

Not I

a small gesture by Ilê Sartuzi
after the play by Samuel Beckett

small Italian-style theater
curtains closed

the audience enters, takes the stage, and settles behind the curtains. they sit.

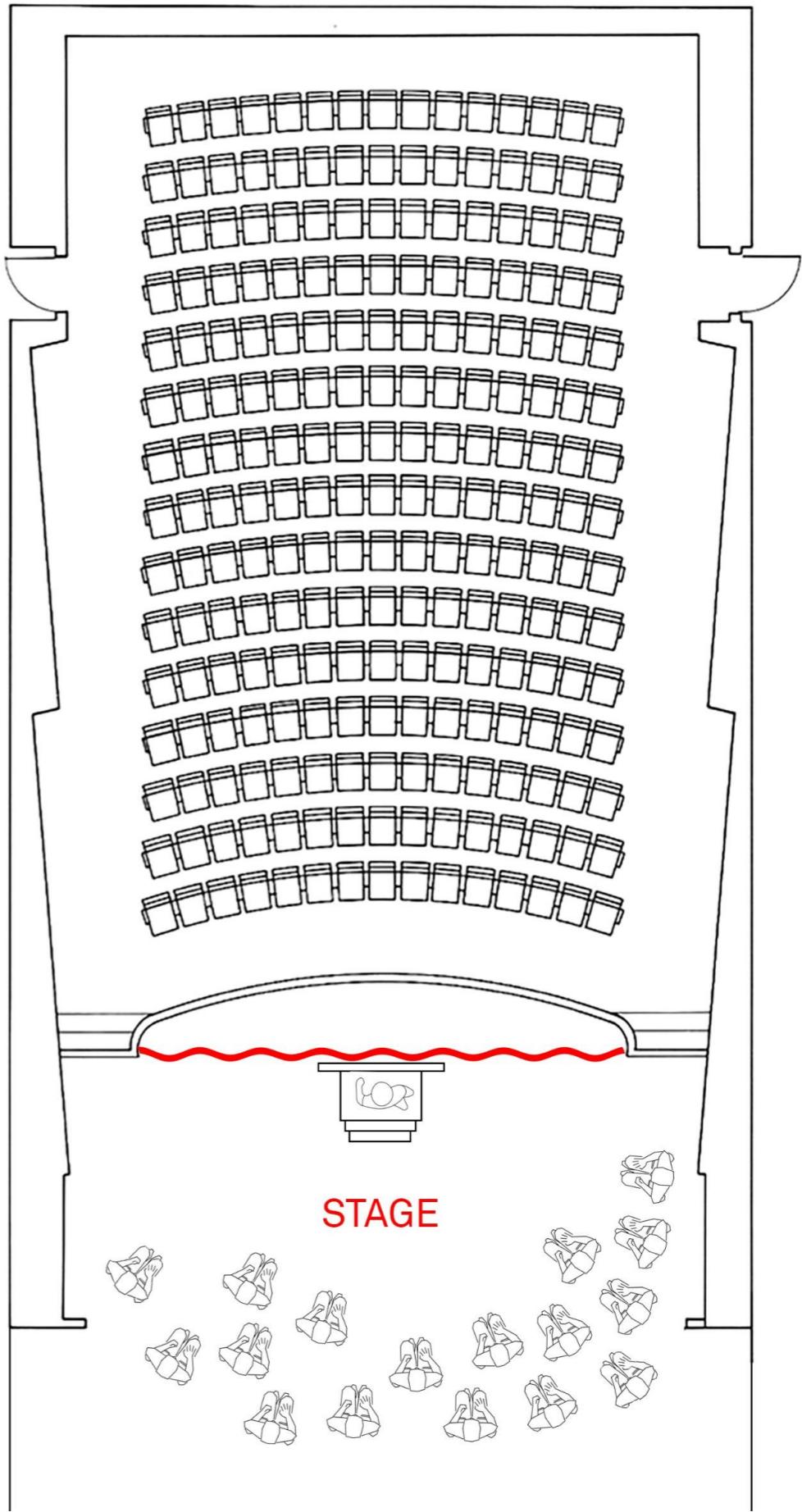
behind the curtains, there is a metallic structure that serves as a support for the actress to perform "Not I" by Samuel Beckett. this apparatus resembles a torture or execution device. small steps lead to a platform that elevates the mouth opening of the curtain at approximately 243 centimeters from the floor, calibrated to the actress' body. the device includes side bars that hold the arms in place, as well as a front metal plate against which the body can be pressed without disturbing the curtains.¹ additional straps immobilise the head in place.

the actress enters the stage naked to perform Beckett's play. she steps onto the platform and attaches herself to the apparatus. after a pause, the theater warning bell rings. the general light on the audience fades, and the focus on her mouth rises slightly. behind the curtains, where the action takes place, there is no direct light, only what leaks through the opening. gradually, the eye adjusts to the dimness.

the actress performs "Not I".

in contrast to the immobility of the mouth that would be visible from the auditorium, what is revealed here is the intense movement required of the body to deliver this dynamic text. the body is constrained by mechanisms designed to stabilize it; even so, the muscles tremble, the buttocks contract, and the hands speak.

at the end of the text, a blackout. the audience lights return. the actress releases herself from the apparatus and exits into the wings. the audience leaves.

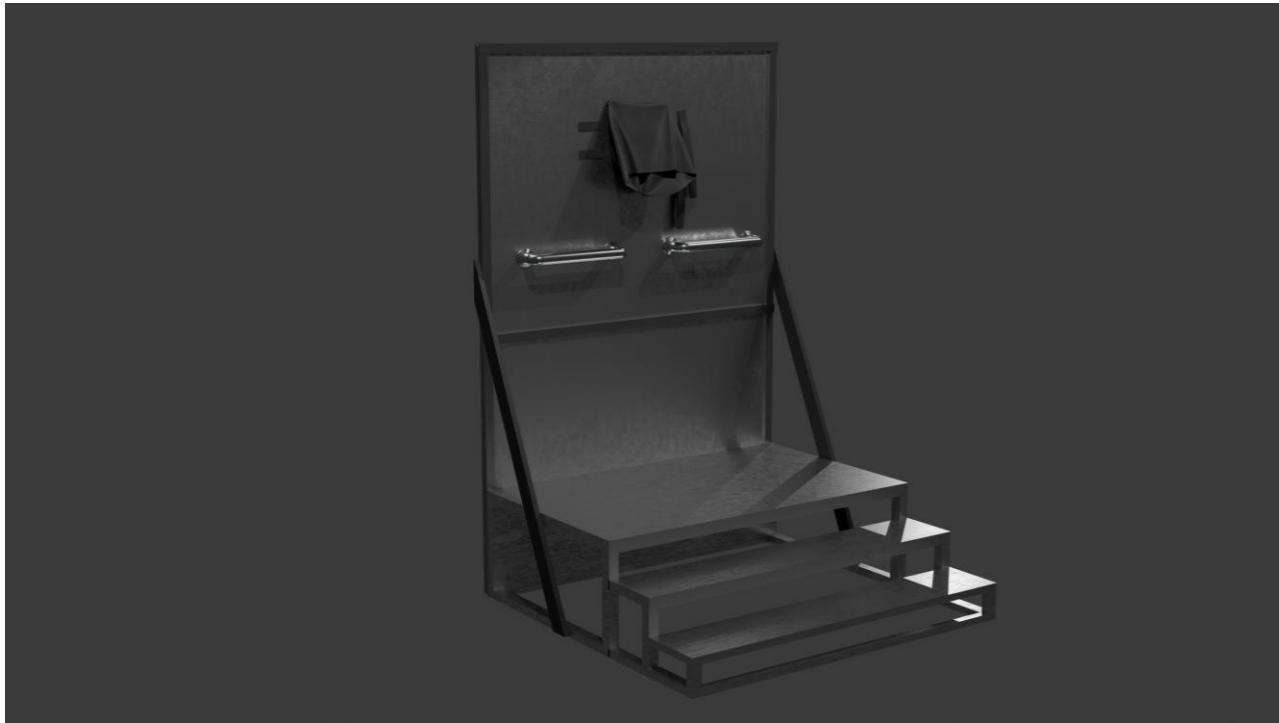


¹ this body pressure reminds me of "body pressure" [1974], by Bruce Nauman. the approximation of the dates is also curious.
(this is a first draft, subtleties of the choreography and staging might change during rehearsals and research)



Not I, 2021-2026

3D render of metal structure for the stage



Not I, 2021-2026

3D render of metal structure for the stage

Lisa Dwan showed BBC News what the play is like backstage at the University of Reading. Images taken from the video were the inspiration for our device and gesture. 12 May 2013. video journalist: Rachel Curtis



Billie Whitelaw in rehearsal for the Anthony Page production of "Not I" in 1973
The rostrum clamps to steady the head to stage an image of the floating mouth in darkness
Photos: Zoë Dominic