks etc.) and ‘interrupting’ shots and sounds constitute further instances of this dual structure in the work. These embody both visual and aural ‘cuts’ in the film viewing, and instigate ‘joins’ - the connections that they prompt the viewer to make.
The notion of simultaneous splits and joins resonates across Ping in a number of ways. Firstly, as discussed early on, the words’ repetition and disconnection from one another create a split in the reader, as these make us aware of our own act of reading.\(^5\) Also, re-reading the text, there are might be regarded as hints of this ‘splits and joins’ structure in the phrases: “white scars invisible”, “seamed like sewn” and “joined like sewn”. Most centrally, however, it is implicit in the simultaneous gapping and connectivity of the blanks in the text. As we have seen, the direct result of blanks is the reader’s activity to attempt to join what are disparate elements. It is to these central structures - the syntactic blanks, the omission of traditional prose features, the undisclosed gender of the “body”, negated images, the pings, the ‘sound words’ and the unfixed ‘voice’ – that I have primarily responded in the process of creating the installation, thus it is from these and the accumulation of images they provoked that the viewing experience described above came about.

From this, it can be surmised that the performative effect of the accumulation of blanks in Ping, is a reader experience that is premised on, and is characterised by, an active and pervasive splitting and joining. In response to cumulative blanks, the reader initiates and is subjected to the endlessly changing subject-object positions of the textual elements in relation to one another.

5.3.2 The installation

Having evolved the moving-image installation by developing visual and aural equivalents for the active reader-response the text provokes, the work that resulted embodied these processes and structures. I would therefore argue that my final moving-image work is an audio-visual translation that re-constructs the reader-text exchange in Beckett’s Ping. It reflects and embodies the textual processes in Ping and the aesthetic object that these produce, in a wide range of ways. These include through its general structure; non-linearity, image repetition and alternation (e.g. between ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ or ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ sequences); its

\(^5\) Ch.2: ‘Hearing Ping’ and ‘Speaking Ping’.
aesthetic/aural qualities (e.g. a cycle of monochromatic images, stop-start movement, expansion/contraction and ‘interrupting’ sounds); and in its narratological fluidity (changing subjects and objects, and configurations of ‘figures’). It is also reflective in its engagement with the idea and effect of blanks or gaps (i.e. in its metamorphoses of the elements in Ping into visual negations and fluid (feminine) ‘un-figurations’ etc.) and in the relationships between its images, which are characterised by multiplicity, ambiguity, self-reflexivity and irresolution.

The installation is also representative in the way in which it engages its recipient. In my experience, it actively invites the viewer to reprocess its images; to switch physically between the surrounding images, to assume changing subject-object positions, and to attempt to consolidate the figures that this suggests. As a viewer, one is thus set within, and a contributor to, the (reconstructed) space and processes of an aesthetic object of Ping. In this sense, through participation in the artwork the viewer (through their imaginative processes) continues the action I undertook in constructing the piece - the ‘re-casting’ of the filmic images shown. By inviting this response, the artwork thus extends the idea that the text instigates an ongoing process for the reader.

My (visual and aural) aesthetic object of Ping thus both embodies and instigates a continual active making and re-making, where the viewer is positioned as both ‘caught’ and ‘creator’. By embodying the processes of reading the text in this way, I would argue that the installation thus makes visible the performative workings and ‘trap-like’ form of the reader-text engagement in Ping.

5.3.3 Third Revisiting the Text – summary and conclusions

Reflecting on the text in relation to the artwork I had made, revealed the extent of the ambiguity and potentiality in Ping, and that the central source of its complex and fascinating effects is in its multitude of gaps.
The depth created in reading the text is made tangible by the work I have created. The moving-image installation coalesces and interrelates in a way that is analogous to reading the elements in *Ping*: creating fluid multiple senses and inter-relationships (including with the viewer/reader), which importantly are not the result of narrative development over time. It represents, in its making and viewing, an equivalent to the interaction experienced in reading *Ping*: the sense in which the textual object makes the reader respond in an active and creative way, becoming integrated into the processes it engenders.

I would therefore argue that the installation I have created forms what is ostensibly an exploded 3-D audio-visual diagram of the aesthetic object of *Ping*, in that it shows the components of the ‘mechanism’ unfolded and how they relate. The artwork has made visible the extent of the multiplicity, splitting, fluidity and movement that results from reading the text, both through its creation and the effect it creates when viewed, reinforcing my original premise that the most appropriate form of investigation for an artwork such as *Ping* is the creation of an artwork.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Summary

The aim of this project was to explore the idea that Samuel Beckett’s *Ping* is a text that ‘performs’, by adopting a new practice-based approach to the text: translation into moving-image.

*Ping* is traditionally considered a ‘difficult’ piece of prose. Challenging conventional notions of plot, character and syntax, and premised on ambiguity, it is a radical work and an extreme example of Beckett’s avant-garde approach to writing.

Much of the previous critical writing on *Ping* has essentially viewed the text under the auspices of modernism, and as such has focussed on what might be classed as the negative aspects of this form of literary expression. The focus has been on the reductionism of the text, its difficulties and on its ‘narrative’ as denoting a move towards a static, silent state. The traditional approach of referentially reducing the text to try to extract a single ‘hidden’ meaning has dominated its interpretation.

On reading the text myself I felt that this mimetic interpretive approach stood in opposition to its active nature; the mobility, multiplicity and generative quality of the text.

Hints of this active nature have been found in previous research, which suggested that elements of *Bing* (*Ping*’s forerunner) worked in a performative way. Considering this, I felt that by applying an extended notion of this performativity to *Ping* (i.e. beyond that of the “pings”), and switching the focus of its analysis from traditional
mimetic interpretation to the reader’s activity, greater understanding of the text could be gained. This focus on the reader-text interaction of Ping was, I felt, missing from previous research. Reading Ping I felt that active process was key, primarily the continued and constantly changing engagement between reader and text. Moreover, a review of the literature on Ping suggested a more open-ended approach was required in order to accommodate the complexities of the text. As an artist myself, it seemed, then, appropriate to respond with another active and open-ended process: that of creating an artwork.

As a medium that ‘does’ and ‘shows’, I considered moving-image a suitable format in which to explore and make visible the performative aspects of the text/reader-text interaction in Ping. In addition, I felt there were interesting parallels between aspects of filmic-media and the experience of reading the text, which meant it might prove a useful visual correlate. I also felt that by raising medium specific questions, the process of translating the text into moving-image might draw out its visual and aural processes. This practice-based approach to researching a literary text is I believe, novel in relation to Ping.

Moreover, in addition to providing me with insight on the workings of Ping, my intention was that the moving-image piece I created should also stand independently of this thesis as an artwork in its own right; an engaging piece of (Beckett) art which produces its own complex set of alternative readings for an external viewer.

### 6.2 The translation process - actions and insights

#### 6.2.1 First stage

The first stage in the translation process (Chapter 2) was to examine the text in close detail with the focus on its performative (visual and aural) aspects.

I began by deconstructing the ‘difficulties’ of the text in the light of Iser’s reader-
response theory. This introduced the idea of ‘blanks’ and negations as key performative structures in the text, aspects not previously identified in other research, which have the effect of the reader endlessly processing irresolvable images. Reading these in combination with Gell’s theories of pattern and of the trap suggested cognitive resistance and the idea of the reader as split between the positions of creation and suspension in the visualisation process as potentially key in reading Ping. Gell’s structure also prompted an early unfolding of the central textual feature of the “ping”, as working performatively in the manner of a blank. Parallels between Ping and complex pattern/the trap, moreover, suggested these as useful correlative frameworks to explore and develop in the practice. Through these frameworks, I generated some fundamental strategies for visualising the processes in the text; firstly, a position from which I could approach the work - reader as maker; and secondly a general structure for the work – a cyclical process of making and reflecting.

I next considered the effect of Ping’s form on its reading. This brought out what I consider the essential aurality of the text – its words experienced as sounds and the propensity it has for making us sound the words. Following this cue, I experimented with the text read aloud. This initiated the idea that being suspended within process was enacted aurally/physically in reading Ping and suggested ‘un-fixedness’ as a strategy to take through into the art-practice. It also exposed the text’s words and phrase repetition as effecting self consciousness within reading, and therefore as a further source of splitting - a central experience of reading the text suggested by my application of Gell’s psychological and aesthetic structures earlier.

6.2.2 Second Stage

In the first major stage of the art-practice (Chapter 3), I created the beginnings of a visual manifestation of the effect (and action) of reading Ping. Immediately, the process of translation into moving image brought into focus the question of gender in the piece. Portrayal in a visual medium meant that a decision had to be made as to the gender of the (albeit fragmented) “body” in the text. I was thus, directed to
examine this aspect of the text early on. After considering the gender indeterminacy of the body in the text and the effect this had in prompting me to question and project this element’s possible gender (and thus its status as a further blank in the text), I chose a female body (my own). With the resulting subtext of female subjectivity and self-reflexivity this brought, further layers of complexity were added to the artwork.

The idea/use of negative space in visual art and photography, and the repetitive action integral to animation enabled me to unpack the idea of blanks and negations in Ping in a suitably performative way - by re-constructing the visual and active effect (visualising and re-visualising) they create in reading the text. Through this, I established some fundamental strategies and techniques to further structure the visual translation, beginning with the general strategy of responding to elements’ appearance in the text by creating sets of images. In addition, by applying individual visual techniques to textual elements (e.g. the ‘condensation’ of images), and by the reframing of each ‘making’ as a re-casting of the work as a whole, I could both recreate the process and outcome of the accumulation of images created in reading Ping.

Viewing the first set of images that resulted, I was struck by the ‘opening scene’ in which, I realised, I had instinctively projected the potential narratological figures of a ‘creator’ and of a character. Revisiting the text in light of this, I found that the ambiguity of the elements in Ping meant that the reader could link them in a variety of ways. A result of this was that, despite the lack of characters and narrators in the text, one could project narratological figures (although none of these could be clearly ‘fixed’). Thus it could be said that such figures feature during reading through projection by the reader. Although previous work has touched on this subject in relation to Ping prior to this research (Gontarski, 1995), the full extent of the interrelationship of its ‘elements’ and the operations around the potential conceptualisation of narratological figures had not been explored. My further identification of this central (reader) activity of projection reiterated the centrality of the reader’s desire in the text and suggested something of the complexity involved in reading Ping. In considering potential narratological figures in Ping, the ‘voice’ of
the text was introduced; an additional element which was particularly fluid in its relationship to the other elements. Finally, in viewing eyes shots I realised the viewer could be set as a ‘viewed’ object. As images produced in response to and based on an element in the text, this introduced the idea of fluid reader-text subject-object relations in Ping.

6.2.3 Third stage

In the second phase of art-practice (Chapter 4), I constructed further images as a response to elements of the text, and used structures generated by my close reading of Ping (blanks, ‘unfixed-ness’, alternation and repetition) and my previous practice (the idea of sets of potential and transient connections) to assemble the piece. The mechanism of the medium of moving-image suggested visual metaphors for the remaining elements, for example, the opening and closing of the eye as the active blank of the “ping”. Furthermore, the aesthetic ‘gapping’ of filmic-media (cuts between scenes etc.) provided an effective correlate to the gaps in Ping. Using editing and the time-based nature of moving-image I could, therefore, reconstruct the form and sense of the dynamic movement blanks give rise to in the reading process – i.e. a stop-start movement as they interrupt and then prompt visualisation.

When I viewed the work that this stage of activity produced, I found I made multifarious links between sequences; essentially undertaking a further reprocessing of the images to try to fix narratological figures. On reflection, this mirrored the effect produced by reading the indeterminacy between the elements in Ping. I thus had a growing realisation that the actions I was undertaking in viewing, paralleled the experience of reading Ping. In addition, my combination of filmic metaphors (e.g. on-screen film apparatus), intermittent eyes close-ups and the previously mentioned ‘creator’ in the work, inaugurated an ongoing sense of fluid viewer subject-object relations and an awareness of my own activity in viewing. As a result, I felt I was beginning to be integrated into the work through the adoption of different positions: viewer and ‘viewed’ as well as and viewer and creator. Reading the text through the moving-images I had created from it, it was therefore made evident that the
multifarious links between elements in *Ping* included the reader, and as such the reader could be integrated as an element of the text.

At this point, translation into the medium of moving-image raised the question of sound in the text. In response, I re-read *Ping* to consider the text in terms of sound. Re-reading *Ping* with this aural focus revealed new similarities between the functioning of ‘sound words’ in the text (the mechanics of which had not previously been examined in literature on the text) and other of its features. I found that these words also worked performatively, in the manner of the structures of blanks in the text. The ‘sound words’, therefore, like the unfixed ‘voice’ in the text, prompted the questioning and projection of different spaces and narratological figures.

**6.2.4 Fourth stage**

In my third major re-casting and final stage of the art-practice I developed the work into a multi-screen installation with sound (Chapter 5). Using film-sound as correlate, I reappropriated Chion’s articulation of unfixed voices in film as a framework for applying sound to the moving-images. I found that the play with conjunction/disjunction between the sound and the image that this suggested, and the curating of the work (the addition of multiple screens and looping) transformed the viewing experience and deepened the work. The installation produced demanded a more active visual, aural and physical engagement, thus, as viewer, I could fully engage with the cyclical and active nature of the reading process in *Ping*, in a way that had not previously been done. In combination with the filmic effects produced in the earlier major re-castings (e.g. of moving inside and outside, a self-consciousness, being ‘viewed’) this final re-casting also established the viewer as fully integrated in the work, and represented the gamut of figures that could be projected in reading *Ping* through its image connections.

Having created the work by using visual correlates for the process of reading, the complex operations and form of the reader-text interaction of *Ping* were embedded in the work. As a result, through viewing the installation, the full extent of the
complexity created in the textual processes of Ping and the degree to which the reader is integral to these processes was made clear. It is, for example, possible to make links between all of the main elements of the text during reading and each ‘human’ element has the potential to be interpreted as a ‘narrator’ and/or a ‘character’. The textual repetitions and the pervasive structures of blanks across the work (syntactic blanks, the omission of traditional prose features, the undisclosed gender of the “body”, negated images, the pings and the ‘sound words’) all inaugurate a dynamic action of continual splitting and joining within the diegesis and also in the reader.

Thus in this research, through considering the text’s performative aspects, re-enacting the process of reading visually, responding to (medium-specific) questions that were raised by artistic practice, and periodic reflection on both the artwork and the text, a number of new structures and their effects within reading the Ping were unfolded. In both its process of construction and in the viewing of its final incarnation (engaging with the embodiment of these structures), the artwork therefore provided valuable insights into the structures/actions of the text.

6.3 Final reflections on Ping in the light of its visual translation

From the visual and aural translation of the text that I have undertaken it has become clear that the ‘dead-ends’ of totalising (mimetic) interpretation described in previous research - the gaps and ambiguity of Ping - are, in fact the source of multitudinous interpretations and creative ideational activity for the reader. As a result of the many and wide-ranging gaps in Ping, the text ultimately refuses to figure in the manner in which the reader is trained to desire – as a single interpretation based on the resolution of its aesthetic object. Through the response that blanks and negations create in the reader, this traditional outcome is replaced by visualisation after visualisation (image after image) ad infinitum, and furthermore, a consciousness of the activity he/she is undertaking. Moreover, the extent to which the blanks figure
means that the reader at the same time assumes a position as creator of the text, complicit in these processes. The constantly changing aesthetic object and its ‘captivating’ process effectively becomes Ping’s central ‘image’ for the reader. Thus, in reading Ping, the reader forgoes a forward movement towards resolution, and is instead directly engaged in a trap-like ‘narrative form’: a cyclical making and re-making of the aesthetic object (which complicates but does not resolve), where this ‘object’ is both constituted by, and ‘captures’ the reader.

By reading (the gaps in) Ping, one has an experience that is not available from mainstream prose. In response to the performative aspects of the text, the reader must self-consciously visualise, sound, mobilise and engage with the resistance of Ping; essentially ‘performing’ the text. It takes us out of the world of convention and in doing so, reveals that language and visualisation are psychologically related, through processes of projection and narrative desire.

6.4 Recasting

Over the course of the translation, the extent to which ‘re-casting’ was appropriate as a structure for making became clear. ‘Re-casting’ was apt to describe the overall approach to the creative practice (the act and the work produced at each main stage), as well as the processes interior to it. Each of my three acts of ‘making’ resulted in a new visual (or audio-visual) configuration or re-casting that was more complex and representative than the one before. Within each making stage I also undertook/created re-castings of individual elements of the text. The visual techniques I developed for this: visual negations (Ch.3); mirroring (Ch.4); suggesting more than one Ping element in image (Ch.4); and employing multiple-screens (Ch.4/5), embedded a condensed set of interrelated images and possible relationships into the artwork which reflected those in reading Ping.

The complication that (both main and internal) re-castings constituted - a
concentration or a ‘folding together’\(^1\) - served as an appropriate way of reconstructing the complexity created when reading the text. By re-casting elements repeatedly and subsequently, allowing them to ‘coalesce’ in the final installation I was able to engage with their paradoxically generative effect - the multitude of images and relationships they afford when read. Undertaking this in stages interjected with periods of reflection, meant that I could simultaneously unfold the intricacies of the reader-text relationship in *Ping*.

Re-casting was also demonstrated in this study to be particularly apt as a strategy for translating *Ping*, since it was (potentially) an indefinite process. As maker, I could have continued to re-cast the images and sound ad infinitum - re-creating the work in ways analogous to the activity of the reader in response to the text - and then re-mapping its effects against the text.

### 6.5 The artwork

In addition to providing me with insight into the processes of reader-text interaction, my intention was that the final moving-image piece should stand as an artwork in its own right for an external viewer. In this public arena, it would be framed in an exhibition simply as a new work created as a result of reading *Ping*. A title along the lines of ‘Traces blurs signs no meaning’ or ‘fixed ping fixed elsewhere’ would link the work with its Beckettian origin whilst allowing the viewer to come to his or her own conclusions.

By nature of what I did to construct the work – the creative interrelation of a diverse set of ideas and theoretical concerns (pertaining to aesthetic theory, visual anthropology, film-making, and avant-garde art practice) – the artistic result is by definition multifarious, and contains a range of embodied references that are available to the viewer. It thus has a sense of depth resulting from its multiple layers

\(^1\) I use “complication” in the sense of the Latin “complicare”.
and the intellectual basis from which it is formed, together with a capacity to raise questions. These are characteristics that I feel are key to artworks, and are also effects of Beckett works.

For the viewer (independent of my research aims and the Ping text), the installation is non-linear, mobile, cyclical and ambiguous. The extent to which the processes I undertook in creating the piece are embodied/made explicit in the images and sounds (e.g. the visual negations etc.) means that, in my opinion, many of these are clearly evident. Furthermore, by the repetition of the images and sounds these are communicated repeatedly to the viewer. This suggests the sense of an ongoing process in the work.

Just as is the case with Ping, it is possible to draw mimetic interpretations from the moving image piece, based on the visual subject matter. One might perhaps conclude, for example, that as a work it is concerned with aspects of feminine subjectivity, or else is a self-portrait of sorts. This is determined by the individual cultural experience that each viewer brings to it. Though a valid response, the singular adoption of such an interpretation is a closing down of the work enacted by the viewer after the fact, and only serves to reiterate the desire of the viewer/reader to consolidate in which Ping plays.

What I would argue is most prominent in viewing the piece is rather its fluidity, potentiality, and the way in which it integrates its viewer. With the choice of images that the viewer can view and the ‘interrupting sounds’, the images in the work can be absorbed in a number of different ways depending on the viewer’s personal (physical, visual and aural) response. The connections that can be made between and from them are thus multiple and fluid. Add to this the fact that potential characters and narrators are suggested, but not determined, and that the viewer can form a sense of either a fractured single figure or multiple figures from the work, and the piece becomes particularly resistant to singular interpretation. It instead actively invites the viewer to ‘reprocess’ its images (provoking ideational activity by its visual and aural ‘blanks’), to attempt to consolidate what are irresolvable visual and aural elements in
the piece. In addition to this, the viewer is potentially (in the same way that I was in viewing) subject to changing subject-object positions and a changing sense of the space. As in the reading of Ping the viewer of the installation is then in a dual position; on the one hand he/she is ‘trapped’ within a perpetual (impossible) process, however, by the extent to which he/she is also engaged in significant creative ‘work’, he/she is also set as its ‘creator’.

I would therefore suggest that, independent of knowledge of the text, my thesis and the intricacies of the processes I undertook, the installation offers the viewer a visual and auditory experience that is equivalent to that in reading Ping. It involves significant (physical and ideational) activity in its viewer in the form of questioning around narratological figures, the reprocessing of images, imaginative movement and the generation of multiple interpretations; what I have found to be the key activities in reading Ping. Thus in addition to being an engaging multifarious artwork, the piece has the potential to communicate insight into the text for an external viewer.

From this, I can conclude that moving-image translation proved to be a sympathetic approach in which to explore the text in a number of ways: by providing a suitable medium in which to (visually) re-enact the process of reading, by focussing investigation of the text in a new and more appropriate way, and in creating a correlative response to reading Ping in an independent viewer.

6.6 Future work

As mentioned earlier, there is considerable potential to extend the research in this project by continuing the creative process of re-casting. Possibilities include playing the DVDs in further permutations or with different time-delays, to see what further connotations are produced.

In addition, new moving-image pieces could be created by recasting individual
textual elements. This could be used to address particular ideas that arose in the course of the *Ping* translation, for example relating to the unfixed voice. My decision to use animation initially came from the ‘stop-frame’ feel of the images in *Ping* – the sense in which the text feels as if it is constructed from ‘stills’. It soon became clear that the potential within animation to make something which is ‘lifeless’ (an artefact) move through the use of sequential images was particularly relevant to *Ping*. The contrast between the apparent stillness and ‘silence’ of the object of the text, and the mobility afforded by the reader’s activity in response to it, is encapsulated by the use of this medium as a visual correlate. A related parallel might also be made with the metaphor of ventriloquism – the inanimate object made active by an external voice - something that could be inferred from the idea of the movement of the ‘voice’ in the text and the puppet-like ‘body’ in *Ping*. The concept of the ventriloquial voice strikes me as something that might usefully be developed as a framework for further practice-based work on *Ping*; to further tease out ideas around the unfixed voice, ‘splits’ and ‘seams’ in *Ping*. This could be a context in which I could use actual voice (for example, the female voice with intermittent reverb discussed earlier,\(^2\)) to explore and render the ambiguity of the voice in the text; does the body ‘speak’ the voice or does the voice ‘speak’ the body? In a related vein, the correlate of pattern might be further explored with respect to *Ping*, in terms of its ability to make “objects come alive in a non-representational way” (Gell, 1998, 76). By developing the pin-hole images I created,\(^3\) it might be possible to exploit this facet of pattern to reveal further aspects of *Ping*.

An additional area that might prove fertile for further work is that of the notion of female subjectivity, a possible subtext created from reading the text. I touched on ideas of play with gender through my use of a female figure in the work, and in feminine symbolism as a parallel for the fluidity and multiplicity created in reading *Ping*. However, I felt that there was more that could be drawn out from this.

Similarly, my exploration into the use of intertitles might be developed. Although in

\(^2\) Ch.5: ‘Third Making – Sound – 1. Voiceover’.

\(^3\) See Fig. 4.1 in Ch.4: ‘Second Making – Recasting the ‘body/surfaces’”.

Chapter 6: Conclusion
this context the use of textual inserts proved inappropriate, intertitles could be used in a related work combined with the sets of abstracted body images, yet unused to further explore ideas of showing and hiding, and the effects of disjunction between text and image as a correlate to the Ping text and the visualisations it produces.

Finally, with respect to the approach as a whole, it seems to me that this mode of investigation may also have wider applications. As an effective, alternative means of understanding the mysteries and the psychological and aesthetic basis of Ping, it is conceivable that this practice-based approach could be applied to other later 20th century avant-garde texts. Certainly, as an example of the successful exploration of text through practice, it could provide a useful frame of reference for future textual investigation by other art-practitioners.

6.7 Final Remarks

The research in this thesis sought to advance knowledge in the field of Beckett Studies by examining the short prose piece Ping using a novel practice-based approach to the text: translation into moving image.

Through the performative, aural and visual focus it gave, translation into moving image enabled me to open up the space between the reader and the text and engage directly with the reader-text interaction that is its key, an aspect of Ping that had not before been studied.

Re-reading Ping through the act of creating (artwork) successfully revealed its latent visuality, aurality and its ‘performative’ aspects, the extent of which had not previously been identified. It revealed, most notably, its blanks and the active way that these work with respect to the reader - prompting creative activity and determining that the aesthetic object of the text remains perpetually ‘in process’. This

4 See Appendix 4.
perpetual, active ‘making and unmaking’ of the text by the reader, was made visible by undertaking equivalent (visualisation) processes in an audio-visual medium. It is also embodied and thus can be experienced in the artwork that these processes produced.

I would argue that Ping has indeed, therefore, been found to be a text that ‘performs’ - acting on the reader to make him/her ‘create’. My novel approach of translation into moving-image has allowed this to be shown, and furthermore, has enabled the intricacies of the text to be deconstructed out. From this, I can conclude that moving-image translation is an effective approach for the exploration of Ping.
Appendices

Appendix 1 – *Ping* by Samuel Beckett¹

Ping

ALL KNOWN all white bare white body fixed one yard legs joined like sewn. Light heat white floor one square yard never seen. White walls one yard by two white ceiling one square yard never seen. Bare white body fixed only the eyes only just. Traces blurs light grey almost white on white. Hands hanging palms front white feet heels together right angle. Light heat white planes shining white bare white body fixed ping fixed elsewhere. Traces blurs signs no meaning light grey almost white. Bare white body fixed white on white invisible. Only the eyes only just light blue almost white. Head haught eyes light blue almost white silence within. Brief murmurs only just almost never all known. Traces blurs signs no meaning light grey almost white. Legs joined like sewn heels together right angle. Traces alone unover given black light grey almost white on white. Light heat white walls shining white one yard by two. Bare white body fixed one yard ping fixed elsewhere. Traces blurs signs no meaning light grey almost white. White feet toes joined like sewn heels together right angle invisible. Eyes alone unover given blue light blue almost white. Murmur only just almost never one second perhaps not alone. Given rose only just bare white body fixed one yard white on white invisible. All white all known murmurs only just almost

never always the same all known. Light heat hands hanging palms front white on white invisible. Bare white body fixed ping fixed elsewhere. Only the eyes only just light blue almost white fixed front. Ping murmur only just almost never one second perhaps a way out. Head haught eyes light blue almost white fixed front ping murmur ping silence. Eyes holes light blue almost white mouth white seam like sewn invisible. Ping murmur perhaps a nature one second almost never that much memory almost never. White walls each its trace grey blur signs no meaning light grey almost white. Light heat all known all white planes meeting invisible. Ping murmur only just almost never one second perhaps a meaning that much memory almost never. White feet toes joined like sewn heels together right angle ping elsewhere no sound. Hands hanging palms front legs joined like sewn. Head haught eyes holes light blue almost white fixed front silence within. Ping elsewhere always there but that known not. Eyes holes light blue alone unover given blue light blue almost white only colour fixed front. All white all known white planes shining white ping murmur only just almost never one second light time that much memory almost never. Bare white body fixed one yard ping fixed elsewhere white on white invisible heart breath no sound. Only the eyes given blue light blue almost white fixed front only colour alone unover. Planes meeting invisible one only shining white infinite but that known not. Nose ears white holes mouth white seam like sewn invisible. Ping murmurs only just almost never one second always the same all known. Given rose only just bare white body fixed one yard invisible all known without within. Ping perhaps a nature one second with image same time a little less blue and white in the wind. White ceiling shining white one square yard never seen ping perhaps way out there one second ping silence. Traces alone unover given black grey blurs signs no meaning light grey almost white
always the same. Ping perhaps not alone one second with image always the same same time a little less that much memory almost never ping silence. Given rose only just nails fallen white over. Long hair fallen white invisible over. White scars invisible same white as flesh torn of old given rose only just. Ping image only just almost never one second light time blue and white in the wind. Head haught nose ears white holes mouth white seam like sewn invisible over. Only the eyes given blue fixed front light blue almost white only colour alone unover. Light heat white planes shining white one only shining white infinite but that known not. Ping a nature only just almost never one second with image same time a little less blue and white in the wind. Traces blurs light grey eyes holes light blue almost white fixed front ping a meaning only just almost never ping silence. Bare white one yard fixed ping fixed elsewhere no sound legs joined like sewn heels together right angle hands hanging palms front. Head haught eyes holes light blue almost white fixed front silence within. Ping elsewhere always there but that known not. Ping perhaps not alone one second with image same time a little less dim eye black and white half closed long lashes imploring that much memory almost never. Afar flash of time all white all over all of old ping flash white walls shining white no trace eyes holes light blue almost white last colour ping white over. Ping fixed last elsewhere legs joined like sewn heels together right angle hands hanging palms front head haught eyes white invisible fixed front over. Given rose only just one yard invisible bare white all known without within over. White ceiling never seen ping of old only just almost never one second light time white floor never seen ping of old perhaps there. Ping of old only just perhaps a meaning a nature one second almost never blue and white in the wind that much memory henceforth never. White planes no trace shining white one only shining white infinite but that
known not. Light heat all known all white heart breath no sound. Head haught eyes white fixed front old ping last murmur one second perhaps not alone eye unlustrous black and white half closed long lashes imploring ping silence ping over.

Translated by the author
Appendix 2 – Musical Collaboration

This appendix documents the construction of a musical work that I instigated as a preliminary part of this project, which was musically produced by a co-collaborator (Pete Harvey, BMus.).

The primary rational of creating a musical piece based on Ping, was to better understand the impetus behind other composers’ creation of ‘Ping music’. As a non-musician I found it difficult to sufficiently compare ‘Ping music’ that others have produced (outlined in Chapter 1), with the Ping text, particularly when many of these works are unavailable as recordings (Gnazzo et al.)

Once embarking on this exploratory experiment, my thought was to produce and work this piece of music to a finished state (of an orchestrated recording) so that it might stand as a work in its own right. In practice, the emergent differences between the piece and the text, meant that I felt that this would not necessarily add to the overall project (although exciting pieces could easily have been produced from the work that had been done). The work thus exists as a written score and digitally generated/piano recording, and to my mind remain ‘in-progress’. Its significance within the overall project (and thesis), rather became to rule out certain approaches and in refining my own view of the text (sometimes through a mismatch between the feel of the musical piece produced and the original text). This change was not because of the quality of the work, which was produced by its composer with artistic integrity and a great deal of skill – but because this collaboration took place early in the research process, so it is inevitable that it is positioned as exploratory rather than conclusive.

My intention was not to set the text to music (although the composer chose to use the

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2 Although some scores are published (see Bryden, 1998) this is not a format that I am able to make use of.
Rather than focusing on the text directly, but rather to intimate aspects of the text musically. I was able to define the terms and keep within a rough objective framework for this musical experiment, but having outlined these I felt it was prudent to leave space for the practitioner to make creative judgments according to his own musical experience and working methods. The approach taken was based on the purposes for which the piece was designed and the individual working methods of the composer, thus it took the form of a serialist approach, which related to that of Clarence Barlow’s Text music 6.

‘Serialist Ping’ (a collaboration with Pete Harvey, 2006)

I discussed the previous Ping musical works with my collaborator and it was decided to create a piece that was directly based on the text as it is printed. The following is a description of the techniques used to create the work by its composer.

The central point on a standard 88 key piano keyboard is a semitone interval of E4 and F4. This became the fulcrum of the work. Initially one note, or sound, for each word was considered, but this presented the problem of there not being enough notes available on the piano keyboard. It was therefore decided to allocate words to a particular treatment depending on the number of syllable they contain. Single syllable words would be assigned to single notes, whilst bi-syllabic words would be applied to pairs of notes, tri-syllabic to three note clusters, and the only 4 syllable word to a 4 note chord. The presentation of simultaneous notes aimed to provide an audible parallel or equivalent to the cognition of multi-syllabic words in the text, either read or heard.

The frequency of each word in the text, was used to create a "dictionary", applying each progressively less frequent word to a pitch further from the central point on the keyboard, alternating higher and lower each time. Where several words shared an equal number of appearances, they were treated in their order of appearance. The word "white" was represented by the central two note chord, due to it's markedly more frequent appearance (and subsequent dominance in the text.)

Once the dictionary for the single syllable words had been completed, a similar system was applied to those words with two syllables, starting from the same central semi-tone root ("white") and moving outwards, this time sounding two notes simultaneously for each two syllable word, moving outwards with descending frequency. For the three syllable words, the central interval is...
maintained in each three note group, the third note alternating in it's relative pitch and interval, whilst the only four syllable term is the progressive next step from the procession of the three syllable treatment.

As opposed to Barlow's approach of 1971, which provided a system that could be moulded to any body of text, this system (though similar in approach) is specific to the particular vocabulary used in Beckett's Ping.

Once the fundamental ‘dictionary’ had been laid down, it was then a straightforward case of writing the chosen notes in place of the written words. At this point, the decision was then made to restrict the range of the resulting score. This was based on several factors: Firstly, in order to allow the performer to use his own rhythm of speech as a source of metre for performance (it was part of the compositional brief to attempt to reflect the rhythm and pace of Beckett’s piece). This would have been impractical with the spread of notes covering the entire keyboard. Restricting the range, seemed suitably analogous to the confinement and minimal syntax in the text. Also this action meant that recognisable patterns resulting from repeated phrases are more subtle, making the work less imposing on the ear.

Pete Harvey - 2 March 2006

Once scored, this was digitally re-produced as an audio-track. As a rough form of the piece, I could then reflect on its relation to the original text from which it derived.

Reflection

The main features and characteristics that stood out, on listening, were that it was a piece of music it is quite difficult to listen to, that its disjunction meant it was quite emotionless (although this may in part be to do with the electronic form of the work). These to me were reflective of Ping. One could also detect the recurrence and repetition of specific sets of phrases and the lengthening of the musical phrases making up each bar, reflecting the text’s sentences. An additional, interesting point, was the tempo, which roughly follows that of the text read aloud, slightly speeds up towards the end (this I explored later by recording the text read out loud).

Although the piece had a rhythmic quality that felt common to Ping, to me, this
musical version had soporific general effect. This, I felt, was quite distinct from the text. The most notable differences between the music and Ping, were firstly that it was without reference to images, and secondly that the “ping” was not distinguished from the rest of the words in this musical treatment. The omission of the two features made clear the centrality of these to the text. There were various ways in which the piece could be developed to integrate and comment on the “ping”, for example, through orchestration (using a different instrument for the pings), re-recording the piece with the player improvising around a recorded spoken version (i.e. in headphones), or else following the “ping” by a change (e.g.) going up to treble /up or down octave. To integrate the images was, however, far more difficult. This, conceivably was a contributing factor for why the majority of the composers that has made musicalisation of Ping included a visual element to the work – in order to integrate this key element of the text.

I did not develop the piece any further in this context; it having served its purpose as an exploratory experiment. There did seem, however, potential to re-work what had been created into an interesting reflective work, and this remains a possibility for future work.

Musical Collaboration – Conclusions

Though unsuccessful in some respects, in terms of informing my view of Ping, this work was helpful in developing my thinking about the text, and the best ways to proceed with it. For me, this activity framed areas to be aware of, most significantly, the differences between the ‘languages’ of written versus musical/sound media. Substitution of words by notes does not account for the sophisticated relation of words to each other. Most importantly, this activity reinforced that it was the process aspect of translation into a different medium, which was most pertinent to the text, and that the act of visualisation - the engagement with the images in the text - is key to reading Ping.
Appendix 3 – Ping text line length

All Known all white bare white body fixed one yard legs joined like sewn.
Light heat white floor one square yard never seen.
White walls one yard by two white ceiling one yard never seen.
Bare white body fixed only the eyes only just.
Traces blurs light grey almost white on white.
Hands hanging palms front white feet heels together right angle.
Light heat white planes shining white bare white body fixed ping fixed elsewhere.
Traces blurs signs no meaning light grey almost white.
Bare white body fixed white on white invisible.
Only the eyes only just light blue almost white.
Head haught eyes light blue almost white silence within.
Brief murmurs only just almost never all known.
Traces blurs signs no meaning light grey almost white.
Legs joined like sewn heels together right angle.
Traces alone unover given black light grey almost white on white.
Light heat white walls shining white one yard by two.
Bare white body fixed one yard ping fixed elsewhere.
Traces blurs signs no meaning light grey almost white.
White feet toes joined like sewn heels together right angle invisible.
Eyes alone unover given blue light blue almost white.
Murmur only just almost never one second perhaps not alone.
Given rose only just bare white body fixed one yard white on white invisible.
All white all known murmurs only just almost never always the same all known.
Light heat hands hanging palms front white on white invisible.
Bare white body fixed ping fixed elsewhere.
Only the eyes only just light blue almost white fixed front.
Ping murmur only just almost never one second perhaps a way out.
Head haught eyes light blue almost white fixed front ping murmur ping silence.
Eyes holes light blue almost white mouth white seam like sewn invisible.
Ping perhaps a nature one second almost never that much memory almost never.
White walls each its trace grey blurs signs no meaning light grey almost white.
Light heat all known all white planes meeting invisible.
Ping murmur only just almost never one second perhaps a meaning that much memory almost never.
White feet toes joined like sewn heels together right angle ping elsewhere no sound.
Hands hanging palms front legs joined like sewn.
Head haught eyes holes light blue almost white fixed front silence within.
Ping elsewhere always there but that known not.
Eyes holes light blue light blue almost white on white only colour fixed front.
All white all known white planes shining white ping murmur only just almost never one second light time that much memory almost never.
Bare white body fixed one yard ping fixed elsewhere white on white invisible heart breath no sound.
Only the eyes given blue light blue almost white fixed front only colour alone unover.
Planes meeting invisible one only shining white infinite but that known not.
Nose ears white holes mouth white seam like sewn invisible.
Ping perhaps a nature one second almost never one second always the same all known.
Given rose only just bare white body fixed one yard invisible all known without within.
Ping perhaps a nature one second with image same time a little less blue and white in the wind.
White ceiling shining white one square yard never seen ping perhaps a way out there one second ping silence.
Traces alone unover given black grey blurs signs no meaning light grey almost white always the same.
Ping perhaps not alone one second with image always the same time a little less that much memory almost never ping silence.
Given rose only just nails fallen white over.
Long hair fallen white invisible over.
White scars invisible same white as flesh torn of old given rose only just.
Ping image only just almost never one second light time blue and white in the wind.
Head haught nose ears white holes mouth white seam like sewn invisible over.
Only the eyes given blue fixed light blue almost white only colour alone unover.
Light heat white planes shining white one only shining white infinite but that known not.
Ping a nature only just almost never one second with image same time a little less dim eye black and white half closed long lashes imploring that much memory almost never.
Afar flash of time all white all over all of old ping flash white walls shining white no trace eyes holes light blue almost white last colour ping white over.
Ping fixed last elsewhere legs joined like sewn heels together right angle hands hanging palms front head haught eyes white invisible fixed front over.
Given rose only just one yard invisible bare white all known without within over.
White ceiling never seen ping of old only just almost never one second light time white floor never seen ping of old perhaps there.
Ping of old only just perhaps a meaning a nature one second almost never blue and white in the wind that much memory henceforth never.
White planes no trace shining white one only shining white infinite but that known not. Light heat all known all white heart breath no sound.
Head haught eyes white fixed front old ping last murmur one second perhaps not alone eye unlustrious black and white half closed long lashes imploring ping silence ping over.
Appendix 4 - Examples of further image recasting permutations

Above: Re-drawn body images filmed with distorting lenses.

Above: Material traces mirrored – example 1.
Above: Material traces mirrored – example 2.

Above: Material traces mirrored and redrawn
Above: Body cut-outs layered over black.
Appendix 5 – Additional work - ‘Intertitle’ Ping

This visual experiment with intertitles was a brief investigation of the possibilities of using text with image in film to interrupt figuration in a way analogous to reading Ping (made in order to think about the punctuating “ping”, through showing and hiding in film). Since text structures vision: we see or look for what we are directed to see by a textual statement, then here, it seemed that there was an opportunity to play (in a way closely resembling Beckett’s) with the relationship between visualisation and negation; disrupting the viewer's construction of a ‘narrative’ with a textual incongruity, in a way approximate to the “ping”.

To think about this idea I decided to use the first line of the text. I parsed these into phrases, with the idea that it could foreground the rhythm of Ping.

- *I created a series of intertitles of the following: “All known” “all white” “bare white body” “fixed one yard” “legs joined like sewn” “never seen” “fixed” “fixed elsewhere” “invisible” “silence” and “over”. I set these between sets of body images that became more and then less abstracted, in a cycle.*

Viewing this test piece, I found the text invited me to “read” rather than to “see”, thus interrupted by introducing a different kind of viewing. The “never seen” and invisible intertitles “invisible” either reiterated or denied what was seen, depending on what images was directly before and/or after them, i.e. a discernable body or a blank/very abstract images. In this way, these intertitles worked similarly to the textual negations from which they were derived. A similar appropriate word-image disjunction could be created if the intertitle of the final “over” was to be closely followed by the repeating of the film, da capo.

By isolating words as intertitles and setting them inconjunction with particularly fluid images, they had something of their sense when read in the text - as ‘irresolvable objects’ and ‘things’ without signifieds. Thus, the words themselves

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3 Chion, Sound on Screen, p.6.
might usefully be represented in the visual piece by the use of intertitles that contrast with the visuals before/after them. In addition, I found that in isolating particular words as intertitles; without (visual) signifieds as it were, foregrounded the multiple possible word usages (the arbitrariness of language). This offered further possibilities with respect to using intertitles with the moving-images and sound. For example ‘silence’, if read as a verb - to make silent or bring to silence; to curtail the expression of - suggests the possibility of viewer/character/narrator being addressed by the film/creator/character; to listen or pay attention. As a noun, it relates to the (sudden) absence of sound/speech in the diegetic scene. The “silence” intertitle could, therefore, function either as a graphic substitution for the lack of sound or, with sound, for the failure of silence to emerge (or of the narrator to instigate silence).

Finally, the intertitle screen seems to set up a layer that is outside of the film diegesis, and between the viewer and the film. This could be something that I could play with in terms of the layering of the work, and the relationship of the viewer to its elements and ‘figures’.

Conclusions

The intertitle could be used as an interruption through its ‘pulse’ (created by several intertitles in succession with a ‘short’ image in-between). As the only textual element (especially if used sparingly) it would stand out, generating difference and a block to viewing and, with the generation of multiple possibilities of meaning, to fixed interpretation. Something of the effect of words that visually negate or erase their preceding statements and descriptions in the text (“never seen”, “invisible”) can be reproduced visually when interrupting as intertitles. In the context of this project, the fact that textual inserts would (in particular if parsed into phrases) lead the way that the viewer reads it, was something I wished to avoid in this context.
Appendix 6 - Shot list

Key:
*Element image created ‘for’*/form – (how filmed) – single/multiple [digital effect][movement]
Transition/interrupt shot

Black screen
Fade in
Cutting out sequence
Dissolve

**Body** /cut-out – (layered over black background) - single

Flash

**Body** /cut-out - (layered over white background) - single

**Through shot** /cut-out eyes - (layered over white background) [open-shut-open]

**Body** /cut-out - (layered over white background) - multiple [Mirrored]

**Through shot** /cut-out eyes - (layered over black background) [open-shut-open]

Dissolve

**Zoom shot** /tunnel [in]
Dissolve

**Body** /projected shadow 1, 2, 3

**Body** in zoetrope – (viewed from outside)

**Body** projected shadow 1, 2, 3

Dissolve

**Zoom shot** / tunnel –(Reverse) [in]
Dissolve

**Eyes** /cut-outs reverse [shut – open]
Dissolve

**Body** /cut-out trace reverse (single over trace background)

**Body** /trace - (rubbed out) – single [to blank]
Dissolve

**Body** /cut-out - (layered over white background) - single
Fade to blank

**Through shot** /cut-out eyes - (layered over black background) [shut-open-shut]
Fade to blank

**Surface** / still 1 [mirrored]
Pulse to white then to

**Surface** / still 2 [mirrored]
Pulse to white then to

**Surface** / still 3 [mirrored]
Dissolve

**Body** /cut-out - (layered over black background) – single

**Ping** /sound-wave graphic - vertical (in/out of shot) [up - down]
Dissolve

**Body** /projected shadow 4, 5, 6, 1, 2, 3

**Body** in zoetrope – (viewed from outside)
Dissolve

**Body** /cut-out - (layered over white background) - single
Film-glitch

**Body** /cut-out - (layered over white background) Mirrored

**Eyes** /cutout - (layered over black background) [open-shut-open]
Fast dissolve

**Body** /re-drawn for zoetrope – (shadows projected over)

**Ping** /sound-wave horizontal
Film-glitch

**Body** /carousel [mirrored] [out towards camera]

**Body** /projected shadow

**Body** /carousel 2 [mirrored] [away from camera]
Film-glitch

**Eyes** /cut-out - (single over black background) [shut-open]
Film-glitch

**Body** /re-drawn (for zoetrope) 1- [mirrored]
Film-glitch

**Body** /re-drawn (for zoetrope) 2 – [mirrored]
Flash

**Zoom shot** /camera viewfinder [in]
  Fast fade to black
  Flash

**Body** carousel 2 (single), 1,2,3,4 [clockwise]
  Fade to white
  Fade in

**Zoom shot** /tunnel 2 [in]
  Dissolve

**Eyes** cut-outs 2, reversed [closed-open]
  Flash

**Body** cut-outs (alternative - on/off – lighting)
  Flash

**Body** re-drawn (for zoetrope) 2 [scratched film effect]
  Dissolve

**Zoom shot** /camera lens [in]
  Face still (iris)
  Fade to black

**Body/surface** /blurred projection shot 1
  Fade to black
  Dissolve

**zoom out** camera viewfinder
  Flash

**Body/surface** /carousel mirrored 2 [to camera]

**Body/surface** /carousel mirrored 3 [away from camera]
  Flash

**Eye** /Zoetrope – filmed from outside [left to right]

**Eye** /Zoetrope – filmed from outside [right to left]

**Eyes** /cut-outs (layered over white background) [open-closed-open]

**Body** /cut-outs distanced layered 3, 4

**Through shot** cutout Eyes (single over black background) [open-shut-open]

**Body** blurred mirrored 1, 2
Dissolve

**Eyes** cut-outs (single over black) [open-still]

Dissolve

**Body** blurred mirrored 2

Formcut (dissolve)

**Body/surface** cut-out - (layered over white background) – mirrored

**Body/surface** cut-out - (layered over black background) – mirrored

Dissolve

**zoom in** camera lens

Fade to black screen

Dissolve

**Body** Shadow  mirrored 1, 2, 3

Blurred projection shot 2

Pulse to white

**Eyes** cut-outs, layered over white [closed-open to blank]

Dissolve

**Body** cut-out - (layered over white background) – single

Light flash

**Ping** Sound-wave graphic - vertical (in/out of shot) [up - down]

**Eye** Zoetrope – filmed from outside [right to left]

**Eye** Zoetrope – filmed from outside [left to right]

**Eye** Zoetrope – filmed from outside [right to left]

**Eye** Dark face [blink]

Dissolve

**Eye** Zoetrope (body) – filmed from outside [clockwise]

Black screen
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Exhibitions and conferences


www.beckettcentenaryfestival.ie/events

*Beckett & Company*, a collaboration between Tate Modern, the London Consortium, Birkbeck, Goldsmiths (University of London) and the LCACE, 6-8 October 2006, http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/beckett/

http://beckettandcompanyconference.blogspot.com/


DVD notes

This thesis was presented for examination alongside an exhibition of the final installation it describes. The DVDs attached contain documentation of this artwork in the form of, firstly, a film-clip of the final set of moving-images with sound (DVD 1), and secondly, a video-projection of these moving-images onto two screens with sound edited in (DVD 2). The material on the second DVD is designed give an impression of the installation in situ. This two-screen projection set up (rather than the intended four television monitors) was adopted in order to compensate for the difficulties in filming images on television screens.

Technical notes

The DVDs are playable on both PC/mac and TV. For optimum performance the DVDs should be viewed on a television screen. If viewing on PC/mac, I recommend that the sound be heard using headphones rather than inbuilt computer speakers.