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Vox Manet: Samuel Beckett’s Novels of Possession and Dispossession, 1938–1955

Kenny, Eva

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Vox Manet: Samuel Beckett's Novels of Possession and Dispossession, 1938–1955

Eva Kenny

A DISSERTATION

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY

OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines possession and dispossession in Samuel Beckett's novels and prose texts, from his English-language novel *Murphy*, published in 1938, to the end of the series of novels comprising *Watt*, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* and the short *Texts for Nothing*, published in 1955. The first chapter, "Echo's Bones," is concerned with possession. It examines Beckett's translations of surrealist poetry and prose in the early 1930s for a special issue, edited by André Breton, of the Paris magazine *This Quarter*. The surrealist use of automatic writing, represented here in particular by a set of texts called *Les Possessions*, made a huge impression on Beckett, and I argue that his curiously old-fashioned translation of these texts emphasized the surrealist reliance on the clinical methods of nineteenth-century French psychiatry, particularly those associated with so-called degeneracy. In Chapter Two, "Were Turned to Stone," on dispossession, I argue that Beckett wrote *Watt* and the Three Novels as if "possessed," under the aegis of this surrealist preoccupation with automatic, spontaneous text, and wrote *Watt* and the French-language novels as a self-styled degenerate, using linguistic impediments, tics and repetitions in order to address the dispossession of the Anglo-Irish literary tradition after Irish Independence. This is done in the Three Novels by means of an increasing attention to emblematic objects – the stone, the stick, the pencil – and their loss and disappearance, until, at the end of *The Unnamable*, "only a voice remains." Chapter Three, "Vox Manet," shows how these novels therefore allowed American artists and art historians to narrate another dispossession, the so-called dematerialization of the artwork, from the object-focused Minimal Art to language-based Conceptual Art, in the 1960s and 1970s in New York.

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Deborah Nord and Esther Schor during these meetings and I am grateful to them for their insights and encouragement.

In my first semester at Princeton I took a seminar with Thomas Trezise on the novels of Samuel Beckett. It was rewarding to return to his class earlier this year to present work on Beckett's surrealist translations and, as he will notice, many of his insights, not only recent ones but from the seminar in 2008, have made their way into my final draft. I thank him for the invitation, which provided a much-needed deadline for a chapter draft, and for his feedback. His seminar on Beckett proved extremely useful when, during two Mellon fellowships at the Princeton University Art Museum, I researched the topic of Samuel Beckett and American art of the 1960s under the direction of Kelly Baum. She provided me with the first questions of this dissertation and the means with which to research them. I thank her for her valued friendship, and the Art Museum for the financial support to study this subject in 2013 and 2014. I was fortunate to find Fintan O'Toole in need of a teaching assistant for his seminar on Beckett in 2014 and would like to thank him for the many insights his class provided, as well as the plays and performances, including a memorable seven hour *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, I saw that semester. My understanding of Beckett has also been enhanced by meeting Lisa Dwan at Princeton and seeing her interpretations of his work both in seminars and on stage. I thank Sandra Bermann warmly for hiring me as a research assistant in 2014, giving me occasion to read René Char long before I knew how helpful it would be for my dissertation. I would also like to thank Anne Jarvis, April Miller and the staff of the Rare Books and Special Collections for facilitating my research in the unparalleled luxury of

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Last but not least, thank you to Rory Rowan for your love and unending support of my work. My favorite geographer, who "makes one little room an everywhere."

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Introduction

In March 1948, Samuel Beckett's essay *Le Nouvel Objet* appeared in a catalogue for the exhibition *Introducing Two Modern French Painters: Geer Van Velde, Bram Van Velde* at the Stanley Kootz gallery in New York.[1] This was a translation from the French, almost certainly by the author, of a slightly longer essay called *Peintres de l'empêchement*, which had been commissioned by *Derrière le miroir,* a journal published by the Paris Galerie Maeght, printed later in the same year.[2] Although *Le Nouvel Objet* must have been the first of Beckett's texts to appear in print in the United States, it is fair to say that the philosophy of art espoused in his critical essays *La Peinture des van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon*, *Les Peintres d'Empêchement*, *Le Nouvel Objet* and *Trois Dialogues* found far less traction here than did his novels and plays. In other words, Beckett was not known or celebrated as an art critic in the United States. His writing on art, as I will argue, is still not very important to our understanding of artists he favored, like Bram and Geer van Velde, nor are these artists ones that anyone but Beckett scholars particularly care to understand. These essays make up the majority of Beckett's direct postwar engagement with art, with the exception of some later personal collaborations, like the edition of *Come and Go* illustrated by Sol LeWitt in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1969, or the artists' book *Foirades* illustrated by Jasper Johns in 1975. None of his letters after the 1950s discuss art in anything like the same capacity they had before the Second World War; he did not write any more about art, had stopped translating for

[1] Kootz Gallery records, 1923-1966. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This modernist art gallery was known for its exclusive representation of Picasso in the United States.

[2] Fifield, Peter. "Introduction to Samuel Beckett, 'The New Object.'" *Modernism/Modernity* 18, no. 4 (2011): 873–77.

Transition and other magazines, and he gave all of his art books to the widow of his friend Avigdor Arikha before he died, meaning that there is no library to give a sense of any interest he may have had in the art of the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s.[3] Beckett's personal relationships with Alberto Giacometti or Marcel Duchamp, although very worthy of further study, did not result in collaborative bodies of work or critical texts. However, much of the scholarship on Beckett's relationship with art stems from these essays and the paintings that he refers to by name in his novels. This is misleading in its reduction of Beckett's involvement with art to the set of texts that bear both his name and the proper names of the artists in question, assuming that the most important points of contact or influence between Beckett and art are those direct and personal relationships described in his writing on the van Veldes, for instance. As with his 1930 essay on Proust, what we stand to gain from Beckett's "words on painting" have far more to contribute to our understanding of his own work than the artists whose work is discussed in these texts: Bram and Geer van Velde, Pierre Tal-Coat and André Masson.

Yet Beckett's writing was so influential within a group of artists in New York in the 1960s that it is hard to find an appraisal of the new sculptural paradigm of that period that does not mention him in the same breath as Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, Eva Hesse, Hanne Darboven and Richard Serra, as well as minimal composers of the era like Philip Glass and Morton Feldmann. How does Beckett connect the American art of the years 1950–1980 to the European interwar avant-garde? This is the subject of my dissertation and in the first chapter I will show that Beckett provided a link that connected American artists of the 1960s onwards with the

[3] Hulle, Dirk van., and Mark Nixon. *Samuel Beckett's Library.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

interwar avant-garde through his translation into English of the surrealist catalogue for its belated English-language audience. When, in the late 1970s, the American art historian Rosalind Krauss referred to Beckett in her essays on modern sculpture, she used his novels to invoke a very familiar argument. Using Beckett's *Watt* and *Molloy*, she refers to the art of the early twentieth century, smuggling something of surrealism's legacy into the art of the 1960s and evoking in the minimal and conceptual art of those decades the precepts of the European avant-garde.

Although there is an increasing body of critical literature on Beckett and art, much of the scholarship takes Beckett's *Wanderjahre* in Germany in 1937 as the beginning of a serious engagement with art that would later be expressed in the essays named above, culminating in the best known of these, *Trois Dialogues*. In my first chapter I argue that Beckett went to Germany to research so-called Degenerate art, a milieu he was already familiar with, as one of surrealism's early translators, and that surrealism had a deep and lasting influence on Beckett's early work to which his later essays on art were a reaction. The influence surrealism had on his novels can be seen in Beckett's use of the following tropes: automatic writing, repetition, the fixation on the asylum and the mock-scientific format. This influence can clearly be seen not only through Beckett's own use of these tropes but through his repeated characterization of the narrator of his novels as a sort of degenerate, in *Watt* and *Molloy*, *Malone Meurt* and *L'Innommable*.

In the field of Beckett studies there are two central myths. One is that Beckett, after beginning his writing career in James Joyce's shadow as a lowly secretary and assistant, suddenly burst into French, a language until then unbeknownst to him and thus absolutely neutral, releasing him from any problems of style or influence. This event is usually referred to as the "frenzy of writing," or the "siege in the room" that

Beckett experienced on his return to Paris after the Second World War. Here is a summary of what he wrote between 1946 and 1951: "The Expelled," "First Love" and "The Calmative;" four novels, *Mercier and Camier* and the three novels, *Molloy, Malone Meurt* and *L'Innommable*; two plays, *Eleutheria* and *En Attendant Godot*; the short prose pieces *Texts for Nothing*, the essays on art and many credited and uncredited works of translation, primarily for the journal *Transition*, a new version of the pre-war literary journal *transition* which placed a greater emphasis on the visual arts in the postwar period.[4]

The second great myth about Beckett is that he had a "revelation" on a return trip to Ireland in 1945; this "revelation" would make clear to him what his life's work was to be and, henceforth, he would have no problems regarding influence or lack of artistic clarity. Beckett dramatized his experience in *Krapp's Last Tape* thus:

> Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indulgence until that memorable night in March at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when suddenly I saw the whole thing. The vision, at last. This fancy is what I have chiefly to record this evening, against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, warm or cold, for the miracle that . . . (*hesitates*) . . . for the fire that set it alight. What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely--(*Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again*)--great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propeller, clear to me at last that the dark I have always

[4] Weller, Shane. "Post-World War Two Paris." In *Samuel Beckett in Context*, edited by Anthony Uhlmann, 160–72. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

> struggled to keep under is in reality--(*Krapp curses, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again*)[5]

According to Beckett's official biographer, the mysterious last words of this tape, cut off before they can be heard, are "my greatest ally."[6]

Between these two myths we get a deeply romantic sense of Beckett as having suddenly emerged into French with a clear vision of what he was to do with the rest of his life some time in 1945, his philosophy of art ultimately encapsulated by the formula "The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express," as he put it in *Three Dialogues.*[7] Although, as I discuss in the first chapter, Beckett did not become possessed and spontaneously start writing in French immediately after the war, the myth of bursting into spontaneous language is not only a central one in Beckett mythology but a central one in the history of twentieth century art, and one which was crucial to Beckett's development as a writer, since his work as a translator consisted in large part of rendering simulations of uncensored, uninhibited and frenzied texts from French to English. The early twentieth century literary-artistic movement known as surrealism was founded in, and prized more than anything else, the concept of "automatic," spontaneous, uninhibited and uncontrollable writing and drawing; the potential of dreaming for creative practice and the figure of the artist as childlike, insane, inexperienced or otherwise "primitive." The myth of Beckett's coming to write in French therefore intersects with

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[5] Beckett, Samuel. Krapp's Last Tape. In Samuel Beckett: The Shorter Collected Plays. New York: Grove Press, 1984. 54.

[6] Knowlson, James. *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 1996. 319.

[7] Beckett, Samuel, "Three Dialogues," in *Disjecta.* London: Calder Books, 1983. 139.

a host of ideas eminently popular around artistic production in the early twentieth century. As well as reading Beckett's early work, the poems and particularly the novel *Murphy*, coterminous with his involvement with surrealism, the first chapter studies Beckett's translations of André Breton, Paul Éluard and "the entire *surréaliste* guild," because they are more important, I think, than what Beckett wrote directly on art or artists to our understanding of the relationship between his work and art.[8] Therefore, in addition to the lasting influence of Joyce, "consider the work of a lesser known author," as Beckett wrote in his 1935 poem, "The Possessed."[9] By extension, the surrealist translations of the late 1920s and 1930s and Beckett's extensive anonymous translations of the postwar period in collaboration with Georges Duthuit, the publisher of *Transition* magazine in its postwar iteration, provide a form of written evidence of what Beckett knew and how he engaged with certain arguments and themes, much more than a study of points of contact between the writer and a specific artist.

What Beckett found most relevant in the early surrealist obsession with automatism was a concern for a loss of bodily control that was relayed through metaphors of possession and dispossession. Through a study of their work, I argue, Beckett began to read widely in psychiatric literature, texts on neurological disorders, and, importantly for his work, treatises on the popular and controversial ideas of degeneracy that were popular in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. Some of the tics of Tourette's disease, Parkinson's disease, echolalias and aphasia that were seen as symptomatic of degeneracy allowed Beckett to create a writerly character for himself as a degenerate, the last in the Protestant, Anglo-Irish literary tradition. In many essays on Beckett, his own experiences with psychoanalysis are seen as the root

[8] Letter to Thomas MacGreevy of 5th January 1933. *Letters*, 1:149.

[9] Beckett, Samuel. "The Possessed." In *Disjecta*. 99.

of his interest in medical, neurological or psychoanalytic literature. In her essay "'What Is the Word': Beckett's Aphasic Modernism," for example, Laura Salisbury attributes Beckett's use of aphasia as a model for poetry to his own temporary aphasia after a fall in 1988, seeing his poem « *Comment dire* » as the direct result of this experience. However, while she is certainly not wrong about the inspiration for this poem, I argue that throughout his work, from his first engagement with the European avant-garde, Beckett mimicked the tics, impediments and lapses of the so-called "degenerate" as a way to address, in the broader European context, the conditions of his own literary disinheritance.

In the second chapter I argue that the surrealist theme of possession was a way for Beckett to address the idea of dispossession, an idea which was to occupy him over the course of the novels that he wrote as he retreated to the south of France during the Second World War, *Watt*, *Molloy*, *Malone Meurt* and *L'Innommable*, published in France in the late 1940s and early 1950s. These make up the central core of Beckett's *oeuvre*; they are also the novels most important to the American artists and critics I discuss in the third chapter because of their comprehensive undermining of the authorial subject, in their lengthy descriptions of automatism, generation and permutation, and their theorization of the concept of the series and the nature of change. *Watt* in particular shows the transition from Beckett's early work, inflected by Joyce and surrealism, towards a mature Beckett and what we might think of as 'a voice of his own."

What these novels show, I argue, is Beckett getting rid of imagery and iconography, symbolism, through the related metaphors of possession and dispossession. Beckett displaced the Anglo-Irish tradition of the "Big House" novel onto wartime rural France and created a hybrid of the Irish ancestral home and the

mental institution there. In these novels, the "Big House" is transformed into an institution: Sam, the narrator of *Watt*, calls his and the protagonist's rooms "mansions." Beckett's association of the mansion with Bedlam has been related to a line in "A Letter from Artemezia in the Town to Chloe in the Country" by the seventeenth century poet John Wilmot, the famously debauched Earl of Rochester, whose line, "Bedlam has many mansions," was itself a profane version of Christ's description of heaven in John 14:2 as "My father's house" with its "many mansions."[10] In his poem *Courbet: Les Casseurs de Cailloux*, which Beckett translated for *transition* magazine in 1949, René Char describes the sound of the stonebreakers in his home region, the Vaucluse, an image that Beckett combined, over the three novels, with the description of stonebreakers in the quarries in Carrickmines, close to where he grew up in Dublin. In *Watt*, "he heard the distant clink of the hammers," while in *Malone Dies*, "The hammers of the stone-cutters ring all day like bells." Over the course of these novels, the narrator, the same type of deranged amanuensis in each, displays a preoccupation with possessions and belongings, of which he is divested entirely by the end of *The Unnamable*. The Three Novels show Beckett's development of a relationship between *possession*, in the sense of a loss of control over the mind or body, and *possessions*, in the sense of belongings. These possessions play a prophylactic role. When, at the end of the series, the narrator has been divested of all his possessions, he is left with a voice and nothing more, and one which cannot be stopped.

In the third chapter, "Only a Voice Remained," I examine the artists of the American postwar period who have cited Beckett as an influence or who have been

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[10] Rochester, John Wilmot, and Paul Davis. *Selected Poems.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 117.

written about in relation to his work. I had some difficulty in figuring out the best methodology for this chapter. Although there is a lot of interest in the relationship between Beckett and postwar art, particularly American minimal and conceptual art, it is difficult to show in a sustained capacity and, as I have noted above, tends to rely heavily on biographical links or references. Although there are survey essays on Beckett-inflected art, Beckett-inspired art and art that reminds one of Beckett, the artists tend to be disparate, disconnected other than through their references to Samuel Beckett. The choice that I made to limit this field whilst writing was to use important works of art criticism that cite Beckett to explain the artworks in question. This means that in the last chapter I focus on criticism as much as on art and literature, but it seems the only way to avoid reasoning by analogy or relying solely on biography.

For these reasons, I grant perhaps a disproportionate amount of space to art criticism, specifically to one art critic, Rosalind Krauss, who has written about Beckett in her most important readings of two American artists of the 1960s, Sol LeWitt (1928–2007) and Robert Morris (1931–). The first of these artists made repetition a fundamental part of his practice; the second used formal distinction and differentiation as his motif. In two significant essays, Krauss used Beckett's prose in order to explain these contradictory tendencies in their work, on the one hand showing the madness inherent in systemic repetition in Sol LeWitt's structures, and on the other showing the critical potential of differentiation within Robert Morris's artistic practice. Krauss's 1978 essay "LeWitt in Progress" made an extremely important case for understanding the artist's work in a new light, and Krauss's use of Beckett exemplified and made parodically clear that the repetition and frameworks in LeWitt's work were not, by any means, supposed to represent a clear and ordered mind. In the essay, she intersperses short excerpts from a scene in Beckett's 1951

novel *Molloy*, in which the eponymous character sucks one stone after another, with sections from critical essays on LeWitt by philosophers and writers who saw in LeWitt's work a straightforward depiction of enlightened rationalism and order. We will see that by including Molloy's efforts to systematize a seemingly random process, Krauss makes the compelling argument that the insistence on repetition and multiplication inherent in LeWitt's sculpture of the late 1960s do not show order as much as highlight an obsessional mania for the appearance of rationalism during those years.

Morris was quite different, in that his work has, since the 1960s, performed stylistic turnarounds, changed medium and reversed course completely, to the extent that this habit characterizes his work more than any other stylistic feature. Although hugely influential as a one of the first Minimal sculptors of the 1960s, Morris is not often associated with a signature appearance, because his practice changed from painting to performance to sculpture in a deliberate, reactionary process of shedding styles over the course of a long career, part of a procedure he called "anti-form." In Krauss's essay on Robert Morris, published in the catalogue of his 1992 Guggenheim museum retrospective, she used five different works by Beckett, from this particularly fertile period, the "siege in the room," to elucidate several of the key motivations of Morris's work.[11] Rather than choose one text, as with LeWitt, in which the key principle of the artist's work is illuminated, in her *abécdaire* of Morris, every aspect of Beckett's work from these years is brought in to highlight the one key characteristic of Morris's work, which is that it is different, or non-identical to itself, by design. In this chapter, we will see that in her later reading of Morris, not only is

[11] Bair, Deirdre. *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*. New York London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978. 346.

repetition more generative than one might think, but that difference itself and differentiation *from* is the primary motivator in his practice. Reading many of the debates around minimalism, we will see that while Krauss used a strand of Beckett's work to give integrity to a conceptual art practice that eschewed the importance of formal properties, she would also, ultimately, use Beckett to highlight difference in Morris's minimalist practice: a movement characterized by James Meyer in *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* as entirely made up of the play of discursive differences that compensated for a thoroughly heterogeneous set of formal attributes. The construction of a "new vocabulary" of a non-formalist approach to art, turned into a focus on the semantic and on language as a system of differences that allows us to understand Robert Morris in particular. This, I argue, is the crux of Beckett's relationship with these artists. His novels of the 1940s and 1950s had described a process of dispossession, a diminution of his reliance on material goods and formalist concerns or what he called "going in the direction of less." What Beckett schematized, for Krauss in particular, although other art historians shared her concerns, was the rapid "dematerialization" of the artwork in the 1960s and 1970s as it moved away from modernist formal criteria towards conceptual art, based in language and its operations.

Beckett's writing from the late 1950s onwards sought "the rhythm and syntax of extreme weakness," as he wrote to Barbara Bray in 1959.[12] After the novels that I discuss here, written, I argue, under the aegis of surrealism, Beckett's writing took a decisive turn towards a far more minimal style: he would reduce instead of expand, and the novels of the 1940s, structurally breathtaking as they are, would later seem conventional in terms of structure and length compared to the prose pieces to come.

[12] Letter to Barbara Bray of 11 March 1959. *Letters*, Vol.3.

The texts written at the same time as the American art of the 1960s and 1970s were therefore quite different to those Krauss selected for the purposes of explaining her artists. Although his novels shared in the minimal and conceptual concern with an art that was "desubjectivizing, decentering, anti-subjective, anti-expressive, evacuated of feeling," why, if his later works were formally far more similar to the artworks in question, did Krauss focus on the linguistically more abundant earlier novels by Beckett to explain the work of LeWitt and Morris? [13] This, I show, was a problem to do with American modernist academic art history, or the formalist reading of art that collapsed in the wake of the Second World War. In the introduction to their edition of the tenth volume of the *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Stephen Connor describes a split in the late twentieth century's reception of Beckett, with those critics engaged mostly with his theatrical work who saw the persistence of existentialist humanist values, and those of a later generation preoccupied mostly with Beckett as a post-humanist, poststructuralist thinker whose novels depicted the play of differences and the questionable nature of origins.[14] This latter was the terrain upon which Rosalind Krauss set her discussion of Beckett, partly, I think, as part of an attempt to resuscitate the history of surrealism. Although Beckett was much more popularly received in the United States as a postwar, existential playwright of the absurd, Krauss drew from his work the shared concerns with surrealism: the emphasis on automatism, on uninhibited writing, on a type of primitivism that she was similarly uncovering in the work of Alberto Giacometti and surrealist photography.

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[13] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." *October* 6 (October 1, 1978): 47–60

[14] Thomas Trezise's *Into the Breach: Samuel Beckett and the Ends of Literature* provides an excellent discussion of the shifting receptions and philosophical-theoretical contexts for Beckett's work. See especially Chapter One: Dispossession. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990.

Chapter One: "Echo's bones:" Samuel Beckett's *Possessions*

Samuel Beckett's Surrealist Translations

When Samuel Beckett first moved to Paris from Ireland in 1928 to take up a teaching fellowship at the École Normale, he immediately met the Irish poet and art critic Thomas MacGreevy, then a lecturer in residence at the École.[15] Through MacGreevy Beckett was introduced to more Irish expatriates in Paris, most significantly James Joyce, who was beginning to publish *Work in Progress* in serial form in Eugene Jolas' magazine *transition.* Most English-language studies of Beckett's life have characterized his early years in Paris as being consumed wholly by his relationship with Joyce and depict the intellectual world of Paris in the 1920s as irredeemably fractured and factionalist, noting the intense animosity between circles revolving around Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and the surrealists.[16] This has led to a picture of Beckett's formative years as exclusively concerned with Anglophone Irish, British and American expatriate culture in 1920s Paris. There is no question that Beckett's relationship with Joyce changed the course of his life. Moreover, he was *not* especially socially connected to the surrealists, the group of writers and artists around André Breton, the central figure and self-appointed leader of the movement, and is said to have met Breton only in 1948, long after having translated his work and that of Paul Éluard, René Crevel and Louis Aragon as well as group statements by the "whole *surréaliste* guild."[17] Because of this, and because Beckett was profoundly

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[15] According to Beckett scholars C.J. Ackerly and S.E. Gontarski, MacGreevy was still *in situ* in the room at the École that Beckett was to take.

[16] This seems especially to be the case amongst Anglophone Beckett scholars. See for example the following biographies: Knowlson, James, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*; Cronin, Anthony, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*; Bair, Deirdre, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*.

[17] Letter to Thomas MacGreevy of 5th January 1933. *Letters* 1:149.

indebted to Joyce for his mentorship and for introducing him to a world of writers and artists in Paris, the impact that surrealism has made on his work is often underestimated.[18]

In his essay "Post–World War Two Paris," Shane Weller has noted that when Beckett returned to Paris after the Second World War, he was keen to immerse himself fully in the French cultural life of the capital. [19] Weller suggests that Beckett distanced himself from the Paris English-speaking community in the latter part of the 1940s in order to thoroughly engage with the literary and publishing culture of his new language, specifically the circle around the existentialist philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Beckett's publications in their journal *Les Temps Modernes*, Weller writes, "necessarily situated him for his first French readers within an explicitly existentialist context."[20] Beckett's postwar essays on art, some of the first publications under his own name in French, can therefore be read as part of a deliberate effort to become more involved with the French literary community, but this overshadows his extensive pre-war translation. Beckett's surrealist translations make it evident that the postwar period does not mark the start of his engagement with the French language, but existential humanism has proved an enduring context for his work. In fact, many of Beckett's essays on art from the late 1940s mark a deliberate

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[18] Only two recent English language books focus on Beckett and surrealism: Alan Friedman's very helpful *Surreal Beckett: Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, and Surrealism* (2018), and Daniel Albright's *Beckett and Aesthetics* (2003). Additionally, a chapter on surrealism in Tim Lawrence's *Samuel Beckett's Critical Aesthetics* (2018) has been very useful for my research. Conor Carville's *Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts* (2018), the last of these to be published, seems extremely interesting but was published too recently to really inform my argument.

[19] Weller, Shane. "Post-World War Two Paris." In *Samuel Beckett in Context*, edited by Anthony Uhlmann, 160–72. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.162-163.

[20] Ibid, 163.

intellectual break from the French-language writers he had translated in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

In recent years more of Beckett's archives and letters have been published and made available to scholars, leading to what is now called the "archival turn" in Beckett studies.[21] An important contribution to this body of work is Sinéad Mooney's book *A Tongue Not Mine*, which focuses on Beckett as a translator. Mooney takes a very pragmatic approach to translation, arguing that Beckett worked in French until English itself was a foreign language to him in order to return to it eventually, so defamiliarized in his native language that he was finally free of Joyce's influence.[22] Her book bridges the early Beckett, a translator, scribe and critic, and the later, postwar Beckett, to show that his translations were an important part of the development of his bilingual oeuvre rather than merely an insignificant and inconvenient way of earning money. For Mooney, Beckett's work constantly foregrounds the problematic practice of writing through its emphasis on translation as a way to undermine, question and de-authorize the writing self in order to avoid the habitual, a key concern of Beckett's. The multiple voices that translation produces "emerge as some of his work's most common tropes in problematizing the subjectivity of the author as supposed intentional source, guaranteeing the meanings of a text, and replacing it with a depleted version of the writing self in what André Breton, in the first Surrealist Manifesto, calls 'the silent receptacle of many echoes.'"[23] For Mooney, Beckett's practice of self-translation and multiple-language

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[21] Feldmann, Matthew. *Falsifying Beckett: Essays on Archives, Philosophy, and Methodology in Beckett Studies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. 22-23.

[22] Mooney, Sinéad. *A Tongue Not Mine: Beckett and Translation*. Oxford English Monographs. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

[23] Ibid, 6.

composition has a strong theoretical import in his construction as a writer, but also, more specifically, as a postmodern writer.[24] In the chapter that follows, I examine the idea of translation not so much as a practice of writing that constructs a particular theoretical reception but as a major thematic concern in Beckett's work; more importantly, a theme consonant with a range of automated, desubjectivized writing practices popular amongst the avant-garde in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s and one that situates his work in the midst of this confluence of ideas. One of the problematic assumptions regarding Beckett's abandonment of English is that there was a single moment of renunciation; however Beckett may well have encouraged this idea in the years after the Second World War, and his answers to questions about his change of writing language, like "*c'est plus facile d'écrire sans style*" and "*pour faire remarquer moi*" are not wholly convincing.[25] The interwar surrealist translations show us the part translation and language change played in his own self-construction as a writer, allowing him to participate in the avant-garde idea of the writer or the artist as a conduit or an empty vessel, a scribe or amanuensis; a theme that would continue to animate his entire *oeuvre*.

In Paris, Beckett's first, and enormously difficult, task of translation was to turn some of Joyce's *Work in Progress* into French, participating in a practice of collective composition that Mooney calls "a virtual Joyce translation industry."[26] In 1930 his French version of "Anna Livia Plurabelle" was rejected; Philippe Soupault,

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[24] Mooney, *A Tongue Not Mine*, Chapter One.

[25] Duthuit, Georges, ed. *Transition*. Paris: 1948, N° 6. 147. In the *Notes About Contributors*, very likely written by Beckett himself, the explanation is given as follows: "Invited to give some account of his reasons for now writing in French… having first looked round in every conceivable direction to make sure no doubt that we were not observed, he confessed at last in a strong or rather weak Dublin accent: *"Pour faire remarquer moi*."

[26] Mooney, *A Tongue Not Mine*. 21.

Breton's close friend and the co-author, with André Breton, of their first surrealist automatic texts *Les Champs Magnétiques*, ended up doing it instead. Although he did not continue to translate for Joyce, for a few years in the early 1930s Beckett was extremely active as a translator of surrealist poetry, automatic writing and prose, and made a substantial contribution to the September 1932 "Surrealist Issue" of *This Quarter*, an expatriate Anglophone magazine published in Paris by the Polish-American bookdealer, publisher and journalist Edward Titus, and the vast 1934 *Negro: Anthology*, published by the English expatriate heiress Nancy Cunard. He also translated poems from the Spanish for an anthology of Mexican poetry, and began to work on translations of the Marquis de Sade before the project was delayed and ultimately given to another translator.[27] His authorized biographer James Knowlson attributes far more from *This Quarter* and *Negro: Anthology* to Beckett than is recognized as his, because many of the texts appeared without a translator ascribed to them, and in the postwar period, Beckett did not want to be associated with any of the translations he did for *Transition* under its new editorship by Georges Duthuit, reinvented as a magazine exclusively concerned with visual art, as opposed to Eugene Jolas's prewar "revolution of the word."[28] However, it seems that he did want to be

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[27] After his involvement in an obscenity trial in Dublin, Beckett did not want to be permanently associated with Sade, asking McGreevy in a letter of 21st February 1938 "Would the fact of my being known as the translator, & the very literal translation, of "the most utter filth" tend to spike me as a writer myself? Could I be banned and muzzled retrospectively?" *Letters*, 1:608.

[28] Knowlson cites a reference in a 1931 letter by Beckett to McGreevy about his jobs of translation where he notes "Tzara next." Also: A letter from Tzara to Breton of 24th August 1932 inquiring about the translations of his work does not name Beckett as his translator but the editorial note mentions him: "*This Quarter*…parut en septembre, avec des traductions de Samuel Beckett, qui ne recueillirent pas l'approbation de tous les poètes concernés."

acknowledged for "all the "Surrealism and Madness" texts I translated for Titus [which I] sent him with the Éluard & Breton *Essais de Simulation.*"[29] As I will discuss in this chapter, Beckett's surrealist translations of automatic prose and spontaneous writing of these years, combined with their emphasis on insanity and the asylum as a theme, setting and inspiration, made a lasting impression on his work.

"Modest Recording Instruments"

Surrealism, a literary and artistic movement that derived from the arrival of the leader of Zürich Dada, Tristan Tzara, in Paris, was initiated around the review *Littérature*, a journal founded in 1919 by André Breton, Philippe Soupault and Louis Aragon in direct response to the First World War and its aftermath. The young Breton, as a wartime psychiatric assistant to Dr. Raoul Leroy, a former student of the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, found in the traumatized soldiers he treated during and immediately after the First World War a source of literary inspiration that he named *surréalisme*. Enraged by the ease with which French official culture could seemingly resume normal activities after the war, Breton devoted himself to a form of literary and, later, artistic output that evoked and mimicked its traumatized survivors and their symptoms. Surrealism as a movement was therefore an eager if not accurate interlocutor of what fin-de-siècle French psychiatry and the developing discipline of psychoanalysis had to offer to the arts.

What the surrealists privileged above all else was famously defined in their first *Manifesto* of 1924 as "pure psychic automatism," performed by *les modestes*

Correspondance avec Tristan Tzara et Francis Picabia: 1919-1924. André Breton ; présentée et éditée par Henri Béhar. Paris: Gallimard, 2017. 134.

[29] Letter to Thomas McGreevy of 6th February 1936. *Letters*, 1:311.

appareils enregistreurs, or modest recording instruments.[30] The manifesto, written initially as the introductory essay for Breton and Soupault's collected volume of *Les Champs Magnétiques* characterized their premise thus: "Mais nous, qui ne nous sommes livres à aucun travail de filtration, qui nous sommes faits dans nos œuvres les sourds réceptacles de tant d'échos, *les modestes appareils enregistreurs*… »[31] These were co-authored texts written in approximation of techniques like free association, the interpretation of dreams and "original" writing, or "pre-logical," as Beckett described his own work in a letter to MacGreevy.[32] Not possessing any talents of their own, they wrote, they were merely "the deaf receptacles of many echoes."[33] To this end, Breton described *Les Champs Magnétiques* as simply an exercise in "blackening sheets," « Nous entreprîmes de noircir du papier »[34] a formulation by which Beckett's narrator would describe his own endeavors in *Molloy*: « Mais afin de noircir encore quelques pages. »[35] Breton defined surrealism as follows in a mock-dictionary entry in the Manifesto:

> Je le définis donc une fois pour toutes:
>
> SURRÉALISME : n.m. Automatisme psychique pur par lequel on se propose d'exprimer, soit verbalement, soit par écrit, soit de toute autre manière, le fonctionnement réel de la pensée. Dictée de la pensée, en l'absence de tout

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[30] Breton, André, « *Manifeste du surréalisme* » in *Œuvres Complètes* Vol. 1. Paris : Gallimard, 1988. 328.

[31] « *Manifeste du surréalisme* », 330.

[32] Beckett described his own writing as "pre-logical" in a letter to MacGreevy and to his co-translator of *Molloy*, Patrick Bowles. Noted in Lawrence, Tim, *Samuel Beckett's Critical Aesthetics*, 17.

[33] « *Manifeste du surréalisme* ». 330.

[34] « *Manifeste du surréalisme* ». 330.

[35] Beckett, Samuel, *Molloy*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 2004. 91.

> contrôle exercé par la raison, en dehors de toute préoccupation esthétique ou morale.[36]

As a method of composing poetry and prose, surrealism was less than precise and in fact often deliberately misleading about its clinical sources. Anna Balakian, in her early biography of Breton, has persuasively argued that the medical texts most readily available to the young student in the years after the war were those of the French psychiatrist Pierre Janet, a student of Charcot. These were also written in French, his native language, meaning that he could read them earlier and with more ease than German texts. Janet's *L'Automatisme Psychologique* was in its ninth edition by 1921 and Balakian suggests that the "first materials of surrealism" were the types of exchanges with patients that this book recommended: trying to interpret dreams and record "disassociations of involuntary thought" with a complete "absence of critical intervention."[37] "Let the pen wander automatically, on the page even as the medium interrogates his mind." [38] Janet's work, and not until later Freud's idea of the unconscious, therefore formed the intellectual current underlying surrealist practice and provided the ways in which Breton came to associate the symptoms of traumatized patients with the production of 'liberatory' or 'original' language. Jennifer Gibson goes further, however, in suggesting that Breton, during his military psychiatric training in Nantes, borrowed from Leroy a widely available textbook, Emmanuel Régis's 1887 *Precis de psychiatrie*, that had been updated to include material on Freud. In her fascinating essay "Surrealism before Freud: Dynamic Psychiatry's 'Simple Recording Instrument,'" she traces Breton's use of this

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[36] « *Manifeste du surréalisme*. » 328.

[37] Balakian, Anna. *André Breton: Magus of Surrealism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

[38] Janet, Pierre. *L'Automatisme Psychologique.* Felix Alcau, Paris, 1921. 9th ed.

expression, *modestes appareils enreigstreurs*, to a relatively common analogy used in Régis's book, which argued that Freud was hugely indebted to French dynamic psychiatry, especially Janet.[39] Gibson continues to argue that at the time of his first surrealist texts, printed serially in *Littérature* from 1919 onwards, Breton was generally unfamiliar with Freud and, tellingly, took his principles of free association or "*auto-analyse*" as Régis put it, from this textbook and from Janet's *L'Automatisme psychologique*, showing that at this time he saw the process as something that could be self-conducted, as both "the transmitter and the recorder," "a particularly non-Freudian interpretation."[40] By the time he composed the first Manifesto to accompany the *Champs Magnétiques*, Breton had rejected any association with Janet, who had, in the meantime, "come to symbolize the very doxa of French psychology" that Breton scorned and who had dismissed the potential for the *merveilleux* that Breton so strived to find, writing "The poor patients whom I studied had no genius."[41] To the surprise of his co-author Philippe Soupault, Breton refused any further acknowledgment of Janet and characterized surrealist prose under the new influence of Freud in the 1924 Manifesto.[42]

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[39] Gibson, Jennifer. "Surrealism before Freud: Dynamic Psychiatry's 'Simple Recording Instrument.'" *Art Journal* 46, no. 1 (1987): 56–60. 57.

[40] Gibson, Jennifer. "Surrealism before Freud." 57.

[41] See Bacopoulos-Viau, Alexandra, "Automatism, Surrealism and the making of French psychopathology: the case of Pierre Janet." *History of Psychiatry 23*, Nº 3 (September 1, 2012): 259–76. 267.

[42] Despite the Janetian reference in the very title of *Champs Magnétiques*, "according to Soupault, Breton had systematically failed to acknowledge publicly 'that the readings and re-readings of Pierre Janet's book forced us to question ourselves about poetic creation.'" In Bacopoulos-Viau, Alexandra, "Automatism, Surrealism and the making of French psychopathology," 260.

When they could read them, Freud's *Die Traumdeutung* (1899-1900), the short essay *Das Unheimliche* (1919) and *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920) were the texts most important to the surrealists. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud drew comparisons between the study of the play of children on the point of language and the traumatic neuroses of First World War veterans. What, Freud asked, is the repetitive function of the *fort-da* game? He found that war veterans who were trying to process trauma, or something in excess of the pursuit of pleasure, made belated attempts to prepare the psyche for the shock they had already endured. Breton thus later characterized his versions of automatic writing as approximations of psychoanalytic practice with these soldiers, including, importantly, the technique of verbal free association. And although Freud only used automatic writing as a clinical tool early on, as a way to move beyond hypnosis, Breton described the process as follows in the first Manifesto:

> Tout occupé que j'étais encore de Freud à cette époque et familiarisé avec ses méthodes d'examen que j'avais eu quelque peu l'occasion de pratiquer sur des malades pendant la guerre, je résolus d'obtenir de moi ce qu'on cherche à l'obtenir d'eux, soit un monologue de débit aussi rapide que possible, sur lequel l'esprit critique du sujet ne fasse porter aucun jugement, qui ne s'embarrasse, par suite, d'aucune réticence, et qui soit aussi exactement que possible la *pensée parlée*.[43]

It is important to note therefore that Bretonian surrealism diverged entirely from the clinical ends of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, rejecting psychiatry in particular when it pathologized the very freedoms, convulsions and uninhibited creative potential that Breton prized. "In contrast to the 'mad love' so cherished by

[43] Breton, André. « *Manifeste du surréalisme* ». 326.

the Surrealist leader, to the intoxicating desire and convulsive beauty – in contrast to the tropes of exhilarating passion and the attraction for the irrational, one finds a psychological model assigning to the automatic mind a morbid origin."[44]

Breton's second, solo-authored collection of automatic writing, *Poisson Soluble,* was "written in a 'feverish frenzy,' as if possessed," according to Balakian, as he pursued the literary rather than psychiatric or medial intent of his prose. Nevertheless he self-published in journals that would mimic the format and language of a scientific publication. *La Révolution surréaliste*, the journal published from December 1924 onwards, "deliberately set itself up to resemble scientific periodicals of the time such as *La Nature*."[45] Dream journals by Breton, Giorgio di Chirico, and Renée Gauthier (sample text: « *C'est le soir, chez moi. Picasso se tient au fond du divan »*) were placed alongside new and previously published *Textes Surréalistes* and poems by Aragon, Eluard, Desnos, Péret and others, as well as drawings and collages. Although for Breton verbal imagery would always have a more prominent place in his understanding of surrealism, since he had worked directly with the psychiatric patients whose linguistic ingenuity had thrilled him, it was not long before the imagistic potential of these concepts would be apparent. Soon the surrealists would start to produce artworks, like the automatic drawings of André Masson, and the collaborative works of Robert Desnos and Paul Éluard, and the *frottages*, or rubbings, of Max Ernst. These were executed under much the same circumstances as automatic writing: without censorship, inhibition or conscious design, freely and in a trance-like

[44] Bacopoulos-Viau, Alexandra. "Automatism, Surrealism and the making of French psychopathology." 267.

[45] Caws, Mary Ann ed. *Surrealism.* Themes and Movements. London: Phaidon Press, 2004. 19.

state of possession, that was, for Desnos at least, difficult to get out of once he was in it.

This Quarter

This introduction to surrealism briefly describes the literary and artistic atmosphere into which Beckett arrived in Paris. To imagine that Joyce did not overlap with the world of the surrealists in any way would be a mistake, nor was Joyce immune to what Louis Aragon termed the *Vague de rêves*, or "the mania for dreaming spread over Paris" as Walter Benjamin glossed it.[46] Like Freud and Breton, Joyce explored reality through dreams as he wrote parts of *Ulysses* and particularly *Finnegans Wake*, but did not relate his work directly to the unconscious and the dream, and did not seem to engage with the earlier models of psychiatry that Breton did. Viewing the barrier between waking and sleeping as permeable, Joyce commented "Why all this fuss and bother about the mystery of the unconscious? What about the mystery of the conscious? What do they know of that?"[47] Joyce also resisted any attempts on the part of official surrealism to be drawn into their ranks, challenging René Crevel, on his presentation of the second Surrealist Manifesto, with the words "Can you justify every word? Because I can justify every syllable."[48] But

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[46] Benjamin, Walter: "Dream Kitsch: Gloss on Surrealism." In *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media.* Edited by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin; Translated by Edmund Jephcott et al. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008.

[47] Budgen, Frank. *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses, and Other Writings*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

[48] « *Pouvez-vous justifier chaque mot ? Car moi, je peux justifier chaque syllabe* ». As recounted by Beckett to Anne Atik. In Atik, Anne. *How it Was: A Memoir of Samuel Beckett.* London: Faber and Faber, 2001. 85.

for Beckett, dream "loosened individuality like a bad tooth."[49] The "Irish Oblomov," as the art dealer Peggy Guggenheim called him, was attracted to the surrealists' version of a communal, delirious use of language and translated nearly half the volume of *This Quarter* into English.[50]

This Quarter aimed to represent every aspect of written and pictorial surrealist work to an English-speaking audience and was designed expressly by Breton to package surrealism in the way he wanted it to be seen: as an independent literary-artistic movement in which Dada played a very small, failed part in what surrealism would come to fulfill. This may explain why Tristan Tzara was anxiously inquiring about translations, in letters to Breton, so close to the publication date.[51] The issue included drawings and engravings by Ernst, Man Ray and Yves Tanguy; experimental prose by René Char, René Crevel and Marcel Duchamp; poems by Tzara, Éluard and Benjamin Péret; the script for the 1929 Luis Buñuel film *Un Chien Andalou*, and large sections of *Nadja*, Breton's 1928 novella. In addition, there was an introduction written by Breton, poems by Breton, and sections from Breton's *Poisson Soluble.* Titus's editorial statement cites the French Philosophical Society's definition of Surrealism from 1932 in their *Vocabulaire Technique et Critique de la Philosophie* as

> A word created by Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les Mamelles de Tirésias, drame surréaliste* (performed 1917, published 1918), and probably an imitation of

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[49] Benjamin, Walter. "Surrealism: Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia." In *One Way Street and Other Writings*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter. New York: Verso, 1978. 229.

[50] Guggenheim, Peggy, *Out of This Century: The Informal Memoirs of Peggy Guggenheim.* New York: The Dial Press, 1946.

[51] Fifield, Peter. "'I am writing a manifesto because I have nothing to say' (Soupault): Samuel Beckett and the Interwar Avant-Garde." In *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*. 177.

> the word *Supernaturalisme* proposed by Gérard de Nerval... Taken over by André Breton and a whole school of modern literature and art, it is characterized by a contempt for deliberate composition or logical concatenation and by the systematic employment of the unconscious and the irrational, of dreams and morbid states, justifying itself often by psycho-analysis.[52]

Beckett translated the long central section of the journal titled "Surrealism and Madness," which includes excerpts from the *First Surrealist Manifesto*, excerpts from Breton's *Nadja*, texts on art and hysteria, and an exchange between Breton and the Medico-Psychological society which argued that surrealist texts, *Nadja* in particular, were inciting patients in mental institutions to attack their psychiatrists.[53] As I have noted, when the disciplines of psychiatry and psychoanalysis became more officially recognized, Breton rebelled against them, convinced that they were suppressing the *merveilleux* in madness. This makes Beckett's translations of sections from a text co-authored by Breton and Éluard called *The Possessions* all the more interesting, since they not only show that surrealism's most significant and lasting contributions to Beckett's work was their use of automatic writing techniques and their emphasis on insanity and the asylum, but also show Beckett's awareness of their nineteenth-century origins.

Les Possessions

Les Possessions, a section taken from Breton and Eluard's co-authored 1930 volume *L'immaculée conception*, was comprised of five examples of automatic

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[52] *This Quarter*, 4.

[53] *This Quarter*, 32.

writing set in the midst of a series of texts on conception, birth, life and death.[54] The "Possessions" were short, unpunctuated essays in which various states of madness were simulated, producing uncensored, unstoppable language and which Maurice Nadeau in his *History of Surrealism* would later call the most important document of what surrealism had been.[55] They evoked distinct states of possession or insanity, referring to the various states of mental disability caused by paranoia, schizophrenia, syphilis or acute mania. For Breton, these simulation prose texts were to replace the ballad, the sonnet and the epic, to, as Breton put it in his 1933 *The Automatic Message*, "cleanse the literary stables."[56] Beckett's later "dramaticules," "fizzles," "residua," "disjecta," and "psychographs" can also be seen as sharing in the same attempt.

Beckett translated three of the *Possessions* into English: *Mental Debility Essayed*, *General Paralysis* and *Delirium of Interpretation.* The texts, despite the protestations of *un scrupule de garantir la loyauté de l'entreprise*, do not seem as unmediated as those which Beckett would later produce in his own novels, since, as Anna Balakian has pointed out, surrealism did not derange literary syntax as much as its precursor, Dada, did.[57] Each one, in fact, takes a pointedly satirical, and therefore rather detached, approach to the subject matter. In *Mental Debility Essayed*, the subject, who confides that he has sent drawings of a submarine and "a secret letter on ministerial paper to the President of the Republic," reveals his idiocy through his

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[54] Breton, André & Éluard, Paul. *L'Immaculée conception.* Paris: Éditions surréalistes, 1930.

[55] Nadeau, Maurice. *The History of Surrealism*. Translated from the French by Richard Howard. New York: Macmillan, 1965.

[56] Breton, « *Le message automatique*». In *Oeuvres Complètes*.

[57] Breton, André, & Eluard, Paul. *L'Immaculée conception.* 27.

great investment in the state's military and educational hierarchy.[58] In *Delirium of Interpretation* a man imagines himself a bird and interprets the world as such. This *essai*, as Jean-Michel Rabaté has noted, was the paradigm for the "paranoid-critical" method of interpretation that the surrealists would later espouse.[59] Finally, Beckett's translation of the *Simulation of a General Paralysis, Essayed* uses an antiquated version of the second-person pronoun in English to draw a connection between the romantic reverie of the poem and the turn-of-the-century belief that paralysis was a symptom of syphilis. This, as Philippe Chardin has noted in his essay on *Les Possessions*, was part of the surrealist insistence that the sacred and profane aspects of love should not be held apart.[60]

Beckett's translation of the *Simulation of a General Paralysis, Essayed* involves some curious choices. He removes much of the punctuation in his version of the text, making it more spontaneous, but undermines its immediacy and sense of modernity by using "thou" and "thy" in place of "tu." By translating the passage

> Tu viendras tu penses à moi tu viendras tu accourras sur tes treize jambes pleines et sur toutes tes jambes vides qui batten l'air du balancement de tes bras une multitude de bras qui veulent m'enlacer moi à genoux entre tes jambes et tes bras pour t'enlacer sans crainte que mes locomotives t'empêchent de venir à moi et je te suis et je suis devant toi pour t'arrêter pour te donner toutes les étoiles du ciel en un baiser sur les yeux tous les baisers du monde en une étoile sur la bouche. Bien à toi en flambeau.[61]

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[58] *This Quarter*, 122.

[59] Rabaté, Jean-Michel. "The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Psychoanalysis." Cambridge Core, September 2014. 61.

[60] Chardin, Philippe. « La Simulation des Delires Mentaux dans *Les Possessions* ». 663.

[61] *This Quarter*, 122.

as follows:

> thou art coming thou thinkest of me thou art coming on thy thirteen full legs and on all thine empty legs that beat the air with the swaying of thine arms a multitude of arms that want to clasp me kneeling between thy legs and thine arms to clasp me without fear lest my locomotives should prevent thee from coming to me and I am thou and I am before thee to stop thee to give thee all the stars of the sky in one kiss on thine eyes all the kisses of the world in one star on thy mouth. Thine in flames.[62]

Beckett unmistakably refers the *essai* to the automatic writing of the late nineteenth and earlier part of the twentieth century.

The surrealist poetry in *This Quarter* also got the old-fashioned treatment. For example, in his translations of Breton's poem *L'Union Libre*, Beckett rendered the line *De rendez-vous dans le lit même du torrent* as the prudish and convoluted "And tryst in the bed yea the bed of the torrent."[63] Where Breton wrote *Et de fontain à têtes de dauphins sous la glace*, Beckett used the abbreviated version of the word "over," evoking Victorian funerary statuary with "And fountain froze o'er its dolphins."[64] In the poems "Scarcely Disfigured" and "Out of sight in the direction of my body," his translations of Éluard's *À peine défigurée* and *À perte de vue dans le sens de mon corps*, "thou," "thy" and "thine" replace "tu" and "ton." In "Scarcely Disfigured," Éluard's modest opening lines, *Adieu tristesse / bonjour tristesse* is changed to

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[62] *This Quarter*, 125.

[63] *This Quarter*, 75. For this insight and many more that inform this section I was helped immensely by Pascale Sardin and Karine Germoni's excellent article "Scarcely Disfirgured: Beckett's Surrealist Translations" in *Modernism / Modernity*, Vol. 18, No. 4. Nov. 2011, 739-753.

[64] Samuel Beckett, *The Collected Poems of Samuel Beckett: A Critical Edition*; Edited by Seán Lawlor and John Pilling. London: Faber and Faber, 2012. 68-69.

"Farewell sadness / Greeting sadness," compounding this by following the opening lines with three "Thou art"s at the beginning of the next three sentences. By adding these pronouns and complex turns to the verse, the poem loses the straightforward address of Éluard's original. In each instance, Beckett makes a point of replacing the simple with the excessively formal.

Commentators have posited Ezra Pound's translations of old Provençal texts, with which Beckett was familiar through his academic advisor in the French Department at Trinity College Dublin, and which were the subject of his short review, "Ex Cathezra," of 1934, as a source for his archaisms.[65] But Beckett's translations seem less antique in general, as is argued, than an affectation peculiar to his translations of the surrealists. It was not the case with all of his translations of French poetry. In her chapter on Beckett in *Surprised in Translation*, for example, Mary-Ann Caws notes that, in his translations of Rimbaud's "The Drunken Boat" and Apollinaire's "Zone," Beckett will "leave this Quakerish 'thee' for a more ordinary 'you,' less off-putting to the reader."[66] And as Caws points out, it is very difficult to translate an exclamation accurately, noting approvingly Beckett's simple "ah" in his version of *Le Bâteau Ivre*. In his translations of Breton's *Soluble Fish*, however, in *This Quarter*, Beckett makes the prose sound hysterical and overwrought by adding multiple exclamations, among them "lo!" "oh!" and "ah!"

In his translations of Éluard's poems for *This Quarter* we can also see that Beckett both removed structure in the form of punctuation, and added it back in again with repetition, either by emphasizing Éluard's original repetitions or placing them

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[65] Sardin and Germoni, "'Scarcely Disfigured,'" 745. See also Beckett's review of Pound's *Make it New* in "Ex Cathezra." In *Disjecta*, 77–79.

[66] "Beckett's Business" in *Surprised in Translation*, Mary-Ann Caws. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 95.

where they had not originally been. In *L'Amoureuse*, for example, which Beckett translated as "Lady Love," the punctuation was removed in accordance with the Bretonian imperative of "absolute continuity."[67] The poem, from Éluard's *Les Répétitions*, has all of the key emblems of surrealism: romantic love for a woman or "lady" as Beckett coyly translates it, the eye, and the dream. Beckett changed the order of lines in the eight-line poem to recreate some of Éluard's rhymes that would otherwise be lost. The regularity is brought in by rhyming every third line, and by using repetition, where Beckett translates *Et ses cheveux sont dans les miens* as "And her hair is in my hair," and reinforces Éluard's own "Me font rire, pleurer et rire" with an additional "And" to make "And me laugh cry and laugh."[68] The repetitious poem, in its English version, persuades the reader to accept the numerous contradictions: the "dreams in the bright day," "make the suns evaporate" and finally the culminating and very Beckettian formulation, "Speak when I have nothing to say."[69] The poet's imagery gives the sense of disproportionate esteem that love induces; that one person could, in the right position "standing on my lids," block out the sun "as a stone against the sky." This mad love is what makes us speak when we have nothing to say, a type of folly that prompts automatic speech. Although Beckett's work seems more concerned with *fou* than *amour fou*, the principle remains the same – there are reasons for speaking and writing that don't make sense. This Bretonian and Éluardian synthesis shows the groundwork for a Beckettian surrealism, in which he would combine repetition and automatic writing, but strip it of much of the imagery typically associated with those poets.

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[67] Breton, André. Introduction to *This Quarter*. *TQ* 19.

[68] *This Quarter*, 86.

[69] Beckett, Samuel. *Collected Poems*, 72.

But where did this device of repetition come from in Beckett's translations? The surrealists aestheticized insanity in keeping with a romantic ideal, and the rhetorical flourishes of *Les Possessions* were in stark contrast to « *la pauvreté et la tristesse répétitive de la monomanies psychotiques* » as Philippe Chardin has noted.[70] In his definitive account of the European interwar avant-garde's fascination with the art of the insane, John MacGregor details how the nineteenth-century preoccupation with genius was replaced in the twentieth century by a preoccupation with madness.[71] In other words, the type of mental state simulated by Breton and Éluard was an artistic, edited version of what was more accurately recorded by Breton in the psychiatric hospital where he first encountered these subjects. Beckett's translation curiously undermines the modernity of their work, while in his own versions of these types of prose, as we will see, he would lose much of the romance whilst maintaining something more of the "repetitive monomania" noted by Chardin. Not only was he translating, therefore, but Beckett was, through his translations, debating the relative persuasiveness of the modernity of surrealist writing and its authenticity to source material, versus its poetic or literary qualities. In his novel *Murphy* we can see clues as to why he may have done so.

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[70] Chardin, Philippe. « *N'est pas fou qui veut » ?* La simulation des délires mentaux par André Breton et Paul Eluard dans « Les Possessions ». 663. In *André Breton et les sources psychiatriques du surréalisme*, Alain Chevrier also notes the influence of *Les écrits et les dessins des aliénés dans les maladies nerveuses et mentales*, a 1905 manual by the French psychiatrist Joseph Rogues de Fursac, on Breton and Eluard's composition of the *Simulations*.

[71] MacGregor, John. *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane.* Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1989.

"Freudian Blarney:" Beckett's "perfect surrealist novel."

After his two-year fellowship in Paris ended, Beckett spent the period from 1929-37 traveling back and forth between Dublin, London and Germany, always with the ultimate aim of returning to Paris as soon as he could afford to do so. Exiled from the center of the artistic world and the international avant-garde, he nevertheless tried to maintain a steady thematic connection to the surrealists by keeping psychiatry at the center of his writing. Described by Herbert Read, the English art critic, anarchist and patron-theoretician of English surrealism as "the perfect surrealist novel," and by Dylan Thomas as "Freudian Blarney," *Murphy,* as well as *Watt* and the *Three Novels*, can best be understood in the context of Beckett's participation in this avant-garde fascination with the insane and the so-called primitive.[72] In other words, the institutional setting of his novels was not just a result of Beckett's own psychological state in the 1930s, as has been claimed by his biographers, but marks his involvement with what was a source of artistic material for a whole group of artists and writers during the interwar period.[73] Beckett's interest in this nexus of avant-garde themes also gives us a more specific sense of why he started to read widely in psychiatric and psychoanalytic texts during these years, which is also usually described as an attempt to better understand his own psychological state during these years.

Beckett's school friend from Dublin, Dr. Geoffrey Thompson, was the Junior House Physician at the Bethlem hospital for most of 1935. Situated in London from the fourteenth century onwards, Bethlem had for centuries been popularly known as "Bedlam," and Londoners had visited the institution at the weekends for entertainment. It was to Thompson that Beckett had sent "all the surrealism and

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[72] Thomas, Dylan. In *New English Weekly*, XII, 17th March 1938, 454. Read, Herbert.

[73] See Bair, Deirdre; Cohn, Ruby; Cronin, Anthony; Knowslon, James, cited above.

madness translations," and acknowledged that he used Bethlem as a point of departure for his novel *Murphy*, which has as its setting a sanatorium for the mentally ill called the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat.[74] Thompson, with whom Beckett corresponded throughout the thirties and with whom he attended Wilfrid Bion's and Carl Jung's early lectures on psychoanalysis, brought the young writer along as a visitor: "I went around the wards with him," as Beckett wrote in a letter to MacGreevy.[75]

Urged by his girlfriend Celia to get a job, Murphy, the idle protagonist of the novel, is eventually hired at a psychiatric institution where another Irish poet, Austin Ticklepenny, who "sucks his 'gaelic prosodoturfy' from mugs of Beamish porter,"[76] manages to get him work. Ticklepenny, a character based on Austin Clarke, an Irish poet of the school Beckett detested and whom he had criticized in his essay "Recent Irish Poetry," is the kind of Irish poet who wants to leave the asylum, unlike Murphy, who very much wants to get in. Before entering the institution, Murphy spends his time looking for ways to "come out in his mind" – to achieve a "third" state, or a dissociated state between sleep and waking, mind and body. In order to do so, he has to bind himself to a rocking chair in his room and rock himself into a catatonic state of hypnosis or torpor, juxtaposed and contrasted throughout the novel with the state of "attunement" that a secondary character, Mr. Neary, can attain through heart attack. In his third state, "he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom. He did

[74] Beckett is mentioned on the hospital's website under "notable visitors."

[75] Letter to Thomas McGreevy of 23rd September 1935.

[76] Ackerley, Christopher John, and S. E. Gontarski. *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Works, Life, and Thought*. New York: Grove Press, 2004. 276.

not move, he was a point in the ceaseless unconditioned generation and passing away of line. Matrix of surds."[77]

On his first tour of the grounds of the "M.M.M.," Murphy becomes familiar with the different types of inmate:

> Melancholics, motionless and brooding, holding their heads or bellies according to type. Paranoids, feverishly covering sheets of paper with complaints against their treatment or verbatim reports of their inner voices… An emaciated schizoid, petrified in a toppling attitude as though condemned to an eternal tableau vivant, his left hand rhetorically extended holding a cigarette half smoked and out, his right, quivering and rigid, pointing upward.[78]

Murphy, immediately feeling at home in the asylum, finds that "every hour in the wards should increase, together with his esteem for the patients, his loathing of the text-book attitude towards them, the complacent scientific conceptualism that made contact with outer reality the index of mental well-being."[79] In the institution, or the "little world," he starts "to think of the patients not as banished from a system of benefits but as escaped from a colossal fiasco."[80] In his new capacity as nurse, Murphy plays chess with Mr. Endon, "the most biddable little gaga in the entire institution," a character based on a composite of a schizophrenic inhabitant of the Bethlem home and Marcel Duchamp, the avant-garde artist with whom Beckett became great chess friends and whose 1915-1923 artwork, the *Bride Stripped Bare by*

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[77] Beckett, Samuel. *Murphy.* In *Samuel Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition*, Vol.1. New York: Grove Press, 2006. 70.

[78] *Murphy*, 1:102.

[79] *Murphy*, 1:106.

[80] *Murphy*, 1:107.

her Bachelors, Even, the written notes for which were included in the Surrealist issue of *This Quarter*, was a point of reference for the complicated heating, rocking and toilet-flushing mechanism that ultimately kills Murphy.[81]

Murphy tries at length to become friends with Mr. Endon, who cannot recognize him as such: "…the sad truth was, that while Mr. Endon for Murphy was no less than bliss, Murphy for Mr. Endon was no more than chess."[82] At the end of the novel, in Murphy's final attempts to emulate Endon and his unseeing narcissism, Murphy tries to summon up any image at all. As he goes to his death, to rock himself in his chair for the last time, he tries to get a last image in his mind and finds that he cannot picture his mother, his father, Celia, the other characters of the novel, or characters from Beckett's other novels. "He tried with the men, women, children and animals that belong to even worse stories than this. In vain in all cases."[83] In her chapter on Beckett in *First Love*, Maria DiBattista reads this scene as one of Beckett's attacks on the optical condition during these years. "He could not get a picture in his mind of any creature he had met, animal or human."[84] All Murphy can see is the following image: "He saw the clenched fists and rigid upturned face of the Child in a Giovanni Bellini Circumcision, waiting to feel the knife. He saw eyeballs being scraped, first any eyeballs, then Mr. Endon's."[85] This startling image, DiBattista notes, is derived in part from the attack on the eye in surrealist filmmaker Luis

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[81] *Murphy*, 1:143. Beckett did not translate Duchamp's contribution to *This Quarter.* The composer John Cage and Marcel Duchamp later staged the chess game choreographed in *Murphy* in a 1968 performance. See the following essay for further details: Hughill, Andrew: "Opposition and Sister Squares: Marcel Duchamp and Samuel Beckett."

[82] *Murphy*, 1:144.

[83] *Murphy,* 1:151.

[84] *Murphy,* 1:150.

[85] DiBattista, Maria, *First Love: The Affections of Modern Fiction.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. 216–217.

Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou*, the screenplay for which was also included in the surrealist volume of *This Quarter*. It marks the start of Beckett's erosion of imagery, particularly surrealist imagery, from his novels, as I will discuss in the second chapter.

Echo's Bones

In letters of those days to MacGreevy, Beckett describes his poems "happening" or "dictating" themselves to him, noting that he had spent long afternoons in Dublin walking around the outskirts of two of the city's mental institutions.[86] *Echo's Bones*, his short poem of 1933, would capture these lonely walks on the gloomy fringes of Europe: in it he wrote "asylum under my tread all this day."[87] As well as the poem *Echo's Bones*, the last in a collection of thirteen poems also called *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates*, there is also a short story by the same name that Beckett wrote in 1933. "Echo" seems therefore to have been an important avatar for Beckett in these years. The Greek myth of Echo and Narcissus, in which the talkative nymph, Echo, is condemned to only copy, but never originate language, underlies the relationship between Murphy and Endon, and was the figure Beckett chose to represent himself in his encounter with surrealism in *Murphy*. The character Endon, the patient that Murphy emulates, is the Narcissus figure; Narcissus, from the Greek *narkē*, means exactly what Murphy is in search of: a state of torpor. Only through imitating him can Murphy hope to gain the attention of Endon, but he is unsuccessful. "The relation between Mr. Murphy and Mr. Endon could not have been

[86] Mooney, Sinéad. *A Tongue Not Mine*, 59.

[87] Beckett, Samuel. *Collected Poems*, 23.

better summed up than by the former's sorrow at seeing himself in the latter's immunity from seeing anything but himself…a speck in the eye of his unseen."[88]

But Echo was not just a myth that Beckett happened upon for the first time in the novel. Breton had cited *echolalia*, a condition of unsolicited repetition in which one can only repeat the last word heard, as a productive source of text for surrealism in the first Manifesto: *Quel âge avez-vous? –Vous? (Echolalie)*,[89] and re-evoked it later in *Poisson Soluble*:

> Plusieurs échos se répondent sur terre: l'écho des pluies comme le bouchon d'une ligne, l'écho du soleil comme la soude mêlée au sable. L'écho présent est celui des larmes, et de la beauté propre aux aventures illisibles, aux rêves tronqués.[90]

The motif of echo and echolalia, as it relates to psychiatry as well as to myth, is therefore one that can be traced from Beckett's work as a translator and the artistic milieu in which he participated to his own writing.

As a result, I think, of echoing the surrealist fascination with the mentally ill in *Murphy*, Beckett read widely in the literature on psychiatry and psychoanalysis during the 1930s. Among the books he read on psychiatry was the influential 1892 polemic *Entartung*, or *Degeneration*, by Max Nordau, also a former student of Charcot's.[91] The subject of degeneracy was a source of tremendous anxiety to Victorian England,

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[88]Beckett, Samuel. *Murphy*. 1:150.

[89] Breton, André. *Manifeste*, in *Œuvres Complètes*. 336.

[90] Breton, André. *Poisson Soluble*, in *Œuvres Complètes*. "Several echoes answer each other on earth: the echo of rains like the cap of a line, the echo of the sun like soda mixed with sand. The present echo is that of tears, and of the beauty characteristic of unreadable adventures and truncated dreams." 350.

[91] As noted in Ulrika Maude's essay "Convulsive Aesthetics: Beckett, Chaplin and Charcot," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014. 71.

articles with titles like “Is Our Race Degenerating?” “Are We Degenerating Physically?” or “Has Our Race Degenerated?” published frequently in scientific journals like *The Lancet.* In his illuminating study, *Degeneration, Normativity and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle*, Stephan Karschay has related this obsessive concern with degeneracy to the legacy of British soldiers returning from European wars, contributing to the fantasy of a “national degeneracy crisis” of an injured, weak male population in Victorian England at the end of empire.[92]

Nordau’s treatise popularized many of the theories of degeneration described in the French psychiatrist Bénédict Morel’s *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés maladives*.[93] It put post-Darwinian medico-evolutionary theories of degeneration into a more generalized cultural critique, in which he pathologized fin-de-siècle art, music and literature including Wagner, Ibsen, the English Æsthetic movement and the Pre-Raphaelites, diagnosing them according to psychiatric discoveries of the late nineteenth century, including narcissism and hysteria. It was first published in English 1895, the same year as Oscar Wilde’s trial for gross indecency, and, as Karschay notes in his introduction, Wilde had not only been listed as an “Æsthete degenerate” by Nordau, but had used Nordau’s pseudo-diagnosis in his own defense, writing that he was guilty of “sexual madness… diseases to be cured by a physician, rather than crimes to be punished by a judge.”[94]

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[92] Karschay, Stephan. *Degeneration, Normativity and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. 20.

[93] Morel, Bénédict Auguste, «*Traité Des Dégénérescences Physiques, Intellectuelles, Et Morales De L'espèce Humaine: Et Des Causes Qui Produisent Ces Variétés Maladives*». Paris: Baillière, 1857.

[94] Noted in Karschay, Stephan. *Degeneration, Normativity and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle*. 1.

This may well be the reason that Beckett read Nordau's *Degeneration*, making notes about Tourette's Syndrome, aphasia and echolalia, amongst other conditions. Nordau characterized Émile Zola, amongst others, as a "Tourettic writer." In the book, which expressed a great concern to explain the literary and artistic products of a *fin-de-siècle* deterioration of European culture according to these theories of deterioration and descent, and which would become extremely popular in National Socialist Germany, Nordau associated echolalia with "feeblemindedness," characterizing it as a type of punning practiced by those whose mental capacity only allowed them to copy sounds without understanding meaning.

> He hears a word, and feels compelled to repeat it, once or oftener, sometimes to the extent of 'Echolalia'; or it calls into his consciousness other words similar to it in sound, but not connected with it in meaning, whereupon he thinks and talks in a series of completely disconnected rhymes; or else the words have, besides their similarity of sound, a very remote and weak connection of meaning; this gives rise to punning.[95]

Beckett read the book in translation in the 1930s, evidenced by his notes on *Degeneration* in his "Dream Notebook:" "Genius," he wrote, at least of this sort, "is a disease of the nerves."[96] He may also have been familiar with George Bernard Shaw's defense of Wilde, in a decimation of Nordau's premise in his commissioned essay of 1895, "The Sanity of Art: An Exposure of the Current Nonsense about Artists Being Degenerate," where Shaw argued that not only was Nordau's book nonsense, but in

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[95] Nordau, Max. *Degeneration.* Translated from the Second Edition of the German Work. London, William Heinemann, 1898. 66.

[96] Salisbury, Laura, & Code, Chris, "Jackson's Parrot: Samuel Beckett, Aphasic Speech Automatisms, and Psychosomatic Language." In *Literature, Speech Disorders and Disability: Talking Normal.* Ed. Chris Eagle. London: Routledge, 2013.

its own utter obsession with the artists and symptoms under discussion, Nordau betrayed most of the traits he described as "degenerate" himself. "Imagine," Shaw wrote, "the general staleness and occasional putrescence of this mess disguised by the dressing of the terminology invented by Kraft-Ebbing, Lombroso, and all the latest specialists in madness and crime, to describe the artistic faculties and propensities as they operate in the insane."[97] Nordau compared the poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to echolalia; as Shaw pointed out, he was generally skeptical of rhyme in poetry. As a prominent symptom of Tourette's Syndrome, echolalia was chiefly of interest to Beckett and the surrealists for the purposes of composition, as another instance of the mind losing control of the body's functions, producing involuntary speech and the "convulsions" so important to Breton's poetry.[98]

As I have noted, the two hallmarks of Beckett's literary translations of the surrealists in *This Quarter* were an old-fashioned phrasing and repetition. These were Beckett's way of evoking what the surrealists drew from nineteenth-century French psychiatry, by reproducing the repetitions typical of echolalia, Tourette's Syndrome and a host of nineteenth-century clinical symptoms. His translations froze and commemorated the surrealist engagement with the nineteenth century, their decadent convulsions, like the "fountain frozen o'er" of Breton's *L'Union Libre*, marking them as outmoded and outdated, and affixing an earlier date to their literary output. But, I suggest, this was not done for the sake of mere pedantry, cynicism or to otherwise show Breton up. Why then would Beckett do this?

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[97] Shaw, George Bernard, "The Sanity of Art." Originally published in *Liberty*, 1895, then in 1908 by B.R. Tucker, New York. 70.

[98] See Maude, Ulrika, "Convulsive Aesthetics." André Breton closed his novel *Nadja* with the lines « *La beauté sera convulsive ou ne sera pas*. »

"Fueros are still in force"

In a chapter in his book *Echolalias,* Daniel Heller-Roazen analyzes Freud's first book, the 1891 *Zur Auffassung der Aphasien: Eine kritische Studie*, written in his pre-psychoanalytic period, and titled "On Aphasia" in its later English publication.[99] In this early text, Heller-Roazen notes, Freud theorizes the workings of the conscious and unconscious mind as a process of inscription: "Consciousness emerges, much like Freudian theory itself, as the product of a gradual process of writing and rewriting."[100] Within this structure, translation plays an important role, as it is the metaphor Freud uses to describe the process by which unconscious memories are transferred or "registered" in the conscious mind or memory. *Aphasia*, or the forgetting of speech, is one instance of a faulty transmission in the system of translation that Freud likens to "registering machines" and that results in what he termed "repression." The consequences of not 'transposing' this information successfully enough are, Freud writes, that

> …the excitation is dealt with in accordance with psychological laws in force in the earlier psychic period and along the paths open at that time. Thus an anachronism persists. In a particular province, fueros are still in force; we are in the presence of survivals.[101]

When, in other words, an event is not adequately "translated," the "material" is not updated and the mind "stalls."[102] Freud "invoke[es] the Spanish juridical term for outdated laws that persist in certain provinces" to describe these survivals,

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[99] Heller-Roazen, Daniel. *Echolalias.* New York: Zone Books, 2005. 140.

[100] Heller-Roazen, Daniel. *Echolalias.* 142.

[101] Freud, Sigmund. "On Aphasia." In Heller-Roazen, Daniel. *Echolalias.*

[102] Heller-Roazen, Daniel, *Echolalias*. 142.

anachronisms, remnants or atavistic marks as significant failures of translation, regions of the mind where "*fueros are still in force*."[103]

As Heller-Roazen observes, this process, on which the functioning mind relies "seems to have strangely little in common with the literary activity usually denoted by the same term," namely, translation. It is not hard, however, to imagine how Beckett's translation of Breton and Éluard could be read in the light of this observation.[104] In fact, "fueros are still in force" might describe Beckett's translation of the surrealists better than any other expression because it is motivated, Freud writes, by the "displeasure that would be generated by a translation."[105] This I do not mean simply as a pun regarding Beckett's paid work for *This Quarter*. According to Heller-Roazen's argument, the recurrent "speech remnants" or echolalias presented in aphasia indicate not problems of remembering, as commonly held, but signal a problem with forgetting or an "aggravated form of recollection."[106]

In his 1929 essay on surrealism, "The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" Walter Benjamin claimed, perhaps too generously, that the surrealists alone could see the revolutionary potential in the recently outmoded artifacts of modernity. He wrote, in a remarkable paragraph:

> Nothing could reveal more about Surrealism than their canon. Where shall I begin? He can boast an extraordinary discovery. He was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the outmoded, in the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photos, the objects that have begun to be extinct, grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago,

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[103] Heller-Roazen, Daniel. *Echolalias.* 142-143. Italics mine.

[104] Heller-Roazen, Daniel. *Echolalias.* 143.

[105] Heller-Roazen, Daniel. *Echolalias.* Translation by Daniel Heller-Roazen.

[106] Heller-Roazen, Daniel. *Echolalias.* 145.

> fashionable restaurants when the vogue has begun to ebb from them. The relation of these things to revolution– no one can have a more exact concept of it than these authors. No one before these visionaries and augurs perceived how destitution–not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects–can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism.[107]

In similar fashion, I argue, Beckett used his translations as a way to attribute this potential to the literary styles of surrealism, "willfully preserved in its apparent effacement,"[108] allowing surrealism to hold on to, or preventing it from forgetting, its sources. But why would he take such an interest in this problem of translation? What motivated Beckett's own "aggravated form of recollection" of surrealist sources? Or, in other words, what might have drawn Beckett to this understanding of surrealism, and to producing an understanding of surrealism as deliberately atavistic in the 1930s?

"Really, my Lord, you forget that I am a postwar degenerate."[109]

In describing his young protagonist Belaqua, in the short story *Echo's Bones*, as a "postwar degenerate," Beckett may have revealed the reason for his interest in this set of symptoms. As Heller-Roazen notes of Freud's *Studies in Hysteria*, "the aphasics who do less than they could because they "suffer mainly from reminiscences"" may seem like a peculiar way to think about translation, but it may be an accurate one for Beckett's treatment of surrealism. As with the rest of the

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[107] Benjamin, Walter. *One-Way Street and Other Writings*. London: Verso Books, 1997. 229.

[108] Heller-Roazen, Daniel, *Echolalias*. 187.

[109] Beckett, Samuel. *Echo's Bones*. Edited and annotated by Mark Nixon. London: Faber & Faber, 2014. 26.

Anglo-Irish ascendancy after the founding of the Irish Free State in 1923, Beckett was indeed "fallen from ancestral position," or "degenerate" in that sense of the word. If the First World War was the shock from which many of surrealism's first subjects had not fully recovered, the rebellion and war of Irish independence during the same years may have provided Beckett with a similar traumatic event. After the founding of the Irish Free State and partition of Northern Ireland, the country that Beckett had grown up in was gone, and although he was still *of* Ireland, Ireland was no longer *his*, in the sense of Anglo-Irish land ownership. He spent much of the years of the Irish civil war in the Portora Royal preparatory boarding school, in what would become Northern Ireland after partition. In the year that he enrolled at Trinity College Dublin, the Free State was declared, effectively abolishing the country in which Beckett had grown up and replacing it with a new country, a Catholic-majority theocracy. As Lois Gordon writes, "Beckett entered college after the armistice and establishment of the Irish Free State, the offspring of a well-to-do Protestant family and the product of Protestant schools for the sons of Protestant gentlemen."[110] Now he was a student at "one of the last bastions of English Protestant culture in Dublin" with alumni that included Burke, Berkley, Stoker, Swift, Synge and Wilde.[111] Outside the university gates, the new Free State was making rapid and concerted efforts to consolidate, amongst other things, a national literature based on the Gaelic Revival and the translation of books into Irish from other languages. The Censorship Act of 1929 prevented books that it deemed unsuitable from being translated into Irish or, later, being sold in the country,

[110] Gordon, Lois, *The World of Samuel Beckett, 1906–1946.* 22.

[111] Gordon, Lois, *The World of Samuel Beckett, 1906–1946.* 24.

a situation that Beckett reacted to in his biting essay "Censorship in the *Saorstát*," writing "Sterilization of the mind and apotheosis of the litter suit well together."[112]

The degeneration of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy had long been a subject for Irish literature. In the genre known as the "Big House" novel, from what is considered the first of the genre, Maria Edgeworth's 1800 novel *Castle Rackrent*, to the last, Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* of 1929, the downward progress of the Anglo-Irish Protestant landlord class had been charted. Typically following dissolute, alcoholic, childless protagonists, these "victims of their own degeneration" narrated the gradual decline in their population over the course of the nineteenth century and up to the Irish war of independence.[113] When Bowen, born shortly before Beckett in 1899, moved to London after Irish independence, she described herself as "the last of a race," and described her ancestral home, Bowen's Court, in a book of the same name in 1942. "It has taken the decline of the Anglo-Irish," she wrote, "to open up to them the poetry of regret; only the dispossessed know their land in the dark."[114]

When he encountered it in Paris, then, Beckett must have understood literary surrealism, in its relationship to the First World War, as evocative of the symptoms of so-called "degeneracy," similarly connected to anxieties around loss, of place, loss of privilege and stature, as I will discuss further in the second chapter. The types of neurological symptoms that for Nordau were associated with the descent of European civilization: aphasia, echolalic repetitions, Tourette's Syndrome, expressed through the surrealist theme of possession in particular, were echoed in the way Beckett

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[112] Beckett, Samuel, "Censorship in the *Saorstát.*" In *Disjecta*. 87.

[113] Genet, Jacqueline, ed. *The Big House in Ireland: Reality and Representation.* Brandon Books, Dingle, 1991.

[114] Bowen, Elizabeth. *Bowen's Court.* See also Gearóid Crónin's essay "Bowen and Landscape: The Big House and the Irish landscape in the work of Elizabeth Bowen." In Genet, Jacqueline, ed. *The Big House in Ireland.*

addressed the very abrupt, recent, and very real sense of his own dispossession: by styling himself as a literary degenerate who had come to the end of the line. As well as writing in the wake of his most recent Anglo-Irish Protestant theatrical peers: Yeats, Wilde, Shaw and Yeats, Ann Banfield has pointed out that Beckett was, significantly, writing after Joyce too, Ireland's first great Catholic writer. She writes "…between Yeats and Beckett had intervened something Yeats's history scarcely forsees: the first major Irish writer not Anglo-Irish but Irish-Catholic: James Joyce. Beckett is the first major Anglo-Irish writer to confront a major Catholic forerunner."[115]

Degenerate Art

It is in this light of this relationship to literary surrealism, and particularly through the uses of echolalia as a feature of "degeneracy," that we should view Beckett's 1936-1937 tour of Germany. Studies of Beckett's relationship to art have benefited from the recent publication of extensive letters he wrote about the paintings in the museums and private art collections of Germany, so it is clear that he went primarily to do this type of research. Not only was it oriented around his self-education in art, however, it was not a novice's trip. Beckett returned to Germany in 1936 to witness the socio-political deterioration of the country and particularly to see the so-called *Entartete Kunst* or "Degenerate Art," as the Nazis had termed modernist art, before its removal, sale or destruction.[116] The tour was directed towards private collections; Beckett knew who to meet and had contact with the curators, art

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[115] Banfield, Ann. "'Proust's Pessimism' as Beckett's Counter-Poison." In *Romanic Review* 100, Nº 1–2, (Jan-Mar 2009): 187-202. 4.

[116] Barron, Stephanie, and Peter W Guenther. *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany.* Los Angeles, Calif.: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991.

historians and collectors who were in the process of being purged from German cultural institutions. Many of the artists targeted by the Nazis overlapped with the surrealist circle in Paris; Max Ernst, for example, an initiator of the Cologne Dada group who had illustrated Eluard's *Les Répétitions* and who was the subject of the first poem in the collection, was interned along with the surrealist artist Hans Bellmer in 1939. Of the collections, art historians and curators he visited, Beckett seems to have been particularly struck by Will Grohmann, the "godfather of modernism," an art historian, critic and the curator at the Dresden Staatliche Gemäldegalerie from 1926 to 1933, before his dismissal by the Nazis for his work in the field of modernist art.[117] Grohmann had published important works on the German Expressionist group Die Brücke and on the Bauhaus, had championed the modernist artists Otto Dix, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky and Oskar Schlemmer, and his essays on surrealism, which Beckett may have read, had appeared in *Cahiers d'Art 10.*[118]

In *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936–1937*, Mark Nixon gives a detailed account of Beckett's travels, writing that "Any reader glancing at the German diaries could be forgiven for thinking that they were written by an art critic, and not by a creative writer."[119] *Murphy* had been rejected yet again and Beckett was still writing short pieces of criticism for the magazines, as well as applying for curatorial jobs in London museums. He wrote constantly and in great detail to Thomas MacGreevy about the paintings he saw. As Nixon sees it, the lengthy discussion of art in these letters and diaries provided Beckett with a neutral arena in which he could "clarify,

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[117] The second chapter of Conor Carville's book, *Beckett and the Visual Arts*, gives a detailed account of Beckett's self-education in German formalist art history as he traveled in the country.

[118] Zervos, Christian ed. *Cahiers d'Art 10*. 1935. 45-47.

[119] Nixon, Mark. *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936–1937.* London: Continuum, 2011.132.

shape and formulate his aesthetic preoccupations and thus…find new approaches to his writing."[120]

Nixon's scholarship in this area is particularly useful in noting where scenes from specific artworks later appear in Beckett's theater, and this is an important facet of Beckett's relationship to art. Paintings frequently reappear as motifs in the plays or as stage sets, like the Romantic masterpiece, Kaspar David Friedrich's *Zwei Männer den Mond betrachtend* (1819-20), from which Beckett drew inchoate inspiration for *Waiting for Godot*. Based on the extent of his engagement with surrealism, however, we can see that Beckett's travels in Germany in the late 1930s were not prompted by the desire to expand his general sense of the history of European art, nor were they simply in the service of gathering images to inspire future writing. This was a research trip designed around seeing not only the old masters that he loved, but the art of the European avant-garde or the so-called "Degenerate Art" that had close ties to the surrealist group in Paris, demonstrating Beckett's deep immersion in a culture of art and literature that privileged the "primitive," the child, the unschooled, and the mentally insane.[121] Although the American modernist art critic Clement Greenberg surmised in his 1939 essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" that Hitler and Goebbels personally did not share the mass taste in art of the German populace at that time, they encouraged the public revilement, confiscation and censorship of the avant-garde. [122]

The state exhibition *Entartete Kunst* or "Degenerate Art" opened in Münich on July 19th 1937, with a concurrent exhibition of "racially pure, racially enobling

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[120] Nixon, Mark. Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936–1937. 132.

[121] Again, John MacGregor's *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane* is an excellent English-language account of this confluence in modernist European art.

[122] Greenberg, Clement, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art and Culture*, collected essays, 19-21.

volkish art" in a neighboring museum.[123] Both Hitler and Goebbels railed against the "horrible dilettantes in our midst" and the "Degenerate Art" exhibition was designed for maximum contrast with the display of officially sanctioned art.[124]At the "Degenerate Art" exhibition, the more popular by far of the two shows, with some two million visitors, paintings were hung haphazardly, "…in a mad jumble, without frames, as if arranged by fools or children without any sense or reason, high and low, just as they came, furnished with inciting titles, explanations or filthy jokes." [125] The exhibition divided artists into categories according to race. Also included were paintings by the inhabitants of mental institutions, and these were placed next to those by modernist artists, in an attempt to show the similarities between their styles. The breakdown of the boundaries between "mad" and "sane" art was an essential part of Dada, the 1919 exhibition of which in Cologne was one of the models for this display, and the exhibition of official, didactic art aimed to reassert these essential categories, separating instructive, educational national art from the so called "art of the insane."[126]

Beckett arrived in Germany too late to see this artwork as it had originally hung in museums and private collections, as it had been already seized for the exhibition, and left too early to see the opening of the exhibition in 1937, finding the political atmosphere in the country unbearable. Writing to his childhood friend Mary

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[123] Gordon, Lois. *The World of Samuel Beckett.* 130.

[124] Gordon, Lois. *The World of Samuel Beckett*. 131.

[125] Grunberger, Richard. *A Social History of The Third Reich*. Hachette UK, 2013. Chapter 28.

[126] MacGregor, John. *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane.* 279. For a detailed description of the exhibition see Barron, Stephanie, and Peter W Guenther. *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany.* Los Angeles, Calif.: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991.

Manning from Hamburg in November 1936, he described his travels thus: "All the lavatory men say *Heil Hitler*. The best pictures are in the cellar,"[127] and a month later, simply "Germany is horrible,"[128] ultimately leaving before the opening of the "Degenerate Art" exhibition to return to Paris, where he began to work for the Resistance in an information cell named Gloria SMH. After several close encounters with the Gestapo, Beckett and his partner fled to the south, where he would begin to write the novels I discuss in the next chapter.

Loin des bambochades du surréel

To finally complete my account of Beckett's encounter with surrealism, I will discuss the short texts on artists that he wrote in the years directly following the end of the Second World War. To reiterate, these are: *La Peinture des van Velde ou le Monde et le Pantalon*, commissioned by the journal *Cahiers d'art* and his first accredited publication in French; a shorter version of this, rewritten but essentially discussing the same themes, *Peintres de l'Empêchement*, commissioned and published in 1948 by *Derrière la Mirroir*, a publication by Galerie Maeght in Paris, and later translated into English for a catalogue issued by Stanley Kootz gallery in New York under the title "Le Nouvel Objet;" and finally *Three Dialogues*, the best-known of his critical writings on art, published in English in *Transition* in 1949 and later translated into French by Beckett.[129] Therefore the first thing Beckett published in French under his own name was *La Peinture des Van Veldes, ou le monde et le pantalon*. Having been immersed so thoroughly in French through his translations of the surrealists he

[127] Letter to Mary Manning Howe of 14th November 1936. *Letters*, 1:395.

[128] Letter to Mary Manning Howe of 13th December 1936. *Letters*, 1:397.

[129] Fifield, Peter. "Introduction to Samuel Beckett, 'The New Object.'" 873.

now knew very well how to reject them in their own terminology, and this essay marks a public break with the surrealist philosophy of art.

The first of these essays, *La Peinture des van Veldes ou le monde et le pantalon* discusses two Dutch painters, the brothers Abraham and Geert van Velde, whose careers Beckett championed in Paris and London. He encouraged Peggy Guggenheim to exhibit Geer's work in her new London gallery Guggenheim Jeune and continued to promote their work up to the 1960s. For this reason, these artists' work is overshadowed by their relationship with Beckett and it is difficult to find critical appraisals of their work that do not refer to him. It has even been suggested that when Beckett realized that the association was no longer helpful to the artists he desisted from further displays of public support for them.[130]

The essay starts with a joke that is told at further length in *Endgame*. God made the world in six days, complains a customer to a tailor, yet you can't make a pair of pants in six months. But look, says the tailor, at the world, and then look at your pants![131] The joke's unexpected juxtaposition indicates that the essay will be concerned with the difficulty in translating unequal qualities, like the world, which cannot be perfected, and a pair of pants, which can. The initial subject of the essay is art criticism itself, and Beckett starts with a set of questions and problems regarding the task of the art critic. Is it a job for a connoisseur or an amateur, he asks, suggesting models of the genre that he might follow: "We'll do a general aesthetic, like Lessing," or "We'll do some anecdotes, like Vasari or Harper's magazine." "We'll do some

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[130] Lloyd, David. *Beckett's Thing: Painting and Theatre*. Other Becketts. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. 9.

[131] Beckett, Samuel. « *La Peinture des van Veldes ou le monde et le pantalon* » in *Disjecta*. 118.

catalogues raisonnés, like Smith," alighting finally on the type of essay he will produce: "frankly an unpleasant and confused chat."[132]

Beckett makes what initially seems a surprising case for amateurism, and for the uneducated lover of art as the best critic, asking why, when he is so dedicated, the amateur is so discouraged by experts in the field. This flat-footed tapir, or *l'inoffensif loufoque*, whose thumbs are worn down by catalogues and oil paint, and who runs to the museums and galleries the way others run to the cinema is a portrait of Beckett himself, touring Nazi Germany in order to see the paintings that would soon be destroyed. [133] Instead of scaring him with contradictory questions of taste and good manners, advising him *Picasso, c'est du bon. Vous pouvez y aller avec confiance*,[134] Beckett asks why the art lover is never informed that actually "The only thing that you know about a painting is how much you like it (and even why, if you're interested)."[135] The amateurism of Beckett's art criticism was a quality prized by the surrealists and in keeping with their avowed distrust of expertise. Fearful of exactly the dampening effect that expert or academic knowledge tends to have on the amateur described by Beckett in *Le Monde et le Pantalon*, Beckett's *loufouque* followed Breton's tenet "Always for the first time." This is a different type of knowledge to that of the expert critic: those "immensely competent…Tarquins of art."[136]

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[132] Beckett, Samuel. *La Peinture des van Veldes*, 119. « Ou alors on fait de l'esthétique générale, comme Lessing. C'est un jeu charmant. Ou alors on fait de l'anecdote, comme Vasari et Harper's Magazine. Ou alors on fait des catalogues raisonnés, comme Smith. Ou alors on se livre franchement à un bavardage désagréable et confus. C'est le cas ici. »

[133] Beckett, Samuel. « *La Peinture des van Veldes* », 120.

[134] Beckett, Samuel. « *La Peinture des van Veldes* », 121.

[135] Beckett, Samuel. « *La Peinture des van Veldes* », 123.

[136] Letter to Thomas McGreevy of 18th January 1937. Cited in Nixon, Mark, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries.* 147.

Before Beckett begins to discuss the two artists that are supposedly the subject of the essay, he launches into an extended pun on the word *pompier*, using it repeatedly in reference to the surrealist artist Salvador Dali. « *Dali, c'est du pompier. Il ne saurait faire autre chose ».* The word, which means a fireman, can also, by extension, mean a helmet; it was also a term used to deride an artist who, as Dali had, used such details as the military helmets found in nineteenth-century history paintings in order to pretend to academicism.[137] «*Pompier*», however, is also likely in reference to Dali's appearance in a diving suit at the International Exhibition of Surrealism in London in 1936, fitted out in order to "dive into the depths of the human subconscious."[138] Having started to asphyxiate in the costume, Dali had to be helped out of his helmet by a technician with a screwdriver. Beckett's critique of Dali's brand of latter-day surrealism was a popular one in the 1940s: his contrived academicism was the basis of Clement Greenberg's dismissal of surrealist painting in 1944, and even *Time* magazine had written, in its profile of the Spanish artist, that "The Surrealist almost invariably appears as something of a playboy in the madhouse, a visitor rather than an inmate of Bedlam."[139] The word is also slang term for oral sex, which was the central aspect of the surrealist defense of Charlie Chaplin, in their public statement "Hands Off Love," published in 1927 after the comic actor's wife filed for divorce. Chaplin's very young wife, Lita Grey, had protested this aspect of her marriage in her divorce suit, and in "Hands Off Love" Breton and the "whole *surréaliste* guild" had mocked her professed horror of non-reproductive sex, writing,

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[137] In a letter to the theatrical director Alan Schneider much later, describing his vision for the set of *Happy Days*, Beckett would again use the word *pompier*, defining it as "try-hard academicism." Conor Carville defines it as "excessive realism" in Chapter 5 of his book *Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts.*

[138] MacGregor, John. *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane.* 291.

[139] MacGregor, John. *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane.* 292.

"there is something comic about considering *abnormal, contra naturam, perverted, degenerate, and indecent* the practice of fellatio."[140] Breton closed his remarks on Chaplin with the words "We are your servants," quickly followed by a note to mention that they were delayed in their publication of the text in English due to the poor quality of its translation in *transition.*[141]

In his eventual discussion of the van Veldes, Beckett remarks that Bram van Velde's painting depicts the object in suspended motion, clipped out of a realist or illusionistic background: *La chose immobile dans le vide*. Of the many references to waterfalls, cascades and rivers in the short text, this artist's work provides a respite, Beckett writes, a place where painting can quietly blink in the dark, "*loin également des bambochades du surréel.*[142] This aside, combined with his mockery of Dali, specifically identifies Beckett's familiarity with the surrealist artistic milieu, despite the seemingly idiosyncratic nature of his text. Still writing about Bram, he asks "what does painting present to unreason, the non-combine?"[143] In what follows, he refers to the "reasoned" painting that the surrealists were prone to and an art in which, he claims, everything is in fact synthesized, every tone accounted for.

> Impossible de raisonner sur l'unique. La peinture raisonnée, c'est celle dont chaque touche est une synthèse, chaque ton l'élu d'entre mille, chaque trait symbole, et qui s'achève dans des tortillements d'enthymème. C'est la nature morte au papillon. C'est la machine à coudre sur la table d'opération. C'est la

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[140] The Surrealist Group, "Hands Off Love." In La Révolution surréaliste, #9–10, Oct. 1, 1927, Gallimard, Paris. « Pour nous en tenir aux scrupules très épisodiques de la vertueuse et inexpérimentée Mme Chaplin, il y a du comique à considérer comme anormale, contre nature, pervertie, dégénérée et indécente l'habitude de la fellation».

[141] « *Le monde et le pantalon* », 126.

[142] « *Le monde et le pantalon* », 126.

[143] « *Le monde et le pantalon* », 127.

> figure vue de face et de profil à la fois. C'est sans doute aussi la dame aux seins dorsaux, quoique ceci ne soit pas certain. Elle produit des chefs d'œuvre à sa façon.[144]

This list is an indictment of some of the key images of surrealism. Of greatest significance is Beckett's reference to Lautréamont's famous description of a young man, beautiful, he wrote, « *comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie»*, a writer and a sentiment revived and particularly revered by the surrealists.[145] In *Vases Communicants*, Breton had noted "the extraordinary hold that Lautréamont's celebrated phrase… can take upon the mind."[146] It is returned to again and again throughout the surrealist canon as the exemplary poetic image, and was one that could, Breton noted, easily be decoded by psychoanalytic theory: the umbrella symbolizes a man, the sewing machine a woman, the dissecting-table a bed.[147] Encapsulating the chance encounter, the conjunction of surprising elements and scientism, Lautréamont's image was emblematic of the entire surrealist endeavor. Beckett's own early titles, like *Dante and the Lobster*, or indeed *Le Monde et le pantalon*, were tributes to this same spirit. The butterfly was another motif of Dali's, and the cubist female figure, the dorsal breasts, indicate Picasso and cubism. References to surrealism abound throughout the text. If surrealism's founding premise was "pure psychic automatism," Beckett's accusation in this essay is that, far from madness, the visual component of their work was fully thought out, reasoned and thick with symbols. In fact, he is accusing them

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[144] « *Le monde et le pantalon* », 127.

[145] "As beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella." Isidore Ducasse, or Le Comte de Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror.* Book VI, strophe iii. Paris: Imprimerie de Balitout, Quesnoy et Cie., 1868-70.

[146] Breton, André. *Communicating Vessels.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. 53

[147] Breton, André. *Communicating Vessels*. 53.

of exactly what they had originally hoped to avoid: that they are "calculated." This is what he refers to, in *Three Dialogues*, as "aestheticized automatism."[148]

The same gallery that had commissioned Beckett's text, Galerie Maeght, had shown the last surrealist exhibition the year before, prompting Breton's essay, *Devant le Rideau*, in the Duchamp-produced exhibition-in-a-box *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, a small chest-of-drawers with a plaster cast breast encased in plastic on top. In the essay Breton, noting the ten years which had passed since the last International Exhibition of Surrealism at Peggy Guggenheim's gallery in 1938, argued for the persistence of dreams as a site of powerful imagery and their importance for socialism. Despite claims that dreaming is just *luxe inutile*, he maintains that socialism is based on the dream of *jours meilleurs pour tous.*[149] But by 1947, surrealism was reviled, had been judged "knowing," "calculated," and the final exhibition of surrealism in Paris, trying to summon some of its original precepts by broadcasting recordings of inmates from an asylum in the gallery, was poorly attended. Essentially, writing in 1948, Beckett is remarking on the death of surrealism, making a total break from the gallery's history in his manifesto, by claiming that Abraham van Velde is the best of the old mode of art, and that the younger, Geer, is the best of the new.[150] Beckett's writing is very distinctly about painting, not about other art forms; this also marks a break with the exploratory mixed media and disciplines cherished by surrealism. In this, and over the course of the next two essays on the van Veldes, he is concerned with promoting artists who have concerned themselves with both « *la condition humaine »*[151] and the question of how to represent "the change:" "Two practices which seem to refute each

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[148] Beckett, Samuel. "Three Dialogues," in *Disjecta.* 145.

[149] Breton, Andre. « *Le Surréalisme en 1947* ». 15.

[150] « G. van Velde peint la succession ». In « *La Peinture des van Veldes* » in Disjecta. 128.

[151] Beckett, Samuel. « *La Peinture des van Veldes* ». 129.

other, yet which in fact rejoin each other at the heart of the dilemma – and this dilemma is, how to represent the change."[152]

"Painters of Impediment"

All three essays on art contain in a slightly distilled version the bones of the preceding one. The main point of them is, bluntly speaking, that art need no longer conceal or camouflage the *empêchements*, or impediments, necessarily involved in its making. Instead, Beckett says, artists should now depict these impediments. In the version which appeared in the catalogue for the exhibition at the Kootz gallery in New York in 1948, this imperative is stated as follows: the artist's task is a shift from the task of expression to the statement of expression's impossibility.[153] Whereas art formerly *represented*, Beckett writes, it now has to show the conditions of representation that it labors under, or, as Vincent J. Murphy has commented, "In the new painting which interests him it is precisely that gulf, that obstacle, that impediment which becomes "the new object of art."[154] Beckett had the same critique of the artists Pierre Tal-Coat and André Masson in "Three Dialogues:" that they were synthetic too, and their work, whether in the case of Tal-Coat, was just a synthesis of Matisse and Cézanne, or in Masson's case, "competent," was "continuous with the work of western art stretching back to the Italian Renaissance painters," with "prodigious value, but a value cognate with those already accumulated."[155] Beckett's

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[152] « *Deux œuvres en somme qui semblent se réfuter, mais qui en fait se rejoignement au cœur du dilemme, celui même des arts plastiques : Comment représenter le changement* ?» In « La Peinture des van Veldes ». 129.

[153] Fifield, Peter. "Introduction to Samuel Beckett, 'The New Object.'" 873.

[154] Murphy, Vincent J. "*La Peinture de L'empêchement*— Samuel Beckett's 'Watt.'" *Criticism* 18, no. 4 (1976): 353–66.

[155] Beckett, Samuel, "Three Dialogues." In *Disjecta,* 139.

art-critic character provided a new, unknowing refreshment of art-critical ignorance, far not only from *des bambochades du surréal* but also of *la critique universitaire*.[156] In this final essay on art he famously encapsulated his new philosophy as follows: "The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express."[157]

Over the course of these three essays, therefore, Beckett refined his idea of art in line with his own "change," rejecting the art of surrealism in favor of a new art that is prone to impediment and even failure. It is important to note that Beckett did not reject the initial premises of surrealism, but rather accuses surrealism of betraying its own principles by calling it "synthetic," "aestheticized automation." In a way Beckett pursued and developed some of the founding premises of surrealism for longer than the surrealists, but – and this is why we do not think of Beckett as a surrealist writer *tout court* — did so having jettisoned their imagery, the playful and artistic potential of the synthesis of unexpected elements, the erotic appeal of women and birds. The novels that he wrote in the south of France before, during and after the Second World War show that what Beckett maintained of surrealism was their early emphasis on the symptoms and methods of automatic writing, particularly insofar as they could be described as impediments.

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[156] Breton, André, « *Devant les rideaux »*, in *Œuvres Complètes*, Vol. 3 : 740.

[157] Beckett, Samuel, "Three Dialogues" in *Disjecta*. 139.

Chapter Two: "Were turned to stone:" Beckett's Novels of Dispossession.

« *J'ouvre la série. C'est un honneur* ».[158]

Beckett's writing contemporary with literary surrealism and directly in its aftermath was concerned with depicting the asylum and the institution. In the novels under discussion here, they not only describe these settings, as in *Murphy*, but also enact or assume the impediments, convulsions, repetitions and obsessions that were thought to characterize their inhabitants, particularly those which evoked the symptoms of degeneracy. In André Breton's early collection of essays, *Les Pas Perdus*, he evoked the pacing up and down in waiting rooms of railway stations, exhorting readers to *lâchez tout!* or leave everything and "set off on the roads."[159] Surrealism made the train a key image in their retinue. It was "an icon of surrealist imagination, exemplified by that classic but anonymous photograph printed in the journal *Minotaure* in 1937, full of eroticism and longing, nostalgia and impossibility, where an abandoned train can be imagined rushing full speed ahead just as it was halted in its tracks by the virgin forest and its encroaching vines."[160] The protagonist of Beckett's novel *Watt* will very carefully retrace some of these steps on the outskirts of Dublin, as the novel opens at the tram stop at the end of the line in the early morning.

In the novels I will discuss in this chapter, I argue that Beckett grafted the Anglo-Irish literary tradition of the Big House novel onto the French countryside of the Second World War. He set his novels far outside the city: away from the streets of Dublin, so strongly associated with Joyce's *Ulysses*, or Paris, the site of the

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[158]Beckett, Samuel. « *Le Monde et le Pantalon* » in *Disjecta*.132.

[159] Breton, André. « *Partez sur les routes ! »* In *Les Pas Perdus.* Paris: Gallimard, 1969.

[160] Caws, Mary Ann ed., *Surrealism.* Themes and Movements. London: Phaidon Press, 2004.

surrealists' most notable adventures in *Nadja* or Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris*. The novels from this period are distinctly rural, set in an abstract composite landscape of the south of France and the environs in and around which Beckett had spent his childhood in Dublin. In *Watt*, this rustic landscape is attained within the first few pages of the novel, as the eponymous protagonist leaves the city behind and does not return to its outskirts until the last few. Everything that happens in this novel happens in the absence of people, the city and the tram, a long walk from the last stop. The crowds of the modern city, such as they are in *Watt*, like the station porter, Mr. Hackett, Mr. and Mrs. Nixon, and Lady McCann, are left behind quickly, as the main action of the novel happens in an emptied environment without typical markers of time. These are the sort of characters that can be moved easily around the board of the realist novel and they are replaced by Watt, who cannot. Even setting out, he "already preferred to have his back to his destination." His walk is "a headlong tardigrade," a "funambulistic stagger;" his movement has no ontology and he rotates in circles, moving his head from side to side, walking by throwing a leg out and pivoting around on it to face in the opposite direction.[161] Despite this strange orientation, Watt cannot go back and must go on.

Watt and Beckett's postwar trilogy of novels, *Molloy*, *Malone Meurt* and *L'Innommable*, were written during and immediately after the Second World War. He wrote *Watt* in English after finishing *Murphy* and before he began to write *Molloy,* the first of the Three Novels, in French. Although he began and ended notes for *Watt* in Paris, the bulk of the writing was done in Roussillon, a small village in Southern France, where Beckett and his partner, Suzanne Déchevaux-Dumesnil, waited for the

[161] Beckett, Samuel. *Watt*. In *Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition.* New York: Grove Press, 2006. Vol. 1:192. These descriptions of his gait are also clear references to Charlie Chaplin, whom Beckett and the surrealists revered.

German occupation to end so that they could return to Paris. Beckett arrived in Roussillon in November 1942 and returned to Paris in early 1945, but the novel was not published until 1953 by Olympia Press, a Paris publishing house, and in the United States in 1959, in a corrected version, by Grove Press, Beckett's American publisher.

Because of the dense complexity of the novel's language and plot, and the number of mistakes in the first edition, *Watt* has been described as "the white whale of Beckett studies."[162] It is rarely mentioned in the frequent references to his "frenzy of writing" and its writer was dissatisfied with this "transitional novel," had trouble placing it with a publisher, and later called it "just an exercise;" "the last stuttering in English," "a paradigm of waiting," and "only a game, a means of staying sane."[163] One reply from a publisher even suggested that in postwar austerity Britain, sufficient paper could not be sacrificed to print material as repetitive as *Watt*. Nevertheless, Beckett wrote, it "has its place in the series."[164] This term, the "series," was his preferred name for the three novels, *Molloy*, *Malone meurt* and *L'Innommable*. In Roussillon, Beckett participated in Resistance activities, worked for a local farmer picking turnips and "clodhopping" to make a living, and spent the rest of the time writing.

At the beginning of *Watt*, a dilemma is described. "He could go on," the narrator remarks of Mr. Hackett, the garrulous old man to whom we are introduced in the novel's first pages, "or turn around the corner and go back the way he came."[165]

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[162] Ackerley, C.J., and Gontarski, S.E., *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Works, Life, and Thought*. New York: Grove Press, 2004. 627.

[163] *Grove Companion*, 627.

[164] *Grove Companion*, 627.

[165] *Watt* in Grove 1:171.

Watt therefore opens with an immediate introduction to the entire drama of motion and mobility that provides a dubious momentum for this novel and the works to follow. The story is concerned with Watt, a one-shoed character, who sets out, compelled by reasons the reader never learns, to serve an elderly gentleman called Knott in a big house in the country. Divided into four parts, the third section of the novel introduces a new character, Sam, whom we suddenly learn is both the narrator and the only witness to Watt's linguistic breakdown. This event, an act that culminates in a wholly unexpected inversion of language, down to the level of words in sentences and letters in words, takes place in the mental institution where Watt has ended up after his stint in Mr. Knott's service. As with *Molloy*, the closing events of *Watt* bring us around to the beginning of the novel again; in *Molloy* too, the clear distinctions between these two types of "big house," the ancestral country seat and the mental institution, are confused, as are the narrator and the person to whom the events of the novel have happened.

Structured around this short journey, very little happens in terms of events in *Watt*. Much of the action that takes place, therefore, occurs at the level of language in a highly formal display of "*parole sans actes*."[166] The book was unfavorably reviewed upon its American publication in 1959, by Donald Barr, who wrote that "Mr. Beckett's vision seems to be of a universe filled with cruelty yet empty of purpose, deformed yet ultimately formless."[167] The novel's plot is, however, summarized succinctly in his review:

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[166] *Watt* is the inverse, according to F.J. Hoffmann, of Beckett's later work *Acte sans paroles*: "Ici il nous donne ou presque son analogue: des paroles sans actes." Hoffmann, *Lettres Modernes*, 3.

[167] Barr, Donald. "One Man's Universe: Samuel Beckett, Watt." Review. *The New York Times*, January 21st, 1959

> Watt, a red-nosed potbellied little old fellow of unknown origin and nurture, arrives at night at a great house and holds a mysterious conversation with the servant he is replacing; the economy of the house is a vastly elaborate, precise and disgusting ritual, and the master, Mr. Knott, is a kind of intangible autocrat, scarcely glimpsed, ("as it were in a glass") and strangely mutable; one night, Watt suddenly comes upon his own replacement waiting in the kitchen, wordlessly drinks his milk and smokes his cigar, walks to the railway station and then collapses; and all this he later tells to the author, a fellow-inmate in an institution surrounded by wire fences.[168]

Watt is in four parts, yet the structure, as Barr notes, is not strictly chronological, since what happens in the last part ("all this he later tells the author,") is told in the third and not the fourth section. When the story opens, the pedantic Mr. Hackett and his acquaintances Mr. and Mrs. Nixon, are sitting near a tram stop, and apprehend Watt at the start of the journey that will comprise the novel. The ensuing conversation between Hackett and the Nixons reveals them to be normal people for whom journeying is optional. They, in contrast to Watt, are marked by their control over their bodies, namely, the ability to stop and divert course temporarily: "But they had not gone far when they returned…" "But they had not gone far when they heard a cry."[169] As the Nixons and Hackett try to guess the possible reasons why Watt may be off the tram instead of on it, they come up with several hypotheses:

> I cannot leave him without a penny in his pocket, said Goff.
>
> Why not? said Mr. Hackett.

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[168] Donald Barr, in "One Man's Universe."

[169] *Watt*, in Grove 1:186.

> He is setting out on a journey, said Goff. If I accepted his offer he would be obliged to turn back.
>
> That might be the best thing for him, said Mr. Hackett.[170]
>
> But he went on, said Mr. Nixon, he did not go back the way he came, but went on, towards the station.
>
> Perhaps he is going home by a roundabout way, said Mrs. Nixon.[171]

From the very beginning, everyone in the novel is embroiled in some kind of pointless exercise: the porter of the station where Watt waits, who has cursed Watt after crashing into him with his milk cans, now wheels a milk barrel from one end of the railway platform to the other, exchanges it and wheels it back again in an entropic staging of Breton's *pas*. Once off the tram, Watt walks, until Lady McCann, whom we will meet again in the closing pages of the novel, throws a rock at the back of his head, causing him to stop and fall into a ditch where he rests for some time. Out of the ditch, Watt makes his way to Mr. Knott's house. Knott's back door is locked, but when Watt tries it for a second time, he finds it unlocked. His predicament is described in a formula that becomes familiar to the reader over the course of the novel, where every proposition must be tested and every potential alternative listed.

> If the back door had never opened, but remained shut, then who knows Watt had never got into Mr. Knott's house at all, but turned away, and returned to the station, and caught the first train back to town. Unless he had got in through a window.[172]

Each precept must be tested; every permutation of every possible action is given; all combinations of possibilities are advanced, challenged and rescinded in

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[170] *Watt*, in Grove 1:180.

[171] *Watt*, in Grove 1:183.

[172] *Watt*, in Grove 1:197.

swift order. However, by the end of the first section, we finally learn that Watt has been inducted into the Knott household to replace Knott's previous servant, Arsene. His arrival elicits "the following short statement" from Arsene, a twenty-page deposition on the nature of time, change, genesis, inheritance and transformation that introduces the main themes of the novel: an obsession with generation, degeneration, and regeneration.[173] The monologue derives from automatic writing, since in this novel, rather than describing the inhabitants of an asylum as in *Murphy*, Beckett modelled the prose in large part on the type of speech act prized by literary surrealism. This has the effect of obscuring the difference, more so than in the earlier novel, between what is spoken by the staff of the asylum and what is said by the inmate. Towards the end of his speech, Arsene describes the course of a year, with each season picked out using a highly idiosyncratic catalogue of personal memories to denote regular events:

> The crocuses and the larch turning green every year a week before the others and the pastures red with uneaten sheep's placentas and the long summer days and the newmown hay and the wood-pigeon in the morning and the cuckoo in the afternoon and the corncrake in the evening and the wasps in the jam and the smell of the gorse and the look of the gorse and the apples falling and the children walking in the dead leaves and the larch turning brown a week before the others and the chestnuts falling and the howling winds and the sea breaking over the pier and the first fires and the hooves on the road and the consumptive postman whistling *The Roses are Blooming in Picardy* and the standard oillamp and of course the snow and to be sure the sleet and bless your heart the slush and every fourth year the February débâcle and the endless

[173] *Watt*, in Grove 1:199.

> April showers and the crocuses and then the whole bloody business starting all over again. A turd.[174]

The unbroken flow of language in Arsene's speech is an odd mix of the specific and the generic, where everything that happens annually is described in distinctively personal language. A leap year is referred to as the "February débâcle," and memories invested with private meaning, like the consumptive postman whistling a war-time song, are described as though it were part of the typical cycle of a year. In anticipation of the linguistic turn-around that will occur in the third part of the novel, the statement is punctuated by figures that indicate an abrupt stop or reversal. At the end of every series comes a scatological, Tourettic outburst: "an ordure," "a turd," "an excrement," "puke" or "a cat's flux."[175]

The Laurel into Daphne

In his essay on the Van Velde brothers, Beckett stressed two related things: their artistic representation of both the "change" and "impediments." In *Watt* we see his own writerly preoccupation with these subjects. In the middle of his speech, Arsene describes a difference that he cannot describe, other than that he *feels* something to be different. Something has changed, but what was changed and how? During his quotidian tasks one day, he finally feels "in the midst of himself."[176] After this moment of recognition, Arsene knows that his replacement has come and prepares to leave, coming back again "dressed for the road." Speaking of himself, in his short statement before he goes, Arsene says:

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[174] *Watt*, in Grove 1:206.

[175] *Watt*, in Grove 1:206.

[176] *Watt*, in Grove 1:200.

> For he knows he is in the right place, at last. And he knows he is the right man, at last. In another place, he would be the wrong man still, and for another man, yes, for another man it would be the wrong place again. But he, being what he has become, and the place being what it was made, the fit is perfect.[177]

Arsene's work at Mr. Knott's house has been the right work for him: "For the first time, since in anguish and disgust he relieved his mother of her milk, definite tasks of unquestionable utility are assigned to him."[178] This perfect harmony that he has experienced, in his time working for Mr. Knott, when finally he has been "been in his midst" has, however, "slipped."[179] Then the change comes: something starts to disintegrate and Arsene soon realizes he will be back to the world outside Knott's house.

> What was changed if my information is correct, was the sentiment that a change, other than a change of degree, had taken place. What was changed was existence off the ladder. Do not come down the ladder, Ifor, I haf taken it away. This I am happy to inform you is the reversed metamorphosis. The Laurel into Daphne. The old thing where it always was, back again.[180]

Arsene, it seems, has entered the house of Knott to find the same state of attunement that Murphy had sought: a point of stillness or silence that can only be achieved, in this novel, through the same kind of rocking motion as in the earlier work. Rather than describe the complicated mechanism by which Murphy soothes himself, however, the whole edifice of this novel is shaking. "Nothing changed

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[177] *Watt*, in Grove 1:200.

[178] *Watt*, in Grove 1:201.

[179] *Watt*, in Grove 1:200.

[180] *Watt*, in Grove 1:203.

because nothing remained. Nothing came or went, because all was a coming and a going."[181] In the myth of Daphne, the high priestess of Mother Earth is pursued by Apollo and is transformed into a laurel tree to escape his unwanted attention.[182] Arsene, in his "reverse metamorphosis," has therefore slipped back out of the natural world and knows that his time at the house of Knott is coming to an end. What his transformation seems to represent more than anything else is a challenge to the Cartesian method parodied by the rest of the novel. It is a moment of respite from the propositional logic that animates the rest of the novel; the work that Arsene has found, doing tasks of "unquestionable" utility, puts an end to this motion, temporarily.

The utility of these tasks at first seems very questionable. The two main parts of Watt's service are to bring Knott's food, in the daytime, and take it away to be finished, if necessary, by a dog, each evening. Often there are no leftovers; this leads to a set of bewildering attempts to account for every possibility. The problem of how to dispose of the leftover food, should the dog be unable to eat it, leads to more and more ridiculous theses: "a violet light or no light at all would hasten to the door with his dog."[183] In the end, this too is shown to be a pointless exercise merely cited to supply the book with its basic reason for existing or "blacken its sheets." Watt, once he knows what is happening with the dog, now finds that "he had turned a disturbance into words, he had made a pillow of old words, for a head.[184]

In its models of reversed metamorphosis, the novel complicates the idea of straightforward narratological progress, as each proposition is rescinded and tried in

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[181] *Watt*, in Grove 1:274.

[182] Ovid. *Metamorphoses, Volume I: Books 1-8.* Translated by Frank Justus Miller. Revised by G. P. Goold. Loeb Classical Library 42. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916. Book I, Lines 548-552. 40-41.

[183] *Watt*, in Grove 1:245.

[184] *Watt*, in Grove 1:262.

all its possible permutations. Like any one of Beckett's symptomatic protagonists, Lucky, Malone, or Molloy, the character does not move easily around the board of the realist novel. With all of its convulsions, repetitions and reversals, then, *Watt* may seem like a strange novel in which to develop the concept of the *series*. It is therefore a crucial text to show how, through the use of a key theme of the interwar avant-garde, namely the art of the insane and the asylum, Beckett's use of the series would be transformed into a paradigm of order and progress in the art of the late twentieth century, as I will discuss in the next chapter. The way in which the novel unfolds shows the development of a very individual and complicated model of the series that does not simply proceed but that goes back and forth, can stop and start, turn and reverse. This is particularly important when we consider that it derived from Beckett's concern with degeneracy and its symptoms. As part of his exit statement, Arsene lists:

> And the poor old lousy earth, my earth and my father's and my mother's and my father's fathers and my mother's mothers and my father's mother's and my mother's father's and my father's mother's mother's and my mother's father's father's and my father's father's mother's and my mother's mother's father's and my father's father's father's and my mother's mother's mother's and other people's fathers' and mothers' and fathers' fathers' and mothers' mothers' and fathers' mothers' and mothers' fathers' and fathers' mothers' fathers' and mothers' fathers' fathers' and fathers' fathers' mothers' and mothers' mothers' fathers' and fathers' fathers' fathers' and mothers' mothers' mothers'. An excrement.[185]

This is a speech impediment governed by the genitive case, and it reminds us that the impediments, or *empêchements*, discussed in Beckett's essays on the van

[185] *Watt*, in Grove 1:205.

Velde brothers are presented in order to tackle the same question: *« Comment représenter le changement? »*[186] Arsene's message to the incoming servant, Watt, details an obsessive, stammering concern with genesis, a crisis of generation that must be recounted at length using a series of possessives, and models this series in the recursive processes of language.[187] If, as Ann Banfield points out in her essay "'Proust's Pessimism' as Beckett's Counter-Poison," the poet W.B. Yeats, Beckett's last Anglo-Irish literary precursor, assuaged his concerns for "those dying generations" with the promise of art in "such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make / Of hammered gold and gold enamelling / To keep a drowsy Emperor awake," Arsene, by contrast, concludes the long history of his primogeniture with "an excrement."[188] Watt, we can surmise, is the character who follows in the wake of this conclusion, starting, as the novel does, after the end of the line. It is by no means the only recursive process in the novel.

Krik --- krak ---- krek

Watt is set in the countryside, and frogs, rats, boars, dogs and bulls populate the novel as well as humans. The series in the novel is shown therefore to be above all organic. In his early critical essay on Proust, Beckett noted that the French writer "assimilates the human to the vegetal. He is conscious of humanity as flora, never as fauna."[189] Beckett's series focuses on fauna. Both humans and animals are ordered within it, more so than machines or inanimate objects, of which very few appear in

[186] « Le Monde et le pantalon » in *Disjecta*, 129.

[187] Banfield, Ann, "Proust's Pessimism." 6.

[188] Banfield, Ann, "Proust's Pessimism." 6.

[189] Beckett, Samuel. "Proust" in *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*. London: Calder Books, 1999. 89.

the novel, apart from the tram at the beginning and end. The novel never describes a mechanical apparatus in action, but rather a mechanized human or animal experience: even the porters engaged in their repetitive activity on the platform highlight this, as the novel's focus is brought to bear on them, rather than on the train's timetable. Through Mary, the maid, we learn that there are only ever three members of the household at a time: the ground floor person, now Watt; the first-floor person, now Erskine; and Mr. Knott himself. Each new arrival displaces the current occupant, either sending them upstairs or out of the house, as with Arsene: "when you came in I went out."[190]

In her essay "Breton, Char and Modern French Poetry," Mary Ann Caws gives an account of the folk tales of the surrealist poet René Char's home region, the Vaucluse, in which Beckett spent the war years. She writes "Another of them is told in this way: in order to give one of the mentally less well-endowed something to do, to keep up his dignity, the town would appoint him to make a clacking noise by the water, to frighten away the frogs."[191] Musing on the troubled concept of the series, Watt reminisces about a frog chorus he has heard in the past:

> Thinking then, in search of rest, of the possible relations between such series as these, the series of dogs, the series of men, the series of pictures, to mention only these series, Watt remembered a distant summer night, in a no less distant land and Watt young and well lying all alone, stone cold sober in the ditch,

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[190] *Watt*, in Grove 1:213.

[191] Caws, Mary Ann. "Breton, Char and Modern Poetry" in Prendergast, Christopher ed., *A History of Modern French Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Twentieth Century.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. 565.

> wondering if it was the time and the place and the loved one already and three frogs croaking krak! Krek! And krik![192]

In the notational device that follows, the "krak" "krik" and "kreks" of the frogs are laid out according to another recursive model, the Fibonacci sequence, a mathematical system that describes a sequence of numbers in which each term after the first two terms is the sum of the preceding two. In Leonardo Pisano's 1202 *Liber Abaci*, the encyclopedia in which the Pisan mathematician introduced the Hindu number system to Western Europe, this principle is famously explained using the example of the multiplication of rabbits: "How Many Pairs of Rabbits Are Created by One Pair in One Year."

> A certain man had one pair of rabbits together in a certain enclosed place, and one wishes to know how many are created from the pair in one year when it is the nature of them in a single month to bear another pair, and in the second month those born to bear also. Because the abovewritten pair in the first month bore, you will double it; there will be two pairs in one month. One of these, namely the first, bears in the second month, and thus there are in the second month 3 pairs; of these in one month two are pregnant, and in the third month 2 pairs of rabbits are born, and thus there are 5 pairs in the month; in this month 3 pairs are pregnant, and in the fourth month there are 8 pairs, of which 5 pairs bear another 5 pairs; these are added to the 8 pairs making 13 pairs in the fifth month; these 5 pairs that are born in this month do not mate in

[192] *Watt*, in Grove 1:278.

> this month, but another 8 pairs are pregnant, and thus there are in the sixth month 21 pairs…[193]

This rabbit-like pace of reproduction is evoked when, later in the story, Mr. Graves, the gardener, explains "another series" to Watt: his family.[194] This large tribe with exhaustive sets of relations to one another and physical ailments in common, is a model of a large Catholic family, and their catholicism is used to show the family as a model of repetition and differentiation that continues, with a greater degree of specificity, Arsene's elaboration of genesis through his "mother's mothers and my father's mothers."[195]

The Picture of the Artist

Watt is structured around several of these key recursive episodes. One of these signal events is when, at the end of the second part, Watt apprehends a painting in Erskine's room. The structure of the house and its rotation of servants is somehow clarified through the use of this painting, in a scene in which Watt learns the meaning of the *series* and himself in relation to the series. Through his meditation on the painting, Watt realizes that he too will be moved along in the series; furthermore, "of the numberless suppositions elaborated by Watt, during his stay in Mr. Knott's house, this was the only one to be confirmed."[196] In the Addenda to the novel, we can see that Beckett withdrew the description of a figurative painting, a portrait, from this scene, and replaced it with an abstract composition instead. The portrait, with its

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[193] Fibonacci, Leonardo, and L. E Sigler. *Fibonacci's Liber Abaci: A Translation into Modern English of Leonardo Pisano's Book of Calculation.* New York: Springer, 2002. 404–405.

[194] *Watt*, in Grove 1:285.

[195] *Watt*, in Grove 1:205.

[196] *Watt*, in Grove 1:274.

"significant detail" describes "toenails of remarkable luxuriance and caked with what seemed to be dirt…chest in disgusting condition, neck positively filthy…"[197] Conor Carville, in *Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts*, notes that this substitution relegates the traditional ancestral portrait to the attic or back room of the big house, hiding it from view. "The portrait in Erskine's room glowers in the Addenda like an image in the attic of a Gothic novel, its abstract and generic antinomies reflecting the truth of the rest of the book, but its actual content so deformed as to be all but meaningless."[198] It also seems a pointed reference to Oscar Wilde's Gothic novel of 1890, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in which the protagonist's painted portrait, and not his body, degenerates, until the very end.

The early reliance, in Beckett's novels, on the use of narrative painting as a stand-in for a descriptive passage, has been explored by Dougald McMillan in a fascinating 1975 essay titled *Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts: The Embarrassment of Allegory.*[199] In the essay, McMillan outlines Beckett's early habit of referring to his characters as being "like" a particular painting, a tactic McMillan attributes to Beckett's desire to undermine any sense of realism around his characters: "Compared to the psychological novels of Joyce and Proust, this art of displacement and obliteration makes these characters seem like 'puppets.'"[200] In *More Pricks than Kicks*, for example, Ruby Tough resembles "Magdeline in the Perugino Pietà in the National Gallery in Dublin, always bearing in mind that the hair of our heroine is

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[197] *Watt*, in Grove 1:377.

[198] Carville, Conor, Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts. 180-181.

[199] McMillan, Dougald. "Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts: The Embarrassment of Allegory." *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*, edited by S. E. Gontarski, Anthem Press, 2012, 23–35.

[200] McMillan, Dougald. "Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts." 27.

black and not ginger;"[201] in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, the Alba's eyes "went as big and black as El Greco painted," in reference to the late sixteenth-century painting, *The Burial of the Count Orgaz*,[202] or even earlier in *Watt* itself, "the Christ believed by Bosch in Trafalgar Square."[203] Later, however, McMillan claims, Beckett came to abhor his former reliance on this technique. "The parody of his own techniques in the portrait of the artist at the end of *Watt* reflects a similar sense of embarrassment at the disparity between direct presentation of 'honest' suffering and dependence on allegory and art."[204] Beckett's rejection of pictorial art, including surrealism, was part of a rejection of illusion across the board intimately bound up with anxieties of influence in the young writer. In his early poem, *A Casket of Pralinen for a Daughter of a Dissipated Mandarin*, he reflected on an attempt to produce what he thought of as official culture:

> I am ashamed in the end
> of this dud artistry,
> I am ashamed of presuming
> to align words,
> of everything but the ingenuous fibres
> that suffer honestly.[205]

It was also, for Sinéad Mooney, in her essay "'Integrity in a Surplice:' Samuel Beckett's (Post-) Protestant Poetics," part of Beckett's rejection of iconography altogether.[206]

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[201] McMillan, Dougald. "Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts." 27.

[202] McMillan, Dougald. "Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts." 27.

[203] McMillan, Dougald. "Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts." 27.

[204] McMillan, Dougald. "Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts." 29.

[205] Beckett, Samuel. *Collected Poems*. 33

This abstract painting is supposed to show Watt "his place in the series."[207] In the novel, the picture that Beckett first described was cut, to be replaced with "A circle, obviously described by a compass, and broken at its lowest point, occupied the middle foreground…. In the eastern background appeared a point or dot."[208] This new "portrait of the artist" is a "degenerate" painting, a clear reference to the work Wassily Kandinsky, the master abstract painter whose text, *Point and Line to Plane*, Beckett had studied in advance of his travels in Germany. Fifty-seven of Kandinsky's works had been confiscated for display in the exhibition of *Entarte Kunst.* The painting through which Watt realizes his place in the series is therefore another means by which to identify him with so-called degeneracy and dissolution.

Through his assessment of the painting, Watt is able, finally, after all the dogs, frogs, servants and families, to understand that he too is a term in a series, belonging to the "the series of Mr. Knott's dogs, or the series of Mr. Knott's men, or like the centuries that fall, from the pod of eternity?"[209] This, for all we know, could be the final stage for every servant in the house, when they too understand at last 'the change' and realize that they have come to the end of their stay in the Knott household. The picture comes to stand in for Watt: like the picture, he says, he will not be long in the house. When he meets his replacement, in fact, the new servant's name is Arthur, or "after" as it would be pronounced in Mr. Graves' Irish accent: "Mr. Graves pronounced his *th* charmingly." After accepting his place in the series, Watt can leave the big house. His return to the city is also a return to the forms and

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[206] Mooney, Sinead. "'Integrity in a Surplice:' Samuel Beckett's (Post-) Protestant Poetics." In *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 9, Beckett and Religion. Brill, 2000. 223-237.

[207] Mark Nixon on *Watt* in *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries*.

[208] *Watt*, in Grove 1:272.

[209] *Watt*, in Grove 1:274.

characters of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century novel. The endless permutations cease in the fourth part of the book, denoting them as linguistic properties of the big house or asylum. The air is fresh, the morning is silent and back at the train station, the early morning platform is populated by bawdy types who drink porter in the toilet and throw a bucket of water – bucket and all – at the "long wet dream with the hat and the bags."[210]

"I forwards, he backwards"[211]

Watt's eventual comprehension of the series is connected to his ability to leave the big house, but it also contributes to his complete mental and linguistic breakdown, returning him, in the third part, to the mental institution where he meets Sam: "all this he later tells to the author."[212] It is after this realization that Watt and Sam, the narrator of the novel, split into two different entities. Towards the end of the second half of the novel, the narrator suddenly refers to himself in the first person; "I did… whatever he says," starting to reveal more about how he came to know all of this and how the story of Watt came to be told.[213] In the most dramatic of its recursions, *Watt* takes an about-turn in the center of the novel and starts to retrace its own steps. In the third part, the narrator, whom we have just learned is called Sam, and Watt, try to find each other through the holes in a fence. There are two holes in the fence, and the narrator, trying to find Watt, notes that for a number of reasons these holes could not have been made by an animal: one animal would not follow the other. This is one of

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[210] *Watt*, in Grove 1:371.

[211] *Watt*, in Grove 1:301.

[212] In Donald Barr, "One Man's Universe: Samuel Beckett, Watt." *The New York Times*, January 21st, 1959.

[213] *Watt*, in Grove 1:271.

the distinctions that we start to notice between the narrator and Watt as their voices begin to separate: whereas Watt would have us believe that a chorus of frogs will sing to us in a Fibonacci sequence, the narrator will give hundreds of reasons why this is not possible.

Watt's act of communicating to Sam what happened to him at Knott's house occurs as the two of them walk, pressed against one another, belly to-belly and forehead-to-forehead, Sam moving forward and Watt backward, then Watt moving forward and Sam backward, along the extremely narrow passage formed by two parallel chain-link fences, one the garden fence of the insane asylum or "mansion" that houses Sam, the other the fence of the asylum or "mansion" where Watt now resides.[214] Here, with the approach of Watt turned back to front, the reversal of the novel begins. Sam, who has "the formidable task of assembling the information on which the whole chronicle of Watt is based" garbles the story because it was hard to catch, told as it was in reverse. [215]

The description of Watt's anastrophic dance with Sam is the strangest and most tender moment of the novel: "his left hand on my right shoulder and right hand on my left shoulder."[216] The movement is so precise and its description so detailed that it lends itself to interpretation as movement as such, as we will see in the next chapter. Walking back and forth in a middle corridor between the fences enclosing them, Watt, who normally speaks "as one speaking to dictation, or reciting, parrot-like a text, by long repetition become familiar," starts to reverse the order of sentences, the order of words and the order of letters, as the narrator tries to capture the story that he tells. Watt, who first wears his trousers back to front, starts to walk

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[214] *Watt*, in Grove 1:291.

[215] Fletcher, John, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1964. 66.

[216] *Watt*, in Grove 1:301.

backwards: "As Watt walked, so now he talked, back to front."[217] Reversing word order in the sentence is followed by a new development: "So all went well until Watt began to invert, no longer the order of the words in the sentence, but that of the letters in the word."[218] It will be suspected, Sam notes, "that there was perhaps more than a reversal of discourse; that the thought was perhaps inverted."[219] After several more of these "stages," Watt's ultimate reversal, that of the letters "Nodrap, nodrap geb," the narrator, Sam, concludes, "were the sounds that at first, though we walked glued together, were so much Irish to me."[220] The reader does not know, in this instance, whether these new "Irish"–sounding words might represent an advance or a retrograde step, or which character, Watt or Sam, might lead in this strange linguistic dance. This is the effect that the dance scene has on the novel's structure. Placed as it is in the center of the novel, its reversal implies that the book's order could be rewound like a tape or played backwards, with the ultimate aim to impede our understanding of the distinction between the inmate and the narrator of the story.

The extended delusion that forms the rest of the chapter revolves around the obsessive permutations of a committee of Catholic mathematicians in regard to a dissertation named "The Mathematical Intuitions of the Visicelts."[221] This tale, told by Arthur, of a primitive Irish peasant, Nackybal, who can name the cube roots of numbers of six digits, fails his examination due to the committee's inability to record his results.[222] In the ensuing discussion, each man's name notes his primogeniture in a

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[217] *Watt*, in Grove 1:302.

[218] *Watt*, in Grove 1:303.

[219] *Watt*, in Grove 1:302.

[220] *Watt*, in Grove 1:306.

[221] *Watt*, in Grove 1:308.

[222] Discussed further in Harrington, John P., "The Irish Landscape of Samuel Beckett's *Watt*." In *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Winter, 1981), pp. 1-11.

set of Irish patrilineal markers: *Mac*, or *son of*; O', or *of*; and the Norman-derived *de* and *Fitz*, or *illegitimate son of*. In their constant misapprehension of each other through accents and inaccuracies, their observations and comments permute and multiply: "Sivinty-thray? said Mr. de Baker. Perhaps he means seventy-three, said Mr. O'Meldon." "The two figures are related, said Mr. O'Meldon, as the cute to its roob."[223] Their examination expresses Watt and Sam's unstable mental condition, in the institution, as a fantasy of ethnic multiplication.

The Closed System

In its exaggerated depiction and defamiliarizing of normal processes, like feeding a dog, *Watt* shows how the cycle of life dominates and produces the logic of the series. It is presented as a model of repetition that is in fact always different. *Watt* was, however, prone to a type of reading that showed its mechanical disposition in a wholly new light in the 1960s. Although the novel does not so much describe the increasing mechanization of humans as show that the series is a function of organic experience, critics like Hugh Kenner would later see something machine-like in Beckett's novels and use them to posit or illustrate a "cold" or "unnatural" element to the natural order, imposing the metaphoric qualities of machines or software after the fact. Kenner saw the information in *Watt* as data that could be captured and transcribed by a notational device. What he saw as orderly syntax, however, was nothing of the sort. Kenner argued that Watt shared with modes of computation "the

[223] *Watt*, in Grove 1:321.

formalization of the real as data and algorithmic processes."[224] In notating a page of *Watt*, Kenner tries to show that the novel can be captured by computational devices.

Throughout *Murphy*, the expression the "closed system" appears again and again. "Any solution would do that did not clash with the feeling, growing stronger as Murphy grew older, that his mind was a closed system."[225] "The horse leech's daughter is a closed system."[226] "The Park was a closed system in which there could be no loss of appetite."[227] Although Hugh Kenner would later interpret the closed system, in very important and influential works on Beckett, "The Cartesian Centaur," "Art in a Closed Field" and *The Mechanic Muse*, as representative of a computational device, Beckett's "closed system" was the psychiatric ward of the 1930s, not the computers and ledgers of the 1960s. In Kenner's 1987 book *The Mechanic Muse*, which accounts, in chapters on Eliot, Pound, Joyce and Beckett, for Modernist writers' sensitivities to the technological developments of their age, he devotes a chapter to "Beckett Thinking," in which he discusses Beckett's novels in terms of the computational developments of the 1960s. As opposed to the importance of the newspaper to "Joyce's Scrivening," for example, Kenner typifies Beckett's novels as maintaining the formal terms of the seventeenth century "passion for order," and relates the "systematizing impulse" that motivates his characters to the new systems of computational programming that were in development in the decades following the publication of *Watt* and the three novels. "Beckett's sentence is already written in a

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[224] This is discussed at length in Franklin, Seb, "Humans and/as machines: Beckett and cultural cybernetics." *Textual Practice* 27.2 (2013): 249–268.

[225] *Murphy*, in Grove 1:68.

[226] *Murphy*, in Grove 1:120.

[227] *Murphy*, in Grove 1:63.

proto-computer-language: its options, its branches, take precedence over its verbs and nouns."[228] "At Trinity," Kenner wrote,

> Beckett wrote a Master's dissertation on Descartes. In France, two decades later, we find him composing Cartesian sentences like the following:
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> "Not that Watt felt calm and free and glad, for he did not, and had never done so. But he thought that perhaps he felt calm and free and glad, or if not calm and free and glad, at least calm and free, or free and glad, or glad and calm, or if not calm and free, or free and glad, or glad and calm, at least calm, or free, or glad, without knowing."229

In Kenner's account, the approximations of automatic writing and aphasic repetitions that Beckett found in literary surrealism are modernized and turned into expressions of the 1960s and computation instead. But, as Anna Balakian points out in her biography of André Breton, the meaning of "automation" has totally changed. "Automation as we know it today is a controlled movement of calculation, the very opposite of automatism as conceived by Breton."[230]

There are interruptions that prevent Beckett's literature from being fully incorporated into Kenner's account of proto-computer language. In the changing cast of characters of Knott's house, for example, Mary the maid has such a huge appetite that she must eat, in rotation, a peppermint, followed by an onion, a peppermint, followed by an onion, a peppermint, followed by an onion, and so on. This odious character is described in grotesque detail, like the following observation: "flitters of

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[228] Kenner, Hugh. *The Mechanic Muse.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. 96. By contrast, Ann Banfield does not note this development until Beckett's late style, arguing that the novels still exploit language's productive processes, rather than the "nonproductive" or closed-class" lexical formatives of the later works.

[229] Kenner, Hugh. *The Mechanic Muse.* 97.

[230] Balakian, Anna. *André Breton: Magus of Surrealism*. 61.

perforated starch entwined an ear."[231] Mary is a remnant of a maid from an earlier novel, a "staple of the Big House novel," fitted into the system of movement and rotation housed by Knott.[232] Throughout the novels from Beckett's early period, sentences like this appear and vanish again, giving the reader a welcome respite from the grinding gears of repetition and phatic expression and forming a deliberate contrast to the mechanistic prose.

Laura Salisbury's rendition of this argument in her essay "Gloria SMH and Beckett's Linguistic Encryptions" on Beckett's activities with the Paris Resistance, and then local *maquis* during his stay in Roussillon, notes that Hugh Kenner does not choose the most complex passage in *Watt* to develop his argument about the novel's systematic qualities. She contends that it is actually the inaccurate transmission of information in the countryside that informs Beckett's wartime novels, not the perfect communication of code and intelligence. The potential inaccuracy of this activity is most thoroughly demonstrated in *Watt* by the scene that depicts the transfer of information or intelligence from one man to another in the telling of the story of Watt to the hitherto unknown narrator, Sam. Without some moments of relief, or what Beckett called the "black diamonds," we would find the endless repetition and deprivation of the prose unendurable.[233] In *Watt*, she writes, "Beckett studs the text with oddly luminous details: 'the little plated trowel, such as confectioners and grocers use, and tea-merchants…' These glimpses of gleaming kitchenalia speak precisely of elements in the sentence whose prime function is not reducible to the

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[231] *Watt*, in Grove 1:212.

[232] Harrington, John. "The Irish Landscape of Samuel Beckett's *Watt*. 5.

[233] Salisbury, Laura. "Gloria SMH and Beckett's Linguistic Encryptions." in *Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

processing of information."[234] The pleasure of reading sentences that are still concerned with description is therefore due to the "strongly affective relief from the violently bland administration" they give us.[235]

As Tourettian outbursts, these details are also sharp reminders of the kind of fiction Beckett chose not to write and in which the nineteenth century reappears as a form of "aggravated recollection."[236] Belacqua meditates on this habit in *A Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, as Maria DiBattista discusses in her chapter on Beckett's novels in *First Love*. This rare poetic image or phrase, or the "black diamond of pessimism," Belacqua reflects, is difficult to attain. The "readymade" or conversational mode of writing cannot produce this diamond, nor can the stylist, but the impoverishment of style can. To get these sparkling results, pressure must be applied – almost relentless pressure – which ultimately renders the startling image, or the Beckettian "precious margaret that makes the chthonian life worthwhile."[237] These create an even greater distinction between the two orders of prose, highlighting the remnants of earlier literary forms. DiBattista writes "The 'mature' or postmodern Beckett also writes as if the precious phrase is awarded only him who represses or renounces the romantic…. The child-man must renounce the grandiose exhibitionism of his narcissistic youth and its romantic infatuations if he is to become his ego-ideal, the man without a style."[238] Beckett's involuntary or "erotoleptic" eruptions and transports prevent these novels from being fully automated; however, they also insist that he leave his youthful infatuations with other types of prose behind. "Perhaps only

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[234] Salisbury, Laura. "Gloria SMH and Beckett's Linguistic Encryptions." 164.

[235] Salisbury, Laura. "Gloria SMH and Beckett's Linguistic Encryptions." 164.

[236] Heller-Roazen, Daniel, *Echolalias*. 145.

[237] DiBattista, Maria. *First Love.* 226.

[238] DiBattista, Maria. *First Love.* 226.

the French can give you what you want."[239] There are no more of these little "black diamonds of pessimism" in *Molloy, Malone Meurt* and *L'Innommable*, as they turn rapidly, in the first French novel, into ordinary pebbles. The emphases on these shining objects, like the "little plated trowel," will turn into a focus on a series of mundane items that are altogether lost over the course of the three novels.

Molloy's Stones

If representations of sleep and dream were a key characteristic of the surrealist output, Gilles Deleuze would later portray Beckett's contribution to the postwar years as "exhaustion." In his essay *L'Épuisé*, written as the afterword to Beckett's 1982 play *Quad*, Deleuze would explore the multiple associations between the exhaustion of a numerical series and the state of fatigue in which Beckett's characters stumble through the novels and plays.[240] Also taking place in an anonymous rural setting, a hybrid French/Irish landscape called the "Molloy country," this novel, the first in the trilogy, is divided into two sections, posing the eponymous Molloy in the first part, a long section consisting of only two paragraphs, against Moran, a pedantic detective in pursuit of Molloy, in the second. Molloy seeks to return to his mother, or at least his mother's house: what Maria DiBattista describes in *First Love* as the "dilapidated maternal premises [on which] all true writing commences."[241] The careful, if off-centered, symmetry is based on this imprecise division and on a series of reflections and similarities, or "likes," between the two characters and the events that befall them

[239] DiBattista, Maria. *First Love.* 226.

[240] Deleuze, Gilles. "L'Épuisé." In Beckett, Samuel, *Quad*. Paris: Éditions de minuit: 1992.

[241] DiBattista, Maria. *First Love.* 218.

in the novel. Initially presenting an opposition between the vagrant Molloy and viciously paternalistic man of the law Moran, the novel, as it proceeds, breaks down the boundaries between the categories these two represent are supposed to represent. Within the novel, we see not only the formal but the thematic intertwining of the law and the state with irrationalism, illogic and unreason. And as with *Watt*, the plot revolves around the transmission of a message, or information, from one actor, the "voice," to another, the "narrator," even as the novel makes these two positions harder to distinguish.

Molloy proceeds in a rocking motion, forwards and backwards, as though mimicking the progress made on crutches by its protagonist. A kind of shuddering rhythm is continuously produced by an advance, immediately followed by a negation, on the level of the word as well as the sentence. "Ma-," for instance, is turned into Mag, immediately revoking the familial relationship implied by the first two letters. This pattern of undoing, and of negative accumulation, is the one in which we should examine Molloy's experiment with moving stones around his person, an extension of the trajectory of loss and dispossession first articulated in the stammering form of an echo. In Ovid's version of the myth, Echo, unloved and unseen, wastes away. *"Vox tantum atque ossa supersunt: Vox manet, ossa ferunt lapidis traxisse figuram*,"" "Only her voice and her bones remain: then, only voice; for they say that her bones were turned to stone," or, as Beckett obsessively phrased and rephrased it in his poems and short stories, "Echo's bones were turned to stone."[242]

[242] Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Book III, lines 398-99. 152-153.

In the novel, Molloy, exhausted from traveling by night, collapses on the beach to gather a store of what he calls "sucking stones."[243] This follows a terrifying sequence on the comparative dangers of walking by day as opposed to by night: "Morning is the time to hide…For the night purge is in the hands of technicians, for the most part,"[244] a clear evocation of the René Char collection of poems, « *Dehors la nuit est gouvernée* » in which the poem *« Courbet: Les Casseurs de Cailloux »* appears. While Char's stonebreakers ultimately pulverize the stones, turning them from «*cailloux* » to « *rocaille* » to « *poussière* », Beckett's translation maintains them as just "stones" throughout, and his character, Molloy, does not transform them but merely moves them around his person.

In an essay titled "The Silence of Babel," Erika Ostrovsky has described Beckett's "switch" from English into French, writing that

> What he did is comparable to a painter who, having too long cultivated drawing with the right hand, and, having acquired an automatic mastery, a facility that smelled of tradition and success, grabs the crayon with the left hand, uncorrupted by habit, virtuosity or conformism.[245]

In fact, Beckett switched into, not out of, a trope of "automatic mastery" when he began to write in French. The stone-sucking section of Molloy is where Beckett evokes the first manifesto of surrealism, retracing Breton's famous formulation of automatic writing as "blackening pages:" « *Mais afin de noirçir encore quelques*

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[243] Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition Volume 2*. New York: Grove Press, 2006. 2:63. Translated by Samuel Beckett.

[244] *Molloy*, in Grove 2:61–62. "*L'épuration*" is the word in the original. Translation by Samuel Beckett.

[245] In Bishop, Tom. "Heavenly Father, the Creature was bilingual." In *From the Left Bank. Reflections On the Modern French Theater and Novel*. New York: New York University Press, 1997. 179.

pages je dirai que je passai quelque temps au bord de la mer, sans incident ».[246] These stones, found by Molloy on the beach, as Breton would later do in his essay, *Langue des pierres*, of 1957, in which he described the magical properties inherent in every rock, provide him with something to suck on: « *Je profitai de ce séjour pour m'approvisionner en pierres à sucer. C'etaient des caillous mais moi j'appelle ca des pierres*», and he concerns himself straight away with their equal distribution amongst the two pockets of his greatcoat and two trouser pockets. [247] What seems to be of tremendous importance to Molloy is that each of these stones has been sucked in turn, rather than some having been sucked twice and others not at all; to that end, he devises a system of circulation that will send each of the sixteen stones around his person at an even rate. The description of the process lasts several pages. But whereas for Breton, these pebbles "enchant those who have held on to some of their childlike freshness," Beckett's stones, or "pebbles really," stay resolutely material, as in his treatment of Char's poem.[248]

Despite little planning or rewriting of the manuscript, Beckett sketched diagrams for himself, while writing, to visualize and clarify the action of this passage. Molloy, beginning with a hypothesis, "say sixteen stones," decides that he will first move one stone of the four in each of his four pockets, from the right pocket of his greatcoat to his mouth, to be replaced by a stone from the right pocket of his trousers, to be replaced with the stone from the left trouser pocket and moving the stone from the left pocket of his greatcoat to the left trouser pocket.[249] In this way a circular

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[246] Beckett, Samuel. *Molloy.* Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1982. 91.

[247] *Molloy.* Éd. de Minuit, 92.

[248] Breton, André. « Langue des pierres » in Le Surréalisme, même. N° 3, automne 1957. « Il ne saurait ramasser les memes pierres ». 62.

[249] *Molloy*, in Grove 2:64.

pattern is established, however, no motivation is provided for this action, nor is it a satisfactory solution. The references to vaudeville, to juggling or a gambling game, are clear, but without anything to win or to play for. “When the desire to suck took hold of me again,”[250] Molloy repeats the motion, but becomes aware that there is no way to know for sure that he is not moving the same stone, or set of four stones, instead of a new set of four stones. The drama of the scenario, for Molloy, seems to consist in the problem of performing a highly repetitive ritual action without exactly repeating any of its gestures.

Over the course of the next few pages, every attempt is made to exhaust the possibility of leaving any stone unsucked: they are shuffled in the pockets, “in the hope of obtaining a more general circulation,” the possibility of transferring four at a time is considered, as is the possibility of creating more pockets by dividing the four with safety pins, and the narrator becomes frustrated, until he realizes that only by “sacrificing the principle of trim” can he find a solution.[251] This word, trim, or *arrimage*, is a nautical term that refers to the correct distribution of weight on a vessel.[252] The revelation that Molloy need not equally distribute the weight of his stones around his body leads to a new set of possible permutations; uneven numbers of them can be passed through the cycle in sets of five and six, and this engages him for a while, before, ultimately, the absence of the principle of trim makes itself felt to such a degree that he cannot proceed with this process. Molloy rescinds his earlier statement, finding that the uneven distribution of the stones is painful to him, and that by doing away with the principle, he realizes that “it was something more than a principle I abandoned, when I abandoned the equal distribution, it was a bodily

[250] *Molloy*, in Grove 2:64.

[251] *Molloy*, in Grove 2:64.

[252] *Molloy*, in Grove 2:64.

need."[253] Molloy concludes the passage with the revelation that in fact he does not care "a tinker's curse," as Beckett translates it, about being off-balance, nor a "fiddler's curse" about a shortage of stones.[254] The passage is a belated surrealist method of covering pages, but one particularly concerned with a single object for a time; however, the episode ends here, and the stones are not mentioned again. What starts as merely an exercise in "blackening a few more pages,"[255] turns into a crisis of "trim" and back into an exercise within a hundred lines. For the sake of covering pages, the objective of the novel as set out at the start, Molloy allows a precept to go beyond the point of its logical conclusion and disintegrate, as excessive attention to logic turns into madness. It is clear that this passage has the trappings or the appearance of a system or of reason, just for the sake of it, and a vast amount of attention is paid to something that doesn't matter at all. The stone as an object is a pretext for language and for writing, and the object itself is lost. This surplus attention paid to the stones marks the beginning of a conscious process of dispossession.

The inventory of possessions

After Molloy's stones, the narrator raises the question of his inventory for the first time:

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[253] *Molloy*, in Grove 2:68.

[254] In French the phrase is « *Mais en manquer au fond je m'en foutais aussi, quand je n'en aurais plus je n'en aurais plus, je ne m'en sentirais pas plus mal, ou si peu* ». Molloy. Éd. de Minuit, 100. Translation by Samuel Beckett.

[255] *Molloy*, in Grove 2:63

> Je dois attendre, pour être certain de ne plus rien pouvoir, ni perdre, ni jeter, ni donner. Alors je pourrai dire, sans crainte de me tromper, ce qu'il me reste, en fin de compte, de mes possessions. Car ce cera la fin du compte.[256]
>
> But I must first wait, to be sure there is nothing more I can acquire, or lose, or throw away, or give away. Then I can say, without fear of error, what is left in the end, of my possessions. For it will be the end.[257]

The idea of degeneration and recursive progress is amplified through the related narratives of possession and increasing material dispossession, undertaken in more and more "dilapidated premises," over the course of the three novels. In *Malone Meurt*, the narrator finds himself, after a blow to the head, in a home that is explicitly not « *une chambre d'hôpital ou de maison d'aliénés, ça se sent* ».[258] Malone's relentless inventory throughout the second novel of the trilogy shows a notable concern with objects, particularly, as it goes on, with writing instruments. Each time the narrator starts to imagine a story to tell, he reflects on a stocktaking process that also has to be undertaken: « *Car alors je parlerai des choses qui restent en ma possession, c'est un très vieux projet. Ce sera une sorte d'inventaire* ».[259] « *Donc mes histoires d'abord et en dernier lieu, si tout va bien, mon inventaire ».*[260] « *Situation présente, trois histoires, inventaire, voilà ».*[261] The stories are, therefore, connected to the notions of possession and dispossession, part of an inverse relationship between stock and trade. As the objects belonging to Malone go missing, they are not replaced. The novel undoes all of the accrual made in an eighteenth-century novel of capital

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[256] *Molloy*, Éd.. de Minuit, 110.

[257] *Molloy*, in Grove 2:76.

[258] *Malone Meurt*, 13.

[259] *Malone Meurt*, 10.

[260] *Malone Meurt*, 11.

[261] *Malone Meurt*, 12.

accumulation like *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, which James Knowlson has cited as a source for Winnie's little pile of possessions in *Happy Days*.[262] In Daniel Defoe's novel, a castaway on a remote island is dependent on a limited store of belongings, which he lists and tracks as it rises and falls, ultimately returning to England and to the fortune his estates in Brazil have amassed while he has been away: "When I took leave of this island, I carried on board, for relics, the great goat-skin cap I had made, my umbrella, and one of my parrots."[263] Beckett was surely referring to the 1791 novel in *Malone Meurt*, when Malone tries to use his stick to punt his bed around the room like a raft, or when, in search of friends, he considers "*les races inferieures, rouges, jaunes, chocolat, etc*."[264] Instead Malone is given a little parrot, which in this novel functions as another symbol of mimicry without understanding: « *Un perroquet, gris et rouge, auquel il apprenait à dire,* Nihil in intellectu, *etc».*[265] The parrot reappears in *The Unnamable*: "And out it all pours unchanged… A parrot, that's what they're up against, a parrot."[266] The bird is an instance of the involuntary, mimetic modes of speech, or "parroting," and one, for the nineteenth-century English neurologist John Hughlings Jackson, that was emblematic the phenomenon of "aphasic speech automatisms" typical of the pathologies gathered by Nordau under the name "degeneration." As Laura Salisbury writes, "Beckett surely hoped that his own unruly bodily systems might allow him to be counted among those whom

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[262] Knowlson, James, "Beckett's Bits of Pipe." In Beja, Morris., S. E Gontarski, and Pierre A. G Astier. *Samuel Beckett--Humanistic Perspectives.* Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1982. In Hugh Kenner's *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* he likens Malone to "a senescent Crusoe" (London, Calder Books, 1962. 62-63).

[263] Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe.* London: Seeley, Service & Co. Limited, 1919. 554.

[264] *Malone Meurt*, 73.

[265] *Malone Meurt*, 72.

[266] Beckett, Samuel. *The Unnamable*. In Grove 2:329.

Nordau called the 'high degenerates, bordermen, mattoids, and graphomaniacs' of modern art."[267]

As well as being divested of the tools with which to proceed: his stick, his pencils and his exercise book, Malone starts to long for tools which might allow him to stop. A pencil eraser, for instance, which might have allowed the character to go back and remove some of what he had already written, is not forthcoming.[268] The novel's focus on material goods, or possessions, makes it clear that there is a relationship between the compulsion to continue, or a type of fevered *possession*, and the loss of objects, or *dispossession*, that would allow him to stop. The fewer belongings the characters of the trilogy own, the less traction or grist there is to slow down the voice that continues to speak through to the end of *L'Innommable*, in which any object that might function as a welcome spanner in the works is has long been lost. Here there is "no wood, nor any stone… no vegetables, no minerals."[269] There are no more material items to lose. "Nothing," according to the narrator of this novel, is the truest possession, because it is the most unchanging.[270]

In the last part of Beckett's "series," *L'Innommable*, the narrator, who has now been divested of all but torso, is housed in a what could be described as a sort of "communicating vessel:" a jar next to the back door of a "chop-house," decorated with Chinese lanterns and intermittently tended to by the restaurant owner.[271] Having lost arms and legs, and not having been able to replace the items which were broken,

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[267] Salisbury, Laura & Code, Chris. "Jackson's Parrot: Samuel Beckett, Aphasic Speech Automatisms, and Psychosomatic Language." In *Literature, Speech Disorders and Disability: Talking Normal.* Eagle, Chris ed. London: Routledge 2013.

[268] *Malone Dies* in Grove 2:265.

[269] *The Unnameable*. In Grove 2:357.

[270] *The Unnameable*. In Grove 2:340.

[271] *The Unnameable*. In Grove 2:328.

stolen or misplaced in the earlier novels, now the preoccupation with belongings has been entirely substituted for an obsession with the voice itself and the forms it takes. This is the purest expression of automatic writing and one which cannot be stopped. It takes commands and dictation from its previous avatars at first: *Mahood dixit*.[272] "Everything will continue automatically, until the order arrives, to stop everything."[273] The voice also parrots what it hears: « *Ce ramassis de conneries… ils sont tombés sur un bec d'un perroquet* ».[274] Roving through the cast of characters of the trilogy, the voice sifts between the many guises he has assumed. Murphy, Mahood, Molloy, Malone, Worm: "It is they who dictate this torrent of balls."[275] This turns into an examination of the type of author the work has: is he a messenger? A master? The novel keeps going, without break, through lesser and lesser categories of fictional type. *L'Innommable* critically undermines the project of writing thus far, asking, "Can that be called a life which vanishes when the subject is changed?"[276]As far as a subject goes, "the subject doesn't matter, there is none."[277] The parts of speech that refer to subjects are parsed, and he finds that there is no need, in the absence of subjects, for pronouns: « *c'est la faute des pronoms, il n'y a pas de nom pour moi, pas de pronom pour moi* ».[278] Smaller and smaller parts of speech are generated in this interrogation. The novel is deeply reliant on a French no less strange to native than to non-native readers, one with a noticeable lack of substantives: « *que je cherche, qu'est-ce je cherche maintenant, ce que je cherche, je cherche ce que*

[272] *The Unnamable*. In Grove 2:315.

[273] *The Unnamable*. In Grove 2:363.

[274] *L'Innommable*. 82.

[275] *The Unnamable*. In Grove 2:329.

[276] *The Unnamable*. In Grove 2:347.

[277] *L'Innommable*. 123. « Peu importe le sujet, il n'y en a pas ».

[278] *L'Innommable*. 195.

c'est, ça doit être ça, ce que c'est, ce que ça peut être », etc.[279] As has been noted in an essay on Beckett's "turn to French," "we become aware of the syntactic pivots of the sentence; it is as though Beckett made art out of the stuff of language textbooks."[280]

As Ann Banfield has written in her essay "Beckett's Tattered Syntax," the language of *L'Innommable* and Beckett's prose texts thereafter, is "not mined in the riches of the dictionary, with its adjectives of infinite shades and qualities and nouns filled to the brim with meaning, but out of the poverties of the syntacticon."[281]

Beckett finishes the three novels with only a voice, and a deeply destabilized one at that. The works in which he founded and cemented his own written "voice" are therefore those most associated with his vivid and comprehensive undermining of the authorial subject, the writing "I," "the being which is called me and is not one," as he writes in the *Texts for Nothing*.[282] What he referred to, in letters to his biographer, as Joyce's "additive process," is agonizing and enforced, not joyful, in this depiction. While Beckett wrote that Joyce's art was always "going in the direction of more," Beckett was going in the direction of less. "I realized that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, in control of one's material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, subtracting rather than adding."[283] Compared to Joyce's "omniverous" quality, and his boundless

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[279] *L'Innommable*, 167.

[280] Astro, Alan. "Samuel Beckett Emerges as a French Writer." In Hollier, Denis., and R. Howard Bloch. *A New History of French Literature.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994. 980.

[281] Banfield, Ann. "Beckett's Tattered Syntax." In *Representations* 84, no. 1 (2003): 6–29. 20.

[282] Beckett, Samuel. *Texts for Nothing.* London: Calder Books, 1999. 43.

[283] Knowlson, James, *Damned to Fame*. 352.

ambition for showing the entire human universe, microcosmic, multilingual and multi mythical, Beckett's tactic became to exclude as much as possible. But this is also a painful, conflicting reduction based in "failure, poverty, exile and loss:" in *L'Innommable*, the arduous continuation of an unbroken stream of prose comes at a cost. "If only this voice could stop," it entreats. "In my life… there were three things, the inability to speak, the inability to be silent, and solitude."[284]

In his essay on Beckett in *Arts of Impoverishment*, Leo Bersani has written, "Beckett is proposing something more radical: a work of art cut off from all cultural inheritance."[285] These novels, as we have seen, are engaged in the question of how to proceed as a disinherited, dispossessed figure, written, as Michael Wood has noted, in the "last person" as well as the first person singular.[286] There is no overall coherent "author," the Unnamable concludes; but a part-time functionary, a "delegate," is posited: « *le préposé parle de soi* »[287] or, as Beckett translated into English, "the man on duty speaks of himself."[288] This was the spirit in which his work was appreciated by American artists of the 1960s and 1970s.

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[284] Knowlson, James, *Damned to Fame.* 389.

[285] Bersani, Leo and Dutoit, Ulysse. *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993. 19.

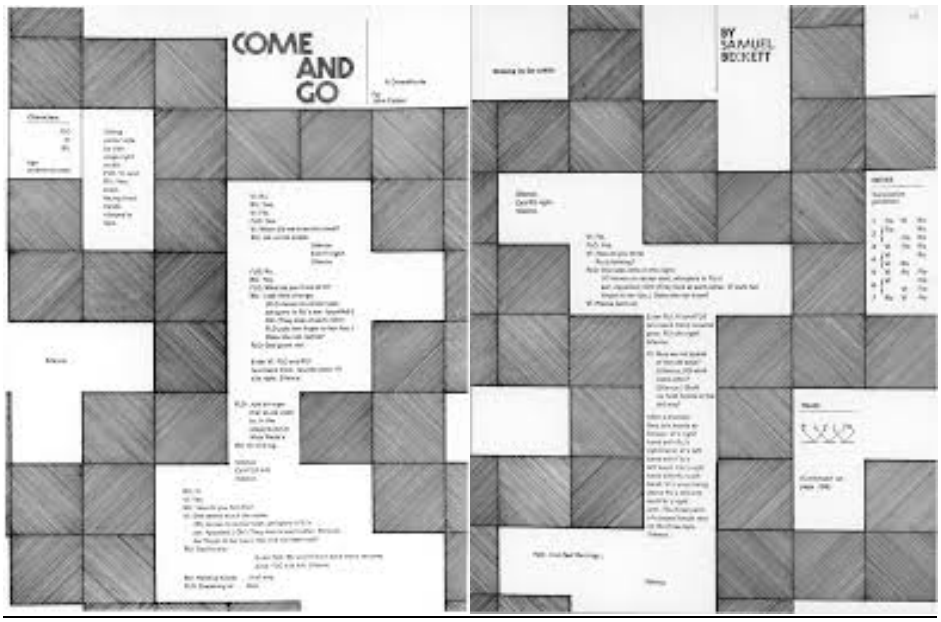
[286]In Wood, Michael, "Name After Name: Samuel Beckett's Secret Autobiography." In *Modernism and Autobiography*, Maria DiBattista and Emily O. Wittman eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

[287] L'Innommable, 197.

[288] *The Unnamable*. In Grove 2:397.

Chapter Three: "Only a voice remained:" The Dematerialization of the Art Object, 1960–1980

Let's do as that crazy mathematician who used to apply a new principle of measurement at each individual step of the calculation.[289]



The extraordinary linear hive LeWitt conceived for the publication of Samuel Beckett's play *Come and Go*, in Harper's Bazaar (August 1969) must be counted among the interests on LeWitt's part that extended beyond the art world, and in Beckett's case might rest on a connection the writer felt for a form of expression - its taciturnity, its intelligence - comparable to his own.[290]

With these lines the American art historian Rosalind Krauss closed her tribute to the artist Sol LeWitt, published the summer after LeWitt's death in April 2007.[291] In 1969, LeWitt had produced the drawings, this "extraordinary linear hive," to accompany the publication of Beckett's play, *Come and Go*, in *Harper's Bazaar* magazine; however, this was not the first time their work had appeared together. Two years before, in 1967, their work had both featured in the so-called "Minimalism"

[289] Letter to Axel Kaun ("The German Letter") of 9th July 1937. The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol.1:520.

[290] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt's Ark." *October*, July 1, 2007: 111–13.

issue of a New York arts magazine, *Aspen*, to which Beckett had contributed an audio recording of *Text for Nothing #8.*[292]

Of course, this was not Beckett's introduction to a general American readership by any means. In 1953, Barney Rosset, the publisher of Grove Press, then a newly-founded New York publishers, approached Beckett about printing his work in the United States. Grove was dedicated to the publication of French literature in translation, as well as volumes of Beat poetry, erotica, philosophy and texts on 1960s counter-culture and civil rights. It was also known for its committed anti-censorship stance, and Rosset published D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch,* Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and other banned books, going to court at times to ensure their publication. Thereafter Beckett's work would be published in the United States by Grove Press, from the first English edition of *Waiting for Godot* in 1954 until *Stirrings Still*, Beckett's last text, which he wrote between 1983 and 1987 for Rosset to allow him to raise funds for a new imprint. *Waiting for Godot* was a disappointment when it was first performed in Coconut Grove, Florida, in 1956, ending early when its promising claim, "the laugh sensation of two continents," was deemed inaccurate by its initial audiences, but the play grew in notoriety and a new production on Broadway was a hit. After its tremendous success in New York, which prompted sales of a million copies in paperback, Grove issued plays by Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter and Luigi Pirandello, putting Beckett at the center of a group dubbed "the theater of the absurd" by the

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[292] *Aspen. The Magazine in a Box. No. 5+6 (The Minimalism Issue).* Twenty-eight numbered items, including advertisements folder. Edited and designed by Brian O'Doherty, art direction by David Dalton and Lynn Letterman. Published Fall-Winter 1967 by Roaring Fork Press, NYC.

critic Martin Esslin, whose 1962 book of the same name shaped much of the public response to Beckett's work in the U.S. With Rosset's assistance, Beckett's plays were also produced in the U.S. In 1963 he travelled to the United States at Rosset's invitation, to make the short film, *Film*, starring Buster Keaton, which was shown at the New York Film Festival in 1965.[293] This was Beckett's only visit to the United States. Before departing, he remarked "This is somehow not the right country for me… the people are too strange."[294]

The "Magazine in a Box"

When you look at Beckett's later reception within American art criticism, however, it is easy to overlook his fame as a playwright, as the focus in that context seems to have been almost entirely on his novels. The special issue of *Aspen* magazine, devoted to minimal art, is a comprehensive introduction to the entire artistic milieu in which his work was read, influenced and interpreted in the 1960s and 1970s in New York. In this special double edition of this short-lived but significant artists' publication, was a recording of Jack MacGowran reading from *Texts for Nothing*, recorded for and distributed in *Aspen* as one of twenty-eight numbered items, edited and designed by the Irish artist and art critic Brian O'Doherty, and published in the fall of 1967. O'Doherty dedicated the issue to the French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé and compiled the following items: "1 box, 1 book, 4 films, 5 records, 8 boards, 10 printed data."[295] The "magazine in a box," which has been

[293] Knowlson, James. *Damned to Fame.* 353.

[294] Knowlson, James. *Damned to Fame.* 467.

[295] *Aspen: The Magazine in a Box*, as above. No pagination.

described as "the first exhibition of conceptual art,"[296] was organized around the axioms of "excess" and "reduction," dividing the work into two thematic registers, time, "silence and reduction", and language; furthermore, the works included were also split into "constructivism, structuralism, conceptualism, tradition of paradoxical thinking, objects and 'between categories.'" Formally speaking, these divisions and subdivisions allowed the reader to organize the items in the box into multiple combinations of works him or herself, a concern reflected in many of the works' emphasis on the role of the spectator or participant. This format, described by Mary Ruth Walsh in a 2003 essay as bearing "unmistakable echoes of the grid which Rosalind Krauss relates closely to the conceptual art of the sixties," was as O'Doherty himself described the grid: "supposed to be indexical of all that is rational, but I think it's as mad as many logical things turn out to be – artificial, hysterical, subsuming its own version of chaos."[297]

As well as commissioning Roland Barthes' essay *Death of the Author* for the magazine, O'Doherty gathered work by the artists Mel Bochner, Merce Cunningham, Marcel Duchamp, Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Robert Rauschenberg and Tony Smith, the composers Morton Feldman and John Cage, films by and the writers William Burroughs, Susan Sontag, Alain Robbe-Grillet, George Kubler and Samuel Beckett. O'Doherty himself contributed a "structural play," with dialogue and diagrams for the positioning of actors, printed and folded into an accordion to fit into the box. The artist Mel Bochner provided a series of grids printed on translucent

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[296] Buchloh, Benjamin, Rosalind Krauss, Alexander Alberro, Thierry De Duve, Martha Buskirk, and Yve-Alain Bois. "Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp." *October* 70, 1994: 127-46. 131.

[297] O'Doherty, Brian, quoted in Walsh, Mary Ruth. "A Labyrinth in a Box: Aspen 5+6." *Circa*, N° 104, Summer 2003. 42.

paper. Marcel Duchamp gave a recording of *The Creative Act*, a 1957 text on the "mediumistic" quality of the artistic production. Robert Morris contributed a short film, *Site.* Sol LeWitt's contribution was *Serial Project #1*, the description of an installation at Dwan, his New York gallery. In an accompanying essay, he described his work "by means of the rather surprising metaphor of a performance of daily bureaucratic tasks."[298] According to LeWitt, the Mallarméan idea of chance would actually "play no part in the outcome. The serial artist does not attempt to produce a beautiful or mysterious object but functions merely as a clerk cataloguing the results of his premise."[299]

MacGowran's recording of *Text for Nothing VIII* and its inclusion in the magazine allow us to understand Beckett's importance to the American art of the 1960s. Immediately after Beckett finished writing *L'Innommable* in January 1951, he started to write the first of these short texts and, as he wrote to Barney Rosset in a 1954 letter, they represent "a failure to implement the last words" of *L'Innommable*, which, at that time, were simply "I can't go on," the final "I'll go on" not added until later.[300] The *Texts for Nothing* are a series of short investigations into the nature of writing, who writes, and what is written. The narrator assumes various writing personae throughout: "I'm the clerk, I'm the scribe,"[301] and in each one considers anew the possibility of writing: "I have high hopes, a little story, with living creatures

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[298] Buchloh, Benjamin H.D. "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions." *October* 55 (December 1, 1990). 140.

[299] LeWitt, Sol. "Serial Project #1, 1966." In *Aspen*, 1967.

300 Dirk van Hulle, "Figures of Script: The Development of Beckett's Short Prose and the 'Aesthetic of Inaudibilities,'" in S. E. Gontarski, *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, vol. 63, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 253.

[301] Beckett, Samuel. *Texts for Nothing* Nº 5.

coming and going… a brief story."[302] As in *L'Innommable*, « *le préposé parle de soi».*[303] The narrators are all characters who, as Rosalind Krauss would later note in her essay on Beckett and Sol LeWitt, are unfamiliar with "the notion of *etcetera*."[304] A voice comes from nowhere and can't stop talking. "It's an unbroken flow of words and tears. With no pause for reflection."[305] The same compulsion that drives Lucky's frenzied speech in *Waiting for Godot*, issuing from him in an outburst of "divine aphasia" that overpowers his body, animates the narrator of *Text for Nothing VIII.*[306] "Here I'm a mere ventriloquist's dummy… It's forever the same murmur, flowing unbroken, like a single endless word and therefore meaningless, for it's the end gives the meaning to words."[307] These short statements concluded Beckett's series of wartime novels, pushing the concept of automatic writing well beyond the surrealist endeavor in a much more persistent and enduring interpellation of their initial premise.

It seems significant that although Beckett first protested "Ah sure, I haven't a scrap" in response to O'Doherty's request for material, what he eventually chose to contribute was exceptionally appropriate for the overall theme of the issue.[308] His *Textes pour rien* were, however, written almost twenty years before Roland Barthes'

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[302] Beckett, Samuel. *Texts for Nothing*. London: Calder Books, 1999. 40.

[303] *L'Innommable*. 187.

[304] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress," 55.

[305] Beckett, Samuel. *Texts for Nothing*. 40.

[306] The « *débit monotone* » that issues from Lucky: « *sa divine apathie sa divine athambie sa divine aphasie* » concludes with a series of remarks and exclamations on stones: « *les pierres…les pierres si bleues…les pierres! »* Beckett, Samuel, and Duckworth, Colin. *En Attendant Godot : Piéce En Deux Actes*. Modern World Literature Series. London: Harrap, 1966. Act 1. 39.

[307] Beckett, Samuel. *Texts for Nothing*. 42.

[308] Brian O'Doherty, "Strolling with the Zeitgeist." *Frieze* magazine, published online on 6th March 2013.

contribution, the essay *The Death of the Author*, or a similar inquiry, the French philosopher Michel Foucault's 1969 lecture at the Collège de France titled *Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?*[309] Both of these subsequent texts challenged, as their titles suggest, the idea of the authorial subject along similar lines to Beckett's sustained inquiry. Barthes' essay argued that biographical information about the life of a writer should not be used to provide a distilled or definitive understanding of a text, and historicized the gradual "death of the author" in modernity as follows:

> Surrealism… contributed to the desacralization of the image of the Author by ceaselessly recommending the abrupt disappointment of expectations of meaning (the famous surrealist jolt) by entrusting the hand with the task of writing as quickly as possible what the head itself is unaware of (automatic writing),

and famously concluded that that "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author."[310] Many of the texts and recordings included in *Aspen* placed a similar emphasis on the new status of the reader and a hitherto-unauthorized voice; as the minimalist composer Phillip Glass put it, "everyone brought his own libretto."[311] Foucault's lecture on the relationship that obtains between author and text also cited *Texts for Nothing*, writing « *j'en emprunte la formulation à Beckett*: « *Qu'importe qui parle, quelqu'un a dit qu'importe qui parle* ».[312] These Beckettian formulations,

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[309] Foucault, Michel. « *Qu'est-ce-qu'un Auteur ?* » Reprinted in English translation as "What is an Author?" Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. Ed. Donald F. Bouchard. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977. 124-127.

[310] Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author" in *Aspen.*

[311] Glass, Phillip. In Oppenheim, Lois. *Samuel Beckett and the Arts: Music, Visual Arts, and Non-Print Media*. New York: Garland Pub., 1999. 146.

[312] Foucault, Michel. « *Qu'est-ce-qu'un Auteur?* »

which implied the opening of the field of writing to non-biographical, non-familial, non-hierarchical set of relations, and the questions of authority and authorship they evoked, particularly in relation to the idea of work, were central to the American art of the 1960s.

"The man on duty speaks of himself."

> For this generation the mode of expression became the deadpan, the fixed stare, the uninflected repetitious speech. Or rather the correlatives of these modes were invented in the object-world of sculpture.[313]

Anti-authorial, anti-expressive strategies characterized the American art of the 1960s. In her catalogue essay for a 2003 exhibition titled *Work Ethic*, the curator Helen Molesworth describes the shift from manufacturing to service production in post-war American industry and the development and spread of a managerial class. Using the terms set out in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*, Molesworth contextualizes American art of the 1960s by considering its engagement with "labor's metamorphosis from… 'productive labor' (the production of goods and services during late capitalism) to 'immaterial labor' (the production and management of information under our current conditions)."[314] These new, "immaterial" laborers oversaw the work of others and represented the flow of this work in diagrams, graphs and charts, turning the focus from the work of the manufacturer or the producer towards that of the reader or spectator. On the specific importance of *Aspen* magazine, Molesworth writes:

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313 Krauss, Rosalind, "LeWitt in Progress." 60.

314 Molesworth, Helen, *Work Ethic*. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003. 47.

> Two texts important to the formation of postmodern ideas declared the newly problematized author/artist. One was a short speech delivered by Duchamp, "The Creative Act," and the other was an essay by French theorist Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author." Both appeared in the eclectic avant-garde journal *Aspen (*1967) — Duchamp's spoken by the artist and Barthes' in its first English translation. Both texts would become legendary.[315]

Molesworth lists the following artists and producers as instances of anti-authorial intent in their work of these years: John Cage, who with chance evacuated the idea of deliberate authorship, LeWitt who used serial, mathematical and self-sufficient forms, Carl Andre who used standard issue bricks in his sculptures, Donald Judd who used fabricators to produce his objects, John Baldessari whose camera replaced the hand and Yoko Ono, whose work was never completed and always rendered through instructions or participants. The "deadpan" art of the 1960s was motivated by a reaction to the highly expressive painting of the late 1940s and 1950s: American Abstract Expressionist painting, which had dominated the discussion of art in the years immediately after the Second World War, was ebbing in popularity and artists were drawn towards its opposite. The same shift that Molesworth describes, from manufacture to management, has also been schematized by the art historian Benjamin H.D. Buchloh in his essay "Conceptual Art: 1962–1968: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions."[316] In the essay, Buchloh describes the rapid development from the first "minimal" art objects of the 1960s to conceptual art practices in the same terms, as did Lucy Lippard, who wrote, in her early article "The Dematerialization of Art," published in *Art International* in 1968:

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[315] Molesworth, Helen, *Work Ethic*. 29.

[316] Buchloh, Benjamin. "Conceptual Art: 1962–1968: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions." In *October* 55, Winter 1990. 106-143.

> During the 1960s the anti-intellectual, emotional intuitive processes of art making characteristic of the last two decades has begun to give way to an ultra-conceptual art that emphasizes the thinking process almost exclusively. As more and more work is designed in the studio, but executed elsewhere by professional craftsmen, as the object becomes merely the end product, a number of artists are losing interest in the physical evolution of the work of art… Such a trend appears to be provoking a profound dematerialization of art, especially of art as object, and if it continues to prevail, it may result in the object's becoming wholly obsolete.[317]

What was at stake during these years was a shift in the value and significance of the materials of fine art: Buchloh dubbed minimalism "the optimistic belief in communication within very limited material options."[318] Beckett's inclusion in *Aspen* magazine is therefore valuable in marking his appearance at an important juncture in the disciplines of art and art criticism. As we have seen, his contribution to the magazine was a text that came at the end of a long process, in his work, of descriptive disinvestment from material possessions, finally substituting a radically undermined voice for a wealth of formal and narratological resources. Despite the fact that his *texte pour rien* was written over ten years before the other contributions to the magazine, his writing was understood or construed, by American artists and critics, to describe a similar shift from formal concerns, and formalist appraisals, to the discussion of an art more concerned with the reduction from material and formal

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[317] In Lippard, Lucy R. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972. A Cross-Reference Book of Information on Some Esthetic Boundaries*. New York: Praeger, 1973. 42-43.

[318] Buchloh, Benjamin, in "The Reception of the Sixties: A Roundtable." In Bryan-Wilson, Julia, and Robert Morris. *Robert Morris.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2013. 119.

qualities to a set of semantic operations and linguistic analysis. In what follows, I will examine two artists, Sol LeWitt and Robert Morris, whose work was initially labeled "minimalist" and show how Beckett's writing was critically construed to define a shift in their development from an object-focused, or "minimal," art, to a conceptual or linguistic practice.

Minimal Objects

Rosalind Krauss's essays on Beckett have been described as amongst the most important paradigms of American art criticism of the 1960s and 1970s by the art historian David Batchelor, who identifies, in Krauss's essay on Beckett and Sol LeWitt, a major development away from high modernist American art criticism, which depended on two articles of faith: one, that the arts are autonomous and two, that art and non-art are distinct.[319] Postwar American art criticism was preoccupied with the discussion of modernist painting; two students of the extremely influential art critic Clement Greenberg, Krauss and Michael Fried, were to depart from his principles in deeply antagonistic ways. As the art of the 1960s moved further from the tenets of modernist painting, the academic art criticism directed towards it became more hostile. For Fried in particular, whose 1967 essay *Art and Objecthood* defined the critical antipathy to minimalist sculpture or "Specific Objects," as Donald Judd referred to his work, "objecthood," was the condition of non-art. Artworks that attempted to blur the lines between art and non-art had no artistic value and were "theatrical;" and the relationship between theater, which synthesizes all the arts, and

[319] Batchelor, David. *Minimalism*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

modernism, was one of "war."[320] The new, often industrial or everyday materials used to make minimal sculpture, and the new approaches to art-making that undermined skill and mastery, like the use of what Duchamp had termed the "readymade," so obviously contravened the distinction between art and non-art, that they simply did not have what Fried termed "the essential character of art." When the artist Frank Stella proclaimed his own paintings to be "objects," having, as he saw it, exhausted the progress made in his earlier work in which the inheritance of an earlier generation of Abstract Expressionist painters was clear, Fried tried to save it in a critical altercation with the minimalist sculptor Carl Andre that was famously described as a "battle for Stella's soul."[321] Fried later summarized his critical project during those years in an introduction to his collected essays of the 1960s thus:

> In "Art and Objecthood" I described the emergence of a basic opposition between the radically abstract painting and sculpture I most admired and what I characterized, pejoratively, as the "literalist" and "theatrical" work of a group of artists usually called the Minimalists – Robert Morris, Donald Judd, Tony Smith, Carl Andre et al. The art I admired I thought of as "antitheatrical."[322]

The pictorial values of art championed by Greenberg were not to be found in the new artistic paradigms, according to Fried's account. The artists in question would therefore have to find a new critical voice adequate to the work, and a poetics appropriate to its modernity, moving away from the formalist models of criticism associated with Greenberg, as artists like Dan Flavin, Robert Morris, Carl Andre and

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[320] Fried, Michael. *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. 160.

[321] Fried, Michael. *Art and Objecthood.* 71.

[322] Fried, Michael. *Art and Objecthood.* 14.

Eva Hesse "all sought to avoid fussiness, complication and over-refinement, which was evident both in much-crafted painting and sculpture, and in the scholastic tone of some contemporary criticism."[323] To this end, critics like Rosalind Krauss, Lucy Lippard, Barbara Rose and Barbara Reise, as well as the artists in question, tried to provide a way of interpreting and understanding the artworks in question through new investigations of literature, philosophy and criticism, turning away from formal appraisal and analysis. The pressure to find new terms with which to describe this work was explicitly stated. "The problem is to keep from discussing the new art with a vocabulary derived from the old position,"[324] wrote Barbara Rose, in her classic 1965 essay on minimal sculpture, *ABC Art*. *ABC Art* referred to the "literal objects" produced by Flavin, Andre and Judd, characterizing them as "bland, neutral and redundant." "The word Minimal," Lucy Lippard wrote, "suggests a *tabula rasa*."[325] Gregory Battcock's important collection of new writing, *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, quickly gathered a set of texts, including these, that opened the door to the use of literary interpretation of art and introduced the metaphors that would run steadily throughout the new writing on art of these years. From an "ABC" to a "new vocabulary" to a "new syntax for sculpture," it was clear that what was being undertaken was an entirely new system of writing around art, first through a discussion of minimal art's new approach to materials for sculpture, and then conceptual art's transition from the art object itself into a presentation of the structures of language around it. [326]

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[323] Batchelor, David. *Minimalism.* 68.

[324]Rose, Barbara. "ABC Art," in Battcock, Gregory, *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology.* New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968. 282.

[325] Lippard, Lucy *Six Years*. 2.

[326] In Battcock, Gregory, Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology.

A New Syntax for Sculpture: ABC Art and Primary Structures

The first minimal sculptures were simple, large forms. Amongst the earliest practitioners of this art was Robert Morris, whose first minimal works were shown at the Green Gallery in New York in 1964, anticipating the work shown in the famous exhibition *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors*, at the Jewish Museum in New York from April 27 to June 12, 1966.[327] *Primary Structures* was the first large-scale exhibition to present, *en masse*, the oversized, highly simplified geometric three-dimensional forms that characterized the new sculpture.[328] Morris's were plywood forms, painted in a light grey, and designed to be as simple as possible, with no internal relationships or internal differentiation, positioned on their sides, standing and lying. These eight-foot-high *L-Beams* that Morris made were scaled somewhere between an object and a monument, and disabused the viewer of any pretensions of illusionism by being "discouragingly real." There would be no *trompe l'oeil* effects in this art: "We walk around it to see what we already know and are literally *disillusioned*."[329] The words used to describe the work: a "stripped down," "austere" aesthetic, "detached, impersonal,"[330] "stark, cool, anonymous sculpture"[331] included "minimalist," a term which, like "Impressionism," was meant in a pejorative

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[327] See Appendix Fig. 1.

[328] For a full description of the exhibition, see Chapter One: "A Tour of 'Primary Structures'" in Meyer, James: *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

[329] Tucker, Marcia, *Robert Morris*. Ex. Cat. New York: Published for the Whitney Museum of American Art, by Praeger Publishers, 1970. 33.

[330] Kramer, Hilton. "Primary Structures: The New Anonymity." Published on May 1, 1966, The New York Times.

[331] Kramer, Hilton. "Art: Reshaping the Outermost Limits; 'Primary Structures' at Jewish Museum: Conception Over Craft Is Credo of 42 Artists." Published: April 28, 1966, The New York Times.

sense and stuck. More thoughtful assessments of the work recognized in it the sense of a new beginning: something in need of its most basic articulation, indicated by the titles *Primary Structures* and *ABC Art.* The cubic form constituted "an order so basic to the culture that its obviousness makes it nearly invisible."[332] Producing the most fundamental forms in art was an attempt to reinvent the wheel. The sculptural work of this period remarked upon these elementary forms and rendered them newly visible, however, this gave rise to a heightened need for critical distinctions in order to distinguish the "primary objects" of one artist from another.

An "Art of Departures"

In his critical history of American art between 1960 and 1980, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties,* James Meyer describes what was called "minimal" art as "an art of differentiation," characterized and even constituted by the multiple and conflicting interpretations its critic-practitioners wrote about it.[333] The rapid documentation, acceptance and canonization of these objects, like Battcock's 1968 anthology, he argues, was due in large part to the masses of writing, particularly artists' writing, on the subject. The art historian Annette Michelson calls the writing of these years "a criticism of departures;" motivated by "critical distinctions" and seeking "fresh departures," the art of these years was engaged in a constant practice of distinguishing itself.[334] Just as important as the sculptural objects being made during

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[332] Morris, Robert, *Robert Morris.* Ex. Cat. Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969.

[333] Meyer, James S. *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

[334] Michelson, Annette. "Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression." Originally printed in *Robert Morris.* Ex. Cat. Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969. Collected in Bryan-Wilson, Julia, and Robert Morris. *Robert Morris.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2013

these years, therefore, were the "Notes," "Sentences" and "Paragraphs" that artists wrote on minimal and conceptual art and on their own work.

Within the group of artists called minimalist, however, Robert Morris seems to have been particularly invested in marking the differences between his art and that of his contemporaries. Whereas Donald Judd, in his essay "Specific Objects," located his new sculptural work within a broader movement with common characteristics, Morris's five-part "Notes on Sculpture" published in two parts between 1966 and 1968 in *Artforum*, first defined the field of sculpture as possessed of particular qualities, and then situated his own work within it as unique, opening the essay with Goethe's remark, "What comes into appearance must segregate in order to appear."[335] Written while Morris studied for a master's degree on the Romanian modernist sculptor Constantin Brancusi at Hunter College, New York, the text was initially conceived as a "parody of formalist criticism" until he was encouraged by the critic Barbara Rose to turn it into a fully realized piece of writing.[336] ""Notes on Sculpture" was an attempt, on Morris's part, to stake a place for himself, a position of authority or distinction within a competitive arena. Donald Judd was the particular figure against whom he defined himself."[337] As a serious piece of writing, however, Morris's claims for sculpture would pose a far greater challenge to formalist art criticism than a parody could have done, and the responses to it constituted one of the most important critical exchanges of the 1960s.

In "Notes on Sculpture" Morris contrasted himself with his immediate predecessor, the painter Jasper Johns. For Morris, the separate elements – the numbers

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[335] Morris, Robert. "Notes on Sculpture Parts I and II" in Battcock, Gregory, *Minimal Art.* 222.

[336] Meyer, James. *Minimalism.* 155.

[337] Meyer, James. *Minimalism.* 154.

and letters – in Johns' paintings engendered relationships within the work, threatening its overall effect. "Every internal relationship, whether it be set up by structural division, a rich surface, or what have you, reduces the public, external quality of the object and tends to eliminate the viewer to the degree that these details pull him into an intimate relation with the work and out of the space in which the object exists."[338] Even after expression had been driven out of the artwork, he noted, details that might cause reactions or remarks within the object itself had to be excluded. Morris recommended that sculpture "avoid divisiveness and set the work beyond *retardataire* Cubist esthetics," in other words, create artworks without separate elements or parts.[339] In the absence of any distinguishing or interesting characteristics in the *work*, therefore, minimalism risked being seen as utterly homogeneous, and the artists went to great pains to distinguish their work through writing. Difference, pulled into the work discursively, was important to individuate it and make it legible, and to demonstrate its intellect and complexity.

Morris's "Notes on Sculpture" and Judd's "Specific Objects" provoked a blistering rejoinder from the art critic and historian Michael Fried, the student of Greenberg. Fried's essay, *Art and Objecthood* became, and remains, one of the most notorious and sustained attacks on the sculpture appearing in New York from the mid-1960s onwards, and as I have noted, the term "theatrical," his ultimate judgment regarding the sculpture in question, became the most loaded term for a modernist critique that founded its identity on the principles of the autonomy, and distinctness, of the arts. Rather than being beautiful or good, Judd had declared in "Specific

[338] Morris, "Notes on Sculpture." In Battcock, Gregory. *Minimal Art.* 232-233.

[339] Morris, "Notes on Sculpture." In Battcock, Gregory. *Minimal Art.* 231-232.

Object" that "a work of art needs only to be interesting."[340] Fried's response came in the form of three theses. One, that the survival of art was dependent on its ability to "defeat theater." Two, that "Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theater." Thirdly, he wrote, the "concepts of quality and value…are meaningful, or wholly meaningful, only within the individual arts. What lies between the arts is theater."[341] To Judd's claim that artworks need only be "interesting" Fried countered with the charge that these works were "merely interesting." In the sense that *interest* simply means "it is different," Fried was right. These objects concerned themselves with minimal degrees of formal or optical difference, such that their discursive theorization had to bear the weight of their meaning and distinguishability. It was also a way of playing with these notions of permutability and near-exhaustion, for LeWitt, as we will see, through stuttering iterations of the permuted cube in serial art and for Morris with his infinite regresses into linguistic repetition. Indeed, in Fried's account of this new art, he wrote "the experience is…one of endlessness, or inexhaustibility, of being able to go on and on…"[342] However, his latter-day concern with degeneracy and theater, or the mixing of the arts, was immediately identified with an outmoded, dogmatic modernist position. Sol LeWitt's *Paragraphs* and *Sentences on Conceptual Art* and Robert Smithson's frequent contributions to *Artforum* all entered the fray to defend their artistic priorities from his judgment. And although her essay came later, it is into this climate that Krauss introduced Beckett, to argue against the prevailing notion that minimalism, and conceptual art, which had rapidly developed out of minimal practices, implied the pursuit of intelligibility by mathematical means, a

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[340] Judd, Donald. "Specific Objects." In Thomas Kellein, *Donald Judd: Early Work, 1955-1968*. New York: D.A.P., 2002. 4.

[341] Fried, Michael. *Art and Objecthood*. 164-165.

[342] Fried, Michael. *Art and Objecthood*. 165.

reading that these artists had specifically set out to destroy. In the last lines of "Art and Objecthood," Fried wrote "Presentness is grace," meaning that an art in which "at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest," a "continuous and entire *presentness,*" a "kind of *instantaneousness*" characterized modernism for him as opposed to the temporal art of "theater." The artists championed by Krauss not only diverged from these principles but derided them as participant in the logic of Greenberg's transcendent modernism. Krauss, in several essays, turned to Beckett to critique postwar rationalism and offer an alternative reading of the work. However, in claiming the status of art for the sculpture that she examined, Krauss was on delicate ground. Beckett, of course, was not only, as we have seen, something of a self-styled degenerate writer, but was far better known in the United States for his plays, and by the time of his inclusion in *Aspen*, his post-*Godot* fame had led him away from the novel and quite decisively towards work in the theater, as a director as well as a writer.

"The head is round in order to allow thought to change its direction"[343]

Through Krauss's reading, Beckett seems, first of all, to have allowed Minimalist art to be understood outside of its initial connection to signature materials. Robert Morris had, as I have mentioned, come to prominence as a minimalist sculptor with his large-scale *L-Beams*. However, over the course of his career, he made a practice of working in "still another style." What comes up repeatedly in the critical writing on Morris is his habit of changing the formal direction of his work, again and again. Within the span of a decade, his work went from neo-Dadaist boxes and hand-

[343] Francis Picabia, cited in Morris, Robert. Tucker, Marcia. *Robert Morris.* New York: Published for the Whitney Museum of American Art, by Praeger Publishers, 1970.

made works to minimalism, to anti-form, to post-minimal sculpture.[344] In this regard alone his work was consistent, yet this seemingly problematic heterogeneity provoked many critical attempts to "efface the excesses of this overly paradoxical body of work, which endlessly eludes those who would wish to pin it down."[345] What was most important to Morris, and what he sought through this process, was the undermining of a type of subjectivity thought to inhere in expressionist art. The processes, rather than the forms, of the decentered art subject, were at the heart of his undertaking: in reaction to both Abstract Expressionism, but also to formalist art criticism, he detached his work from formal concerns before he could become too associated with them. This avoidance of genre was in itself a reference to the strategies of the European avant-garde. André Breton had described the tactic in an assessment of Francis Picabia in his essay on the Franco-Cuban artist in *Les Pas Perdus*, where he approvingly wrote "Only at the price of a constant renewal, particularly of means, can an artist avoid becoming prisoner of a genre that he might or might not have created."[346] Breton's words give an insight into how important a technique this was for Picabia: "Someone was telling me that in New York, among the visitors who flock to art gallery openings, there are always a few who cast a disenchanted eye at the wall and quickly ask about the next artist to be shown. If by some impossibility this were to happen at one of Picabia's shows, I would like the answer simply to be Francis Picabia. So true is it that in such things we can benefit

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[344] For an extended essay on this topic see Morris, Robert, Pepe Karmel, and Maurice Berger. *Robert Morris: The Felt Works.* New York, N.Y.: Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, 1989.

[345] Grenier, Catherine. "Robert Morris." In *Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem*. Ex. Cat. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1994. New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1994.

[346] Grenier, Catherine. *Robert Morris.* 98.

only from change, and the man who provides the greatest change from Picabia is Picabia."[347] In Morris's work, the propensity for "providing the greatest change from Morris" was interpreted, by curators and critics, as a sort of primitivism. "What is astonishingly absent is any acknowledgement of the cumulative record of history, of the collective written record of the human race. Morris presents us with works and situations in which he insists that both the artist as maker and we as spectators act as if there were no accumulated knowledge, as if everything were being made, learned, perceived, experienced for the first time."[348]

Krauss's catalogue essay for a retrospective of Morris's work, which she had co-curated at the Guggenheim Museum in 1992, shows the extent to which Morris sustained this approach in his own artistic practice, through a loose reading of semiotic theory and Morris's use of different *personas* or narratives throughout his work. Her essay, an *abcédaire* of Robert Morris, used Beckett's novels in eleven of its twenty-three entries, to show, in various ways, the multiple directions that Morris's work had gone in since the 1960s. In Beckett's novels, especially using the language of *Watt*, Krauss found ways to explain a host of recursive practices and new starts in Morris's art.

Continuous Project Altered Daily

Morris's continuous reexaminations of sculpture, movement and installation started, in his earliest works, with descriptions of their own production, their system

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[347] Breton, André, "Francis Picabia" in Breton, André, and Mark Polizzotti. *The Lost Steps / Les Pas Perdus.* Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. 96-97.

[348] Introduction by Edward F Fry in: Robert Morris, *Projects*. Ex. Cat. Philadelphia: ICA, 1974.

of influences and their own processes. *Box with the sound of its own making*, of 1962, was, as the title suggests, a box accompanied by a recording of the wood being sawed, sanded, painted and assembled, the emphasis therefore placed on aural, not visual perception. *Card File*, a sculpture that consists of a stack of library cards in a vertically mounted wooden holder, from the same year, displayed all the references that went into its making in alphabetical order.[349] His entries were titled: "Recoveries," "Repetition," "Signature;" and he wrote a short note, on each card, to explain in idiosyncratic terms how this theme manifests itself in the work. For Krauss, "the way language functions in the early works – like *Card File* – in which it is employed, has less to do with Duchamp and more to do with Beckett."[350] This freed Morris's work from a formal interpretation to a certain extent, making the ideas noted on the cards the focus rather than the appearance. Literary analysis was therefore brought to the fore in Krauss's discussion, and Beckett's *Watt* is how she ushered language into her analysis of this work: *Card File*, she writes, is a "system of analytic procedures...let loose... in the world of Watt."[351]

Both of these early works by Morris used a deeply, almost excessively modernist strategy of self-referentiality to describe their own genesis. *Card File* showed Morris's intellectual framework, and all of the problems and ideas that had gone into its making, with each one notated on a card and filed alphabetically. In the same way, *Box with the sound of its own making* was an object overwhelmed by its technical premises. The accompanying soundtrack of its sawing, sanding, hammering and nailing cast the object itself in a diminished or unmonumental light: it seems such

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[349] See Appendix, Fig. 2 and 3.

[350] Krauss, Rosalind. "The Mind/Body Problem." In Bryan-Wilson, Julia ed. Robert Morris. 73.

[351] Krauss, Rosalind. "The Mind/Body Problem." 74.

a lot of work for just one small box. This was a challenge to the self-sufficient or autonomous logic of artistic modernism: the work was so autonomous, in providing its entire framework of conception, production and reception that actually it exceeded the conditions of modernism. The solution was farcically disproportionate to the problem. In the same way, Krauss wrote of *Card File*, "An examination of these note cards reveals…that the same kind of comic riff is being performed here on the orderliness and system of analytic procedures as had been let loose on them in the world of *Watt*." It is the same systemacity that informs the "elaborate conundrum Watt tries to solve as he wonders how a dog is brought nightly to Mr. Knott's house to eat what might or might not be the remains of Mr. Knott's food."[352] *Card File* was similarly a linguistic solution in excess of the problem.

Whereas Robert Smithson imagined this process in rather more liberatory terms, writing that "an artist might advance specifically to get lost, and to intoxicate himself in dizzying syntaxes," for Krauss it presented as a problem of linguistic automatism leading in a decidedly threatening direction.[353] "It is this independent persistence of language as some kind of maleficent entity, capable of spinning itself out onto infinite progressions, or of stories burgeoning from within stories burgeoning from within stories…" she wrote, "that carries along the helpless vagrants and clowns and Watts of Beckett's universe, the ones who say "I"… So that although the characters themselves, the ones who say "I," want to stop, it's the voice – impersonal but insistent– that continues: "It clamours against my walls, it is not mine, I can't stop

[352] Krauss, Rosalind. "The Mind/Body Problem." 74.

[353] Smithson, Robert, "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art." Collected in Lippard, Lucy R. *Six Years.* 44.

it, I can't prevent it, from tearing me, racking me, assailing me. It is not mine, I have none, I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know.""[354]

Waterman Switch

Krauss interpreted the language of Watt as "malicious, become serial and unstoppable."[355] Morris's 1965 performance of *Waterman Switch*, at the Judson Memorial Church in New York, restaged the central scene from the novel, in which Sam and Watt "paced together between the fences, I forwards, he backwards, until we came to where the fences diverged again."[356] In this short performance, the artist Lucinda Childs laid out two long grey plywood tracks like railway sleepers, parallel to one another, upon which the performance artist Yvonne Rainer danced with Morris, both heavily oiled and nude. Beside them, at the end of a long rope, Childs, dressed in a man's brown suit and hat, observed. This pair of wooden rails was, then, the narrow corridor between the asylums which Sam and Watt had traced and retraced each other's steps. Morris had often used tasks and work, as in *Card File* and *Box with the Sound of its Own Making*, to generate work. In dance and performance too, he tried to find casual gestures and tasks to elicit bodily movements without the narrative structures that ballet had previously provided, and oriented his choreography through systems of measurement and task. These early works constantly refer to a body which is rarely pictured and show what the body can generate in terms of its own representation: vocalizations; the marks of a body, like in his 1964 *Hand and Toe Holds*, which registered bodily impressions, ways of showing the trace of a body without showing a body, rather showing what a body can *do*. This task-based

[354] Krauss, Rosalind. "The Mind/Body Problem." 75-76.

[355] Krauss, Rosalind. "The Mind/Body Problem." 76. See Appendix Fig. 4.

[356] Beckett, Samuel. *Watt*. In Grove 1:301.

performance set problems to create prompts for movement like in *Waterman Switch*. The climactic scene of *Watt* was an irresistible challenge, to choreograph the backwards and forwards movement of the series, "belly to belly" and "pubis to pubis."[357] While this "dance of ordinary movement," a correlative of "ordinary language" may have appropriated the series to structure it, for Krauss, again, the performance depicted a form of repetition which, organized "in terms of a linguistic progression, frequently produce the kinds of openings onto infinite regress for which the novel is famous."[358] It allowed the performance to be seen as something excessive and out of control, and for this to be seen as a function of the novel.

Waterman Switch, *Box with the sound of its own making* and *Card File* were all involved in narrating their own genesis and like *Watt*, they all meditate on tropes of creation, production, their origin and their undoing. They are involved in recursive processes, highly-wrought descriptions of their own manufacture, while at the same time presenting themselves as totally *sui generis*. Each term in a series is the last and each one is the first. *Watt*'s version of the series is a relentless challenge to the myth of origins, to genesis, and shows how to undo it even while writing it. It offered Krauss a primarily linguistic reading of the impulse in Morris's work to make it new and keep making it new, even at the expense of progress or accretion. The compulsion to make things new was connected to necessity in Beckett, a counterpoint to loss. Morris's was an impoverished art, one "which demands no resources other than those which are already available to us. Location, identification, measure, process, isolation and contradiction are all inherent in the immediate act of perceiving."[359]

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[357] Beckett, Samuel. *Watt*. In Grove 1:304.

[358] Krauss, Rosalind, "The Mind / Body Problem." 66.

[359] Tucker, Marcia, *Robert Morris*. Ex. Cat. New York: Published for the Whitney Museum of American Art, by Praeger Publishers, 1970.

Morris's art provided the reasons for its own existence through tropes of work. He set himself tasks, re-approached a subject, asked how things, including performances, were made, and made time, change and duration a function of the work. This, for the art historian Annette Michelson, made his work "cognitive." All of the faculties were required for its understanding:

> Staking out areas of intensive exploration of the qualities of shape, scale, size, placing, weight, mass, opacity and transparency, visibility and obscurity, this work urges reflection on the present, concrete options of sculpture, as on the general terms and conditions of its perception. Cognitive in its fullest effect, then, rather than "meaningful," its comprehension not only demands time, it elicits the acknowledgement of temporality as the condition or medium of human cognition and aesthetic experience.[360]

This was not how Krauss would see it. Although Krauss knew Beckett's plays, publishing *... but the clouds ...* in *October* journal in the same issue as her essay "LeWitt in Progress," it was to *Watt* and the Three Novels that she returned again and again to discuss these artworks. The section of *Watt* crucially narrates the passing, or wasting, or artificial filling of time through the assignment of tasks of dubious value, the reversals and retreats, "unable to check its spin into seriality, its language opens out onto absurdity, madness, nonsense."[361]

The cute to his roob

The second artist that Krauss interpreted through Samuel Beckett's novels was Sol LeWitt. In his case we will see how she used the "stones" passage of Molloy to

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[360] Michelson, Annette, "An Aesthetics of Transgression." 17.

[361] Krauss, Rosalind. "The Mind/Body Problem." 76.

describe the shift from minimal to conceptual art. LeWitt was born in Hartford, Connecticut in 1928, and studied art at Syracuse University, graduating with a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Art in 1949. Drawing, particularly from the Italian Renaissance, was a huge source of early inspiration to LeWitt, as were the Korean prints and architecture he saw while fighting in the Korean War as a young man. In the 1960s, drawing was newly appreciated as a process in which ideas could be worked through, rather than a preparatory step towards painting. Conceptual art would concern itself with the idea in all its stages: in the first of LeWitt's public manifestos, his 1967 "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," he wrote that "all the steps in the process are of importance."[362] Of lasting influence too were his studies of early twentieth century photography, particularly by the early English photographer Eadward Muybridge, whose photographs showed for the first time the staggered sequential movements of animals and humans in motion. The photographs showed LeWitt formal ways of thinking about modularity and succession in the context of figuration, which he would describe as "crucial to my ideas of serial imagery."[363]

LeWitt's early paintings soon started to incorporate three-dimensional elements, relief-objects in wood that explored the territory between painting and sculpture and pointed towards his interest in architecture. These years very literally describe the shift from painting to sculpture in terms not only of LeWitt's work, but in the general conversation around painting in these years, concerning the extent to which the medium could be pushed towards three-dimensionality without betraying its status as a painting. For LeWitt too, always interested in exploring or resolving areas between traditional artistic categories, painting became wall drawings, and

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[362] LeWitt, Sol. "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art." *Artforum International*, June 1967.

[363] Gross, Béatrice, Artist Sol LeWitt, and Centre Pompidou-Metz. *Sol LeWitt*. Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2012.

sculpture became "structures." "Structure" had less connotations of fine art and was more suggestive of "a work built in a factory rather than the subjective product of the artist's hand."[364] He was already known as an artist working in three dimensions by the early 1960s and his first "modular" or serial structures were shown in 1965, large "open" or skeletal structures. These had quickly abandoned any use of the traditional supports of painting and were now open sided, their structures completely exposed, standing on the floor or wall-mounted, and painted to disguise the handmade, grained quality of the wooden strips they were made from. LeWitt made these open, modular forms for much of the 1960s and 1970s. After the landmark exhibition at New York's Jewish Museum in 1966, "Primary Structures," LeWitt's work was included in the exhibition "Minimal Art" in the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, and at an exhibition of minimal art in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, called "The Art of the Real." These group exhibitions did much to establish a set of criteria for minimal art, yet during the same years LeWitt published two articles: his *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* in *Artforum* in June 1967 and *Sentences on Conceptual Art* in *Art-Language* in May 1969. These short articles set out LeWitt's own conditions for art that was not founded in or judged using formal principles, as minimalism was. In other words, what LeWitt claimed for conceptualism was work in which the *idea* was of preeminent importance, formal considerations not at all. After the publication of these texts, LeWitt was included in group exhibitions of conceptual art. The 1969 exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern in Switzerland, "When Attitudes Become Form," a 1969 exhibition called *Konzeption/Conception* in Leverkusen, West Germany, and another MoMA exhibition, "Information" in 1970, began to clarify what conceptual art was and to distinguish it from minimalism. LeWitt was, by this time, making wall

[364] LeWitt, Sol. "Serial Project #1." In *Aspen*.

drawings as well as structures, but the principle of the work was the same. "In conceptual art," he wrote in *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*,

> the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.[365]

Conceptual art, for LeWitt, operated along a simple paradox. Art that was "mentally interesting" had to be emotionally "dry" or lacking in that "emotional kick" that the viewer had been conditioned to expect from a work of art.[366] In addition to this, he wrote, the conceptual artist made artwork that appealed to the cognitive faculties, not primarily to "the sensation of the eye;" in fact, "the functions of conception and perception are contradictory."[367] Conceptual art as LeWitt defined it was planned first, and made to appeal to the mind, not the eye or the emotions, according to the least number of decisions possible. The pre-planning of the work meant that all that was left to be done was to execute it, and this was a task that LeWitt later outsourced to assistants when he created his large wall drawings. The labor, therefore, was almost entirely mental, in order to avoid the subjectivity associated with the artist's hand. The "emotional kick," the "arbitrary, the capricious and the subjective," had to be eliminated. With this in mind, LeWitt advocated using the simplest, most basic, least "interesting" forms available, to reduce decision, complexity, association and emotional value. Finally, the artwork did not illustrate a mathematical problem; it did not evoke "any other mental discipline;" it had its own

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[365] "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" in Legg, Alicia. *Sol LeWitt*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1978. 166.

[366] "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," 166.

[367] "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," 166.

logic that was "implicit in the work and it is not an illustration of any system of philosophy."[368] This was a clear statement of purpose and LeWitt advocated these steps in order to completely avoid the problem of expression in art. To this end, he even advised caution with new materials, a comment directed towards minimalism, since an emphasis on the choice of material – even industrial materials, in the case of minimalism – risked becoming "interesting" or expressive in themselves. Artists who sought to distract the viewer from the *concept* of their work were trying to use "gaudy baubles" to attract "his eye or emotions." With conceptual art there was no opportunity for distraction. "Conceptual art is good only when the idea is good."[369]

In "Sentences on Conceptual Art" two years later, in 1969, LeWitt continued to outline the same intellectual project. This series of epigrams elaborated on the tenets set out in "Paragraphs," describing the anti-rational impulse in conceptual art. The art should not make claims to rationality, he stated, but instead, "irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically."[370] Nor do they proceed in "logical order," however, once the idea has been put into motion, "the process is mechanical and should not be tampered with. It should run its course."[371] LeWitt's concern was with *ideas*, not the minimalist concern with material and form. The idea, he reiterated, was a component of the concept. But the concept, once underway, could not be stopped. It became independent of the thinker or artist himself. Once the

[368] "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," 166.

[369] "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," 166.

[370] LeWitt, Sol, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," in Legg, Alicia. Sol LeWitt. New York: Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1978. 168.

[371] "Sentences on Conceptual Art," 168.

concept has been established, the work follows, and the artist merely executes the process. "I want to follow every idea to its end, then try the contrary."[372]

LeWitt's shared an interest in Beckett with many of his contemporaries besides Morris, specifically the German artist Eva Hesse, the German conceptual artist Hanne Darboven, whose serial script also depicted "a mode of recording, with 'mad' obsessiveness." [373] Robert Smithson used a long section of *The Unnameable* to narrate his film *Spiral Jetty.*[374] However, it was to LeWitt's art that Beckett's work was most decisively joined by Rosalind Krauss, in "LeWitt in Progress," an essay in which Beckett's protagonist poses responses, excerpted by Krauss from *Molloy*, to the art critics who saw in LeWitt's work an illustration of the perfection of logic, of a system that demonstrated the apotheosis of the human potential for rationality, or "the look of thought."[375]

By the late 1970s, Krauss found Donald Kuspit, Lucy Lippard and Suzi Gablik, in their catalogue essays, guilty of understanding LeWitt's modular, repetitive "structures" as the "illustration of the mind, the demonstration of rationalism itself, a triumphant Cartesianism,"[376] "representations of Mind," or "the cognitive moment as such."[377] The artist's critical reception had started to shift away from its initial anti-subjective impulses towards more transcendent ideas of truth and beauty. LeWitt denied this representative quality in his work, writing that "in a logical thing… each

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[372] "Sentences on Conceptual Art," 168.

[373] Meyer, James S., *Minimalism*. 182.

[374] Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson, the Collected Writings.* Edited by Jack Flam. Documents of 20th Century Art. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

[375] Kuspit, Donald. "Sol Lewitt: The Look of Thought." Art in America LXIII. September – October 1975. 48.

[376] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 48.

[377] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 51.

part is dependent on the last. It follows in a certain sequence as part of the logic. But, a rational thing is something you have to make a rational decision on each time… you have to think about it. In a logical sequence, you don't think about it. It's a way of not thinking. It is irrational."[378] However, whilst acknowledging that "to associate the look of geometry with a heart of stone or, vice versa, to assume that the presence of spontaneous brushmarks or eruptive calligraphy must reveal the outpourings of a passionate soul is as naïve as thinking that, say, mathematicians are less "human" or "feeling" than tragedians," another essayist, Robert Rosenblum, still concurred with the suggestion that LeWitt turned "Descartes' and Kant's treatises into beautiful visual metaphors."[379] Krauss's essay sought to rescue LeWitt's work from this prevailing interpretation, taking issue with Kuspit's, Gablik's, and Lippard's construal of his sculpture as the "activity of a transcendental ego."[380]

"For almost no writer who deals with LeWitt," Krauss wrote, "is there any question that these geometric emblems are the illustration of Mind, the demonstration of rationalism itself."[381] In their reading of LeWitt, Lippard, Gablik and Kuspit all saw a basic drive, particularly in the set of works by LeWitt on which the essay focuses. A "profoundly humanistic" work, according to Kuspit, it depicted "the pursuit of intelligibility by mathematical means."[382] The 1974 work by LeWitt in question, *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes*, are a set of attempts at forming an open cube in slats of white-painted wood.[383] Each of these cubes is incomplete in a different way; starting with three individual sides, the least amount of information to

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[378] LeWitt, Sol, quoted in Krauss, Rosalind, "The Mind/Body Problem." 90.

[379] Rosenblum, Robert, "Notes on Sol LeWitt," in *Sol LeWitt*, MoMA Ex. Cat., 17.

[380] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 46.

[381] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 48.

[382] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 48.

[383] See Appendix, Fig. 5.

imply a cube is given, and finishing with cubes of eleven sides, the most information which can be given without forming a full cube. In Kuspit's view, Krauss wrote, art is

> …no longer tested by the faithfulness by which it transcribes appearances; it now has to be tested by its transparency to a different model. Visual reality no longer has a privileged status with relation to the work of art, no longer forms the text which the art is to illustrate. Now it is logic that constitutes "the text" and the space onto which the art is now to open, the model it is to "picture" and by which it is to be tested is Mind.[384]

Against this positioning as an artist whose sculpture displayed the potential for mathematical logic, rationalism and order, Krauss invoked an idea familiar to us from *Watt* and *Molloy*, pointing to an alternative interpretation of LeWitt's repetitions and permutations. In their desire for an art that would illustrate Mind at its best, Krauss argued, Kuspit et al. overlooked the obsessional, repetitive tendencies in LeWitt's work. If Mind is, in fact, depicted in the work, it is not a clear, composed or rational one, but a mind incapable of discrimination on the basis of hierarchy or importance, the ability to choose one thing over another. His structures are more like "the spinning gears of a machine disconnected from reason."[385] It was a version of the cube as described by Nackybal, the peasant savant of *Watt*'s "The Mathematical Intuitions of the VisiCelts," where "cubing and squaring is not the point."[386] Far from being coolly composed and rational, Krauss suggests, LeWitt's structures are guilty of not being able to stop or to decide, likening his process to the passage of *Molloy* where the protagonist moves a set of stones from one pocket to another in clockwise motion. This section of Molloy had been anthologized in the United States in 1962 in a book

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[384] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 53.

[385] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 57.

[386] Beckett, Samuel. *Watt*, in Grove 1:165.

called *The Mathematical Magpie*, a collection of "stories, mainly transcendental, all derived from the infinite domain of mathematics."[387] Krauss's essay on Beckett was therefore also a sort of recuperation of the surrealist Beckett, before his mediation in the United States as a postwar existentialist humanist. "Like most of LeWitt's work," Krauss wrote, "*Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* provides one with an experience that is obsessional in kind."[388]

In the essay, each time Krauss cites another critic on LeWitt, she retorts to its claims for lucidity and order with a segment, taken in sequence, from the same scene from *Molloy*. For example, when she first cites the novel, it is to take issue with Donald Kuspit's contention, in his 1975 article, "Sol LeWitt: The Look of Thought,"[389] that "if anyone could perceive the structural beauty of, say, Descartes' or Kant's treatises and then go on to recreate them as exclusively visual metaphor, it is surely LeWitt." For Krauss, however, the transcendental subject or "triumphant Cartesianism" has been so thoroughly divested of authority that if there is a Cartesian logic at work in LeWitt, it is the distorted and hyperbolic version of Descartes offered by Molloy:

> I took advantage of being at the seaside to lay in a store of sucking-stones. They were pebbles but I call them stones. Yes, on this occasion I laid in a considerable store. I distributed them equally among my four pockets, and sucked them turn and turn about.[390]

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[387] Fadiman, Clifton, *The Mathematical Magpie*. New York, Simon & Schuster, 1962.

[388] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 54.

[389]Kuspit, Donald. "Sol LeWitt: The Look of Thought." *Art in America*, September / October 1975, 42-49.

[390] *Molloy*, quoted in Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 48. Krauss does not directly discuss Beckett as an interpreter of Descartes, or the Belgian second-generation Cartesian Geulincx, whose noteworthy innovation was to propose an even more tenuous connection

Krauss also cites the critic Suzi Gablik, who "views the entire range of the world's visual culture as a problem in cognitive development. And abstract art, set within this problematic, appears as the necessary fruits of some kind of world intellectual growth."[391] This aberration of the natural advancement of art towards a higher intellectual achievement, or "problem" gets the following response from Molloy:

> This raised a problem which I first solved in the following way. I had say sixteen stones, four in each of my four pockets these being the two pockets of my trousers and the two pockets of my greatcoat…

Finally, Krauss notes that these writers are simply trying to defend LeWitt's work from a broader, more hostile general audience for abstract art by claiming for him a use value in representative function: "the artist is depicting the cognitive moment as such." However, she quotes, "…this solution did not satisfy me fully."[392] Each time Krauss cites from Kuspit, Gablik or Lippard, she poses against their claims for the full intelligibility of abstract art in its illustration of mind an example of Molloy's unintelligible depiction of mind. The rhetorical strategy gives a clear indication of what conceptual art derived from Beckett's novels: "Irrational thoughts," as LeWitt wrote in his 1969 *Sentences on Conceptual Art*, "should be followed

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between the body and the mind, suggesting that they only met on *Occasion*. His so-called Occasionalist philosophy was of lasting interest to Beckett, although he seems to have treated it with the same irony as he did Descartes in the novels *Murphy*, *Watt* and the trilogy. These relationships are discussed in two chapters of Hugh Kenner's *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (1962): "The Rational Domain" and "The Cartesian Centaur."

[391] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 50.

[392] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress,"50.

absolutely and logically."[393] Molloy, as we have seen, ends up with a stone that neither fulfills the need to have weight equally distributed, or the need to have a new stone to suck. It is a parody of logic, where repetitive patterns hold out the promise of meaning, but in vain. Krauss therefore uses *Molloy* to make fun of the idea of LeWitt's work having an expositional, transcendent function, since every system of information referred to in the text is travestied.[394] The process is not random, Krauss writes, or disorder in general, but is the compulsive production of a system that looks or sounds *like* order. "For what we find," she writes, "is the 'system' of compulsion, of the obsessional's unwavering ritual…"[395] The "solution," as Molloy puts it, must be applied and reapplied insistently to the problem. "The label is the document of persistence, of invention dancing over the pit of non-necessity."[396]

Krauss had analyzed the use of repetition in the art of the 1960s before. In her treatment of Richard Serra's three-minute film work, *Hand Catching Lead* (1969), in which a hand grasps rhythmically at pieces of lead falling from the top of the frame, sometimes catching and sometimes missing them, she introduced repetition as a paradigmatic trope in the sculpture of the 1960s. Serra's repetition is characterized, as is Donald Judd's, as just "one thing after another," a type of accumulation without succession or progression. "One thing after another" became for Judd a way to avoid setting up causal relations between objects. "'One thing after another,'" Krauss wrote, "seems… like days simply following each other without anything having given them

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[393] LeWitt, Sol. "Sentences on Conceptual Art," N° 5. First published in *0-9* (New York) and *Art-Language*, (England), May 1969.

[394] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress," 57.

[395] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress," 57.

[396] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 56.

a form or a direction, without their being inhabited, or lived, or meant."[397] Krauss saw Judd, Dan Flavin, Frank Stella and Carl Andre as practitioners of a type of sculpture that used repetition, found objects and other elements to combat expression, a type of "systematic thinking," which before the 1960s, as the artist Mel Bochner wrote, "has generally been considered the antithesis of artistic thinking."[398]

But in her use of Molloy's exhaustive permutations, Krauss was clearly drawing attention to an earlier iteration of the same discussion, recalling the early twentieth century theories of the art of the insane and the ideas of repetition and automatism that Beckett evoked in his novel. In LeWitt's *Variations of 27 Open Cubes*, which began with wooden painted slats and later were industrially produced, the lattice-structure is accompanied by a sequence of drawings of one each of the possible combinations of sides required to make an incomplete cube, whether three, in the least possible number of sides, or eleven, the most possible without creating a closed, complete cube.[399] These drawings are so precise that they suggest perfect order and logic; however, this systematic display of the cube's progress towards completion without actually achieving one reveals a maniacal focus on something trivial.

What Beckett's contribution to this essay did was allow us to understand LeWitt relative to an earlier tradition, and to the ideas of the European avant-garde that had been discredited by Greenberg, as well as the broader turn against surrealism in the United States as well as in Paris. LeWitt's *leitmotif* and its obsessive repetition exposed an anti-hierarchical structure, a radically egalitarian impulse to show everything and to leave nothing out, that was associated with the art of the insane in

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[397] Krauss, Rosalind. *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. 249.

[398] Bochner, Mel. "Serial art, Systems, Solipsism." In Battcock, Gregory. *Minimal Art*. 94

[399] See Appendix, Fig. 6.

theorizations of the "primitive" art of the early twentieth century, in its anti-centralized spatial arrangements, with an excessively democratic distribution of motifs, equal importance given to all corners of the paper or the room. There was no principle of dominance or subordination in serial art. This desire to account for everything, leaving nothing out, as well as an extreme amount of attention paid to the trivial, was what Krauss referred to as "unfamiliar with the notion of etcetera" in *Molloy*.[400] The description of the stones is proximate to Molloy's need to reproduce and navigate a system in a climate of extreme fear and violence, and this need to reconstruct the system; to repeat until it could be understood, is tied to these objects.

Further, for Krauss's argument the stone does not count at all, just the action it prompts. The "stones" scene elucidated a crucial passage between minimal and conceptual art. In conceptual art, the critical focus was intended to dwell not on the formal characteristics of the object or set of objects, but on the idea that it encapsulated. LeWitt, in an interview, remarked simply "Minimalism implied form. Conceptualism implied content…Conceptualism opened the idea of content rather than form."[401] For Krauss, the stone sequence of *Molloy* shares the same "territory of meaning" as Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*. She writes:

> we are told of a grove of banana trees through the painstaking, persistent, sadistic description of its individual rows. The effect is of course to drive attention away from the grove of trees and back to the voice and its obsession to count.[402]

In other words, for Krauss, the point of repetition in LeWitt's art is to distract from the object, to diminish its importance relative to the act of repetition itself. The

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[400] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 55.

[401] In *Sol LeWitt.* JRP / Ringier catalogue, 269.

[402] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 58.

details of the object are unimportant; the *concept*, in other words, is the operative device; hence we call it *conceptual art.* "It is like music-hall performers doing a spectacular turn, switching hats from one head to the other at lightning speed," wrote Krauss, "No one thinks of the hat as an idea."[403] The passing reference to "music-hall performers" is one of a number of structural slights to the theater in her work. In *Waiting for Godot*, for instance, there is quite literally a scene in which Vladimir and Estragon switch their hats from one head to the other and refer to themselves as "worse than the pantomime. The circus. The music hall."[404] Given Beckett's reliance on hats, canes and noticeably atavistic costumes throughout his oeuvre, or in other words, the formal vocabulary of the vaudeville stage, and his noted admiration for Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton and the Swiss clown Grock, her example is striking.

So successfully does Krauss interpret LeWitt with Beckett's character that we tend to forget that the novel in question was written not in the same decade as LeWitt's structures, but in the late 1940s. *Molloy* was finished in 1947, published first in French in 1951, and in English in the United States in 1955. The essay therefore spans a timeframe of thirty years; Krauss, writing in 1978, is looking back at LeWitt's structures of the early to mid-seventies in her essay, using a novel from the years immediately after the Second World War. In the three novels, these identifying objects, as we have seen, were filled with meaning, as Beckett's characters lose their orientation, their minds and all other worldly and bodily possessions. Tattered hats, sticks, exercise books and pencils, as the only recognizable *things* in the novels, are laden with value and emblematic of his characters' dispossession. The objects that the characters have are often used as important devices or prosthetics for the physical

[403] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 58.

[404] Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. Translated by the author. New York: Grove Press, 1954. 26.

apparatus as it starts to disintegrate. This process of dispossession was re-evoked again in minimal and conceptual art's evacuation of the object, making brief and significant appearances at the moment of their disappearance. The objects are voided of meaning, leaving only the voice.

Beckett's most important revelation regarding the course his work occurred during a trip back to Dublin in the years immediately following the Second World War. In the summer of 1945, in his mother's new house, opposite the old family home, he experienced an understanding of his own work in relation to Joyce's that would motivate the novels of the next few years in a very specific way, as we have seen. This "lessness," "impotence" and "ignorance" that had been set aside and deemed useless by other artists presented Beckett with a motivation that clarified, for him, what his work would actually do and, ironically, a rich store of material from which to draw. This, as we have seen, presented the writer with a problem at first: how to cover paper whilst also "going in the direction of less?" Later, his texts would become shorter in length. Up to the end of the *Textes pour rien*, however, the novels concerned themselves with this paradoxical situation. The objects in the novels speak to a process of dispossession and impoverishment, and are so rare as to be noteworthy. In *Molloy* and *Malone Meurt*, as we have seen, crutches are one of the important markers of identity and distinction, and the inventory of the stick, pencils and lead are all critical. In the absence of any company or external recognition, nor any chronological referent, past, present or future, these objects are imbued with even greater importance than they would be in a novel filled with descriptions of places, people and things. Within the minimal apparatus of the novel, what there *is* has huge significance. The role of *process*, in Krauss's account of LeWitt is of primary importance. But for Beckett, the object is also invested with identity and the loss

thereof. Losing a stick or a stone is a disaster. Markers of identity are important, recognizable, more so than humans are by themselves. In fact, as the novels move towards the ultimately impoverished *Unnameable*, objects and their loss become more and more important, and whereas humans are interchangeable and hard to pin down, objects are vanishing markers of identity. As the novels progress, the objects become important as tools, as a vital distinction between human and animal and as prosthetics to replace the bodily functions that one by one must be outsourced. Eventually, however, they are displaced.

By the time Krauss wrote on LeWitt in this essay, this process of disinvestment and dispossession was complete. For LeWitt, it was of paramount importance that the process, the *concept* of conceptual art as set out in his *Sentences* and *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* be the focus of attention, not the object. The repetition of the action is important; the *why* is not. This repetition in LeWitt was one expression of the decentered subject. The motivation for it is not evaluated; the idea behind it is automated. "The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with. It should run its course."[405] In service of this idea, Krauss had to devalue the stones in the Molloy sequence. The stone is "simply a pretext," a "false 'problem.'"[406]

Krauss used a specific version of Beckett to give a greater sense of what was at stake in LeWitt's structures. In fact, Beckett's own theater work of the 1960s and 1970s was closer to LeWitt's than to Proust's. By drawing attention to Beckett's earlier work, however, Krauss pointed out the sources for LeWitt's systemacity in the systematized violence and deprivation of the Second World War, and transferred the concepts from a novel that is deeply rooted in wartime poverty and deprivation into a

[405] LeWitt, Sol. "Sentences on Conceptual Art." 168.

[406] Krauss, Rosalind. "LeWitt in Progress." 60.

paradigm of postwar post-industrial abundance and proliferation, drawing the violence of the 1940s into the discussion of LeWitt and conceptual art. For Krauss, the most contentious charge against conceptual art was that its invocation of a *system* meant that their work depicted rationalism and logic. Beckett was responsible for carrying something of the systematized brutality of the war years through to the discussion of LeWitt, particularly important when LeWitt was later rehabilitated as "a case study in mastering the chaos of existences."[407] It was also a way for Krauss to reintroduce some of the early tenets of surrealism, which had fallen very much out of favor, thanks in part to Greenberg's rejection of the latter-day surrealist painting, which he largely associated with Salvador Dali in his 1944 essay "Surrealism and Painting."[408]

Krauss used Beckett to defend LeWitt from the idea that his work ultimately portrayed a logical or transcendent "essence of art." The novels in which possession and dispossession had appeared, as "a neuralgia rather than a theme," and the repetitions and elisions that Beckett used to evoke them, undermined the idea that LeWitt's repetitions demonstrated rational Mind, and drew forth a set of connections that had been forgotten in LeWitt's work.[409]

The Problem of Theater

In her 1977 book *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Krauss had looked for ways to circumvent the association between the sculptural works of the 1960s and 1970s and the theater, even whilst discovering that the development of performance and the new sculpture in New York were heavily intertwined. What Fried thought of as modern

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[407] Baume, Nicholas, in *Sol Lewitt: Incomplete Open Cubes*. 31.

[408] Greenberg, Clement. "Surrealism and Painting." In *Collected Essays*, Vol. 1. 224-231.

[409] Beckett, Samuel. "Proust." London: Calder Books, 1999. 35.

sculpture's detriment — its flirtation with theater — Krauss identified as a necessary correlative to its development, and there were different ways that this could imply the politicization or radicalization of the audience, or lack thereof. *Passages in Modern Sculpture* shows exactly how imbricated early 1960s sculpture was with a range of performance genres, whilst also describing the origins of much modern performance art through its history of engagement with objects. However, the prioritization of *presentness*, or the instantaneity of effect, that characterized Modernism still weighed heavily on her writing. Duration, she conceded, was a function of theatrical art. Krauss did not refer explicitly to Beckett in that volume, but turned to Proust in closing. Modern sculpture, she wrote, has been a project of *passages*, her term for the development of sculpture away from the capture of static moments of historical drama towards the dramatization of the passing of time, but located the source of movement in Proust, and the embedding of voluntary versus involuntary memory in physical matter.

There had always been a performance component to Robert Morris's work, for example. Although in the 1960s and 1970s he was mostly known for his sculptural explorations; in his earliest years, he had been involved, through his first wife, the performance artist Simone Forti, in this emerging world of performance and theater. In Morris's 1965 essay, "Notes on Dance" he sought an alternative to "dance," yet he also sought an alternative to "chance" as a structuring principle for a new vernacular ballet or "dance of ordinary movement." Rather than doing away with all disciplinary concerns, he sought new limits or rules for the body, through assigning tasks and quotidian problems to be solved, in order to structure his performance work. Morris also used objects in his stage work to prompt movement; this improvisational

technique was combined with what he called "the problematic as syntax."[410] In her writing on his work, therefore, Krauss was very careful to emphasize the role of Beckett's novels rather than his plays. In her discussion of *Waterman Switch*, as we have seen, in which Morris was dressed as a clown, and a second performer was at the end of a rope, suggesting, to someone generally familiar with Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* more than anything else, she declared "It was Beckett's world of extreme ordinariness—of tramps and hat-passing routines…that attracted these New York dancers and performers very powerfully to his work…" noting the theater company Mabou Mines' staging of Beckett's plays. However, she insisted, "*Waterman Switch* would develop out of Morris's own experience of the novel *Watt*, among other things."[411]

Similarly, in the late 1960s, from 1968 onwards, Morris made so-called "dirt works" from piles of clay and thread waste, broken glass, small scale "earth works," as his contemporary Robert Smithson called them. The formal, architectonic gray monoliths of early minimalism had dissolved into the scatter of "anti-form" – a name coined by the editors of *Artforum* magazine in 1968 to title an influential and controversial essay by Morris.[412] This was the beginning of Morris's concern with artworks that took new shape as they changed and were moved and that varied from installation to installation. *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, of 1969, created an environment which changed every day.[413] Morris spent the 1970s making sculptures

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[410] Morris, Robert. "Notes on Dance." In Bryan-Wilson, Julia, and Robert Morris. *Robert Morris*. 6.

[411] Krauss, Rosalind. "The Mind-Body Problem." 78.

[412] Berger, Maurice, "Remaking Anti-Form." In Morris, Robert, Pepe Karmel, and Maurice Berger. *Robert Morris: The Felt Works*. New York, N.Y.: Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, 1989.

[413] See Appendix, Fig. 7.

using rope and draped felt: using huge rolls of thick grey industrial packing felt, he created sculptures that, when slit and hung from the wall, would fall to the floor in a different way in each iteration, creating a new sculpture with each installation. Felt and thread waste were still industrial materials, like the plywood and steel used in the earliest minimalist sculpture, but they were not static and serial in this iteration of the work. Both gravity and chance played a role in their production: re-installing the works in galleries became impossible to replicate exactly. With these anti-form works, Morris was preoccupied with creating a "direct and literal presence," an art that did not, and could not represent anything other than that was there. The works continued their critique of modernism in the same way as the minimal sculptures that had been shown in Primary Sculptures. They de-emphasized fine art materials: oil paint, never mind gold leaf or lapis lazuli, had been replaced by the dirty old threadwaste, grease, asbestos, clay and heavy packing felt associated with the vanishing industrial manufacturing history of SoHo, where many artists now occupied studios in former factory buildings, newly considered material for artwork at the moment of its vanishing. This material, cut, arranged, and allowed to hang, and with its residual associations of "work," stressed the processes of art as the product. Another aspect of this work was that the figure and ground relationship was disturbed. The new placement of these materials allowed for a "field effect," rather than clearly presenting the artwork with its proper frame or pedestal and upright placement. Finally, the heft and weight of Morris's anti-form works suggested the body in its scale and proportions, implying what Lucy Lippard called a "body ego" or a "phantasmic corporeality." In combination, of course, what these three elements of anti-form– objects, a landscape set or scene, and a body– suggest more than anything else is the theater.

In his anti-form, process-based work, Morris would combine performance, dance, prop-like objects and staged scenarios. Many of his installations, like *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, and *Thread Waste*, which had reconfigured their display environments in the direction of theater, had, therefore, to be distinguished from it. In her discussions of works like these or *Waterman Switch* she averted attention from Beckett's theater, to consider an approach to an art of duration, or time-based art, or task-based performance, that was narrated by other means and showed that the novel could also offer an understanding of these ideas, but at a safely clear and distinct modernist remove. "Beckett returns, then," she wrote, "through the very guise of antiform. As the body tries to finish dying, something nonetheless relentlessly continues. Taking the form of a text, its logic is that of repetition to infinity, the mad imitation of form produced by the abyss."[414]

More than this still, Krauss did not investigate the plays or prose works by Beckett that were roughly contemporary with these artists' output. She recalled the novels that Beckett had written under the aegis of surrealism, and those which seemed most consistent with literary surrealism's desire for a « *pensée parlée* » and uncensored, uninhibited mad speech acts. This was part of a larger project on Krauss's part of the resuscitation of surrealism, through a study of their photography through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Although at times she used Beckett as an alternative to Duchamp, as a reference in Morris's work, and as an alternative to thinking about Morris in the explicit terms of the European avant-garde, Beckett gave her a way of invoking almost the same principles in Morris's, and LeWitt's work: as a way to parse the relationship between object and subjecthood, between the serial properties of body and language, and to point to the avant-garde strategies both

[414] Krauss, Rosalind. "The Mind/Body Problem." 102.

Morris and LeWitt deployed, in different ways, to destabilize the idea of a stable artistic signature through form, and through it, the concept of a singular, authorial, expressive subject. The ideas that animated Morris's work, and what Krauss drew from Beckett, allowed the artist to be revisited very differently, even to LeWitt, in the latter part of the twentieth century.

The Reception of the Sixties

In a 1994 round-table discussion on Morris, organized to discuss the "peculiar and unacceptable response to the Robert Morris exhibition insofar as that exhibition represents the first major retrospective of a minimalist artist in an American museum,"[415] Morris was privileged amongst other artists of the same generation, because his work had not resolved itself into a steady and repetitive "pictorialism" or optical value. This was by dint of his constant practice of renewal and undoing of his own stylistic advances. Krauss's essays on LeWitt and later, Morris, in which she relied heavily on Beckett's novels, were written against an increasing turn towards the acceptance into the canon of American modernism, on the basis of their own individual signatures, the very artists who had sought to undermine formally recognizable traits and characteristic or autobiographically-tethered styles. For Buchloh, conceptual art's "abolition of object status and commodity form—would most of all only be short-lived."[416]

Morris, for Krauss and others in the roundtable *The Reception of the Sixties*, stood out as an anomaly in the art of the sixties and thereafter, for his continuing commitment to anti-form or formlessness, in that he did not continue to pursue the

[415] Krauss, Rosalind et al. "The Reception of the Sixties." 112.

[416] Buchloh, Benjamin. "Conceptual Art: 1962–1968: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions." In *October* 55, Winter 1990. 143.

same formal concerns over the course of his whole career as other minimalist and conceptual artists had proceeded to do after their initial rebellion against formalism in the 1960s.

> If we think of 1960s figures in the context of Minimalism, i.e., Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, and Donald Judd, in particular, they embody a certain production that is demarcated by extraordinary consistency and continuity, basically one that has hardly been modified at all over the course of thirty years, and one that has triumphantly acquired its own position–speaking of triumphalism, I think Minimalism itself had become a triumphant style by the mid-1980s…By the mid-1980s, the persistence and credibility of the industrial paradigm, which is clearly in operation in Andre's, Flavin's, and Judd's work, was certainly open to question…Interestingly enough, Morris is almost exactly the opposite. He breaks all the paradigms; he breaks the parameters at all points, whenever possible, and forces himself to look at all the questions, including the one that is the most painful for some of us at the table, which is figurative painting. Right?[417]

Alone in his lack of an historical, signature style that accumulated and crystallized over the many years of his practice, Morris's Guggenheim retrospective exhibition was unfavorably reviewed. However, the avoidance of association with a particular style, as it motivated and characterized Morris's work, meant that attention was constantly on a refreshment of the discursive and art-historical possibilities that the work suggested. For Krauss, Beckett provided a way to think deeply about the role of language as a model for Morris's work, likening his many stylistic phases to the recursive processes of modernism that *Watt* provided.

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[417] Krauss, Rosalind et al. "The Reception of the Sixties." 117

The means by which Krauss used Beckett to explain Robert Morris and Sol LeWitt, were part of the same endeavor to recover the European avant-garde from the late twentieth-century drive towards a generalizing, optimistic humanism. This was the focus of her 1985 collection of essays, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, in which "LeWitt in Progress" was published. The essays in this volume were similarly concerned with "hoisting," as Beckett wrote of Proust, the world of the early twentieth-century avant-garde above the surface of postwar art history to reinvestigate its operations in the work of her contemporaries, like LeWitt, Morris, Richard Serra and others.[418] In her essay "No More Play," she examines the contemporary reception of Alberto Giacometti, who, like Beckett, had a brief but formative encounter with surrealism in the late 1920s. She relates André Breton's outing to the flea market in Paris with Giacometti, where the artist found the iron mask that would complete his early sculpture, *Invisible Object*, of 1934.[419] Breton had described this in *Amour Fou*, noting that the mask had allowed Giacometti to finish the sculpture and "overcome his indecision in that regard." This reliance on the surrealist object was later elided by Giacometti and his commentators, however, as Krauss notes the "work of rewriting his beginnings that Giacometti himself started in the 1940s," one that led him to construe his work as sculpted from life, not dependent on the belated objects of surrealism. [420] Giacometti's formulation of himself as a humanist artist after the Second World War, his own mythic act of artistic reinvention, "withdraws *Invisible Object* from the orbit of surrealism and places it in

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[418] In Beckett, Samuel, *Proust*. 32. "From this deep source Proust hoisted his world. His work is not an accident, but its salvage is an accident…. No purpose can be served by hoisting the name of the diver. Proust calls him 'involuntary memory.'"

[419] See Appendix, Fig. 8.

[420] Krauss, Rosalind. "No More Play." In *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985. 43.

the postwar realm of Giacometti's studio, as he notoriously strained, month after month, through trial and retrial, to catch the likeness of the model posed in front of him."[421] Krauss was similarly concerned with the restitution and re-inscription of the avant garde in the essay "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," as a way to break down the barriers between literature and art, up to the point that she writes: "Witnessing the parade of surrealist magazines… one becomes that *they* more than anything else are the true objects produced by surrealism"[422] and concluding with the assessment that "surreality is nature convulsed into a kind of writing."[423] Krauss used Beckett's novels to elicit many of surrealism's convulsions, in her discussion of artists of the 1960s and 1970s, a neo-avant garde that was prompted by many of the same motivations as the artists of the European interwar years. In so doing, she thoroughly investigated the mythic origins of the avant garde. Beckett's own myth, that of the lack of origins, therefore bridged these two movements for the art historian and gave her another means by which to narrate the development of art criticism from the description of objects to the discursive practices of the latter part of the twentieth century.

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[421] Krauss, Rosalind. "No More Play." 45. In fact Giacometti enjoyed the patronage of Sartre and De Beauvoir for longer than Beckett did: he sculpted busts of the two French philosophers while Beckett almost immediately withdrew from the existentialist circle after a quarrel with De Beauvoir.

[422] Krauss, Rosalind. "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism." In *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. 101.

[423] Krauss, Rosalind. "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism." 113.

Appendix



Fig 1. Installation view of “Primary Structures,” 1966, at the Jewish Museum, New York. Courtesy of the Jewish Museum.



Fig. 2. Morris, Robert. *Card File*. 1962
Metal, wood, paper. 26 5/8 × 10 5/8 × 1 9/16 in; 67.6 × 27 × 4 cm.



Fig. 3. Morris, Robert. *Box with the Sound of its Own Making*. 1961.
Wood, internal speaker, 7" cassette of ¼" tape, 1999; artist provided Digital Audio Tapes (D.A.T), 2011; digital copy of D.A.T tapes. TRT 3.5 hours. Dimensions: Wooden Cube: 9 3/4 x 9 3/4 x 9 3/4 in. (24.8 x 24.8 x 24.8cm) Overall: 46 x 9 3/4 x 9 3/4in. (116.8 x 24.8 x 24.8cm).

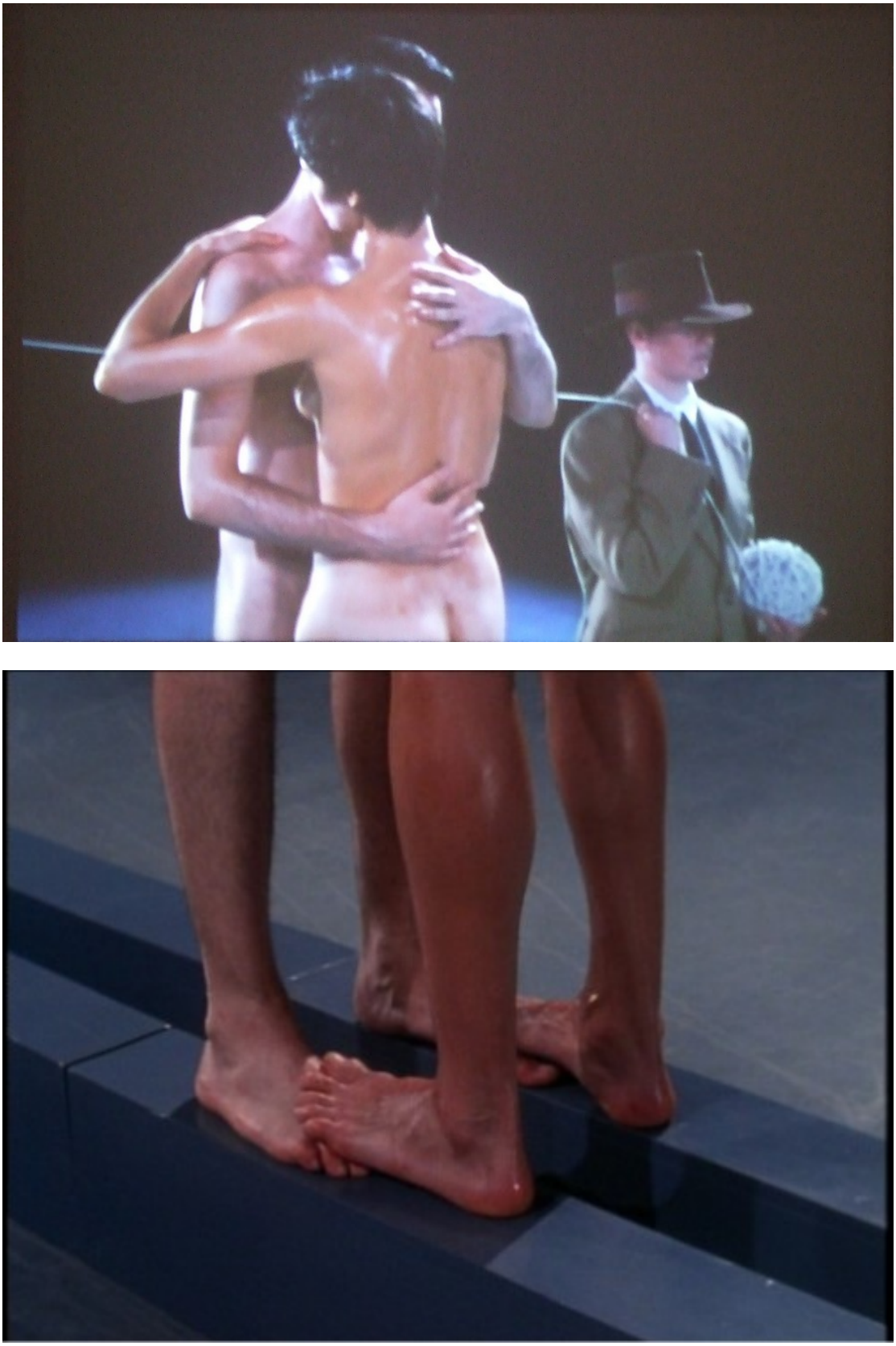

Fig.4. Robert Morris. *Waterman Switch*. Performed 1965 in Judson Church, New York. Stills from the 1993 film *Four Pieces by Morris* by Babette Mangoldt. 16mm, 94 mins, color. With Pamela Weese, Susan Blankensop, Michele Pogliani (Original Cast 1965 Lucinda Child, Yvonne Rainer, Robert Morris).

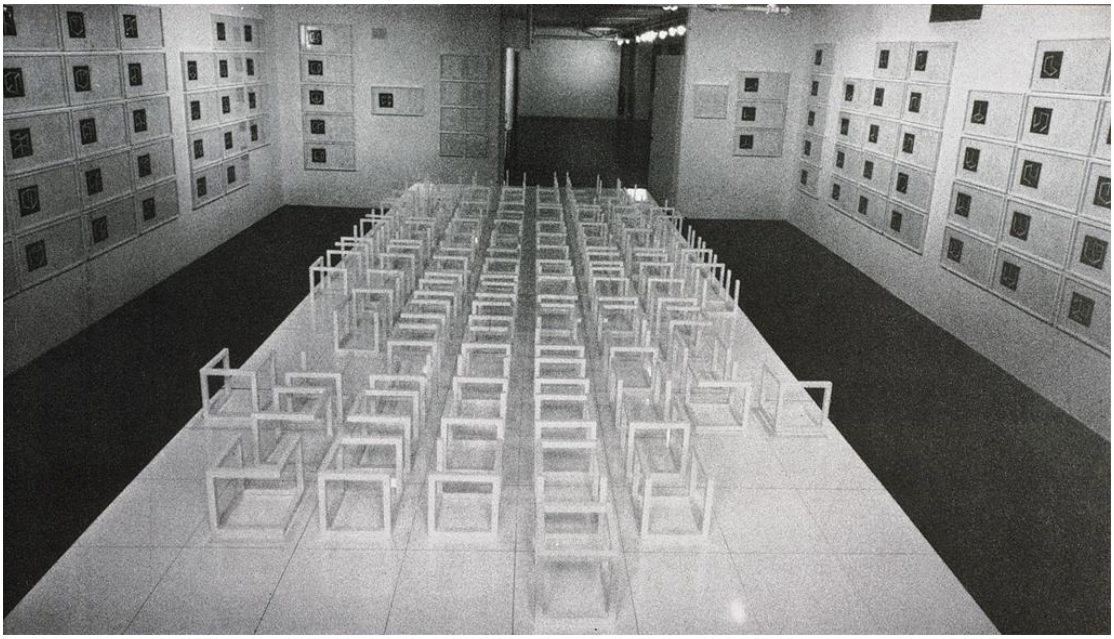

Fig. 5. LeWitt, Sol. Installation view, *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes.* 1974.

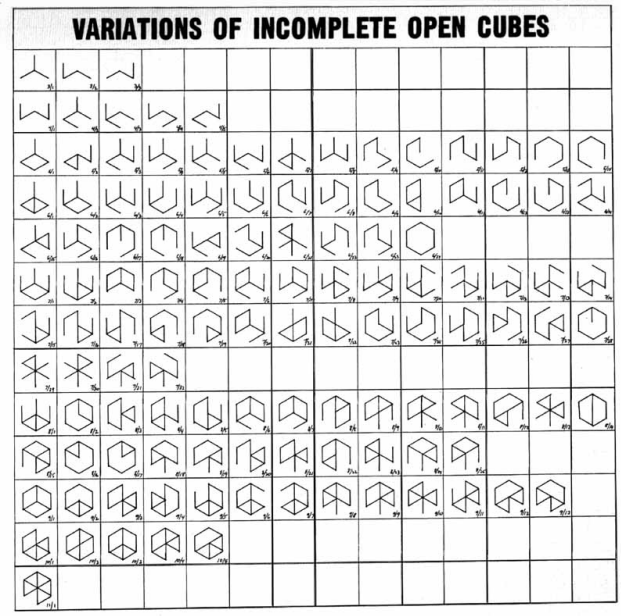

Fig 6. LeWitt, Sol. Drawing for *Incomplete Open Cubes*.



Fig. 7. Morris, Robert, images of *Continuous Project Altered Daily.* Gelatin silverprint. 1969.



Fig. 8. Giacometti, Alberto. *The Invisible Object (Hands Holding the Void)*. Model 1934, cast 1935. Bronze. Overall: 153 x 32.6 x 29.8 cm (60 1/4 x 12 13/16 x 11 3/4 in.)

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