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Introduction:

Literature and Philosophy in Beckett and Deleuze and Guattari

La littérature, elle, a son lieu ailleurs: dans cet espace de la parole décevante qui unit et sépare le roman et le discours sur le roman (Rancière 1998, 166)

Philosophy and Literature, or perhaps, as Andrew Benjamin has recently phrased it, “philosophy’s literature” (Benjamin 2001): this is one of the modes of relation expressed in the title of the present study. Appurtenance in this case goes both ways. Literature’s philosophy? Expressing the relationship of literature to philosophy and vice-versa thus offers a way of saying something about the philosophy *of* literature, but also of the philosophy that is claimed *by* and *for*, and sometimes *of*, literature. Commenting on the lack of a ‘role’ *per se* for literature in the thought of Deleuze (it is not there to exemplify, amplify or in any other way ‘represent’ him, his thought or his discipline), Mary Bryden suggests that literature is an ally insofar as “fiction is favourable to the exposure of the illusion of transcendence” (Bryden in Khalfa, 105). This is fiction conceived as philosophy’s other: a domain of creative encounter that exposes the conniving with transcendence that is never completely out of the frame when philosophical transactions are underway. As Deleuze comments in his book on Proust, “C’est que la philosophie, comme l’amitié, ignore les zones obscures où s’élaborent les forces effectives qui agissent sur la pensée, les déterminations qui nous forcent à penser” (Deleuze 1986, 116). It is the privilege accorded to them that means for him that the signs of art can force thought. In this respect philosophy is the worse off, for “La philosophie, avec toute sa méthode et sa bonne volonté, n’est rien face aux pressions secrètes de l’oeuvre d’art” (119).

In an interview published in *Cahiers du cinéma* to mark the publication of the second installment of his philosophy of cinema, Deleuze makes an important statement on the question of the relationship of two disciplines – described as an *encounter*. It is not, he points out, a question of one discipline *reflecting* on the other; rather what is involved is the

realisation by one discipline that it has to “resolve, for itself and by its own means, a problem similar to one confronted by the other” (367). Anthony Uhlmann’s carefully argued position in his introduction to *Beckett and Poststructuralism* suggests a way of articulating the relationship of philosophy (that of Deleuze included) to other domains (literature included). For Deleuze, all valid criticism is by definition comparative “because any work in a field is itself imbricated within other fields”. According to Uhlmann, paving the way for his own deployment of poststructuralist thought in his discussion of Beckett’s writing, “the new situations confronted by Beckett on an aesthetic plane constituted urgent questions which confronted a whole generation of thinkers across different disciplines” (Uhlmann 1999, 4-5). A coincidence of history and shared intellectual context, however, does not override the necessary distance. The encounter takes place, like that of Watt with his alter ego, between the fences which are part of and apart from each other: “Both the philosopher and the writer...oscillate between the boundaries set up between literature and philosophy, and, further, they encounter one another in this no-man’s land” (28).

This, however, is to continue to beg the question of the essence of literature inhering in its provision of a force to attenuate the pressure of the transcendent. One may wish to speak of a no-man’s land, of a *Watt*-like couloir, but the problem of literature and philosophy resolving problems on their own terms needs to be kept in mind. It is this aspect of Deleuze’s statement regarding the encounter between the disciplines which decrees a level of specificity and irreducibility for each. Some account must therefore be given of the work of fiction/literature as considered not only in an immanent manner (that is, considered as immanent to Deleuze’s work, as part of the unfolding of Deleuze’s thought as a philosopher), but when it is considered on quite another terrain: that of literature ‘itself’.

For, within Deleuze’s philosophy literature is important for what it can *do*, rather than for what it might be said to *mean*. The evaluative enterprise involves an assessment of the degree of *affect* produced by the work. In the background of each of the specific formulations of the relation between the writings of Beckett and the thought of Deleuze and Guattari as developed here can be felt the challenge thrown up by the question of to what extent the

oeuvre of a major literary author can be brought into coherent encounter with a major body of philosophical work while respecting the specificity of each of the disciplines to which their respective authors belonged.¹ The present study is a little like Saposcat's grey chicken as described in one of the stories told to himself by Malone, standing on the *bright* threshold (of one discipline) on the one hand, while if turning back into the interior of either adjoining space (of the other) for solace, it would have to be like the denizen of inner spaces described in Michel Serres' conception of hospitality, still perturbed by the resonant clamour (of the discipline forsaken) at the door (Serres). As such the book practices what Uhlmann, in his own (largely) Deleuzian study of Beckett refers to as the "impure intercourse between literature and philosophy" (Uhlmann 1999, 20).

This book sets out to provide a kind of inventory of philosophy in the writings of Samuel Beckett. Like Malone, however, the term "philosophy" will be employed "according to our definition"; in addition the inventory will be conducted in a ledger which gives its account a particular slant deriving from two distinct but intimately related bodies of philosophical thought, those of Gilles Deleuze on the one hand and of Deleuze and Félix Guattari on the other. This book is a register of a number of encounters both internal and external to Beckett's work, the variety of which it gestures towards in the preposition *after* of its title.

Bracketing the theme of philosophy for the moment, the manner of relating Samuel Beckett to the thought of Deleuze and of Deleuze and Guattari suggested in the preposition *after* could comprise a range of conjunctions, among them:

1. Samuel Beckett *as* Deleuze and Guattari
2. Samuel Beckett *in the wake* of Deleuze and Guattari
3. Samuel Beckett *in the style* of Deleuze and Guattari
4. Samuel Beckett *following* Deleuze and Guattari

¹ A question rendered quite complex in the case of Deleuze's writings with Guattari who is not himself a philosopher.

5. Samuel Beckett *displacing* Deleuze and Guattari
6. Samuel Beckett as belatedly *encountered through* Deleuze and Guattari²

Of course philosophy is itself already subjected to a particular encounter in the thinking of Beckett. The traces of the liaison are to be found in his copious notebooks, and notably those held by the manuscripts section of Trinity College Dublin. The most detailed and extensive of these notes, as many commentators have reported, are on Kant, Beckett's own copy of whose Critiques were passed on to the painter Avighdor Arika (Knowlson 1996, n. 161 and n. 162). Other significant sections of the Trinity notebooks find him making detailed entries on Geulincx in particular – a link profitably explored recently by Anthony Uhlmann (2004). There are brief asides on Leibniz and meticulous diagrams representing the *Enneads* of Plotinus - whose ideas Beckett would appear to have gleaned through Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* rather than the *Enneads* itself. The notebooks, along with the 'Whoroscope Notebook' and the 'German Notebooks', and with various bequeathed annotations, such as those in the margins of Beckett's own copy of Kant, comprise a dispersed inventory which it is (hypothetically) possible to reassemble with a view to elucidating the intertexts philosophical and otherwise of a given work by Beckett.³ Such a task is not attempted here.

If the book is an inventory it does not aim to be exhaustive. On occasion, like Malone, it is impatient to get on to the next story. Moreover in its privileging of certain texts there emerges the possibility that some works by Beckett inscribe or prescribe a heavier dose of philosophy. While I would not wish to contest this view, what emerges out of the discussions which follow is that certain works by Beckett more than others gravitate comprehensively towards specific philosophical problems. This is the case for example with each of the main focal points here; *Murphy* can be said to address the philosophical problem

² Nicholas Royle's book *After Derrida* positions itself as 'later in time than', 'in the manner of' and 'going in search of' its subject (Royle 1995, 3-5).

³ The model of this type of genetic enquiry is the work of Chris Ackerley.

of form, *The Lost Ones* the chestnut formed by the one and the many, *Malone Dies* concerns properties, *The Unnamable* architectonics, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Ohio Impromptu* virtuality, *How It Is* being and judgement, 'je suis ce cours de sable' the sublime and finally *Worstward* *Ho* concerns itself with the problematics of appearance.

It might be objected that the encounters outlined in the following pages are arbitrary. That I conjoin, say, a philosopher whom Beckett read and on whom Deleuze wrote (Kant) is at one level "validated" by a mere coincidence. Each chapter, to a greater or lesser extent, bears the imprint of a coincidence of this sort. It is not my purpose, in any such chapter, to argue that there has been any direct influence of a philosopher on Beckett's writing or thought. I would not deny that Plotinus, Kant, Leibniz, Guelinx, Spinoza, or Berkeley influenced Beckett, but the proof of influence is not my concern. These coincidences are one product of the encounter between a body of literary writing and a body of philosophical writing.

To identify a specific philosophical problem with each of these works in turn may be reductive and may subject Beckett's works to the demands of a philosophical master. My point, however, is quite to the contrary, as I shall now explain, that a virtual, philosopher Beckett is illuminated through these encounters with Deleuze and Guattari and with the philosophical tradition.

Literature in the thought of Deleuze and Guattari

For Deleuze and Guattari literature has been a rich resource enabling the renewal of philosophical thought. The critique of interpretation which they together launch in *The Anti-Oedipus* is coextensive with the exposure of their philosophical (a nomination of course complicated by Guattari's profession) thought to all manner of relation with disciplines beyond the sphere of the professional expertise of the two authors, literature included. One of the lessons which philosophy can learn from literature, both the practice and criticism thereof, will assist it in *unlearning* the image of thought which has dominated the discipline according to Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (published some three years prior to his first

collaboration with Guattari). Of the many literary authors to have participated in this untimely pedagogy Samuel Beckett is a particular case. He is so for reasons only in part explained by the frequent recourse which the authors made to his work by way of illustration or celebration. The uniqueness of the pertinence of the work of Beckett to the question of the relationship to philosophy and literature lies in the extent to which philosophy, philosophical thought and philosophical systems pervade the corpus of his writing in the areas of fiction, prose, criticism, poetry and drama.

A beginning must be made, then, in delineating how literature operates in the thought of Deleuze and Deleuze & Guattari. In the interviews which Deleuze gave to Claire Parnet - broadcast on Arte as *L'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* - a book which he never quite wrote on literature is referred to. The closest Deleuze got to realising this project is the collection of essays *Critique et clinique*. In this latter book we do not find a systematic account of what literature is for Deleuze; we do not encounter a programmatic statement which might be applied by one attempting to write about literature and philosophy in the manner of, or *after* Deleuze. We certainly find no such statement on the literary author under consideration in these pages (the inclusion of Deleuze's essay 'L'Épuisé' in the English translation perhaps gives the misleading impression that it does).⁴ The entries in the eclectic list of literary authors to which the volume turns its attention do not belong to an identifiable tradition; they are not linked by means of period, genre, nationality, style, theme or political ideology. The list includes avant garde experimenters in form as well as authors for whom such innovations would be anathema.

Critique et clinique

The singular body of work co-authored by Deleuze and Guattari has proved an awkward corpus for literary criticism to absorb and reinvent in its own image or deploy to its own ends.

⁴ The fact that without explicitly mentioning that it is an editorial addition (though an endnote does mention it), the English translation of *Critique et clinique* includes a translation of Deleuze's essay on Beckett which did not appear in the French version, is a strange oversight indeed. See Smith in Deleuze (1998).

For one thing the work to which they signed their names as joint authors enters the bloodstream of the literary critic at a rate quite distinct from the rate at which Deleuze's solo writings could be said to have effectuated a similar transfusion. The four main collaborative works, after all, include a short book on Kafka. The process of finding something for Deleuze's philosophy to do for literature in return for the expenditure of reading him picks up pace however when Deleuze – albeit falling somewhat short of his avowed longterm ambition (a book on literature) – publishes his essays on critical and clinical aspects of literature and literary criticism shortly before his death in 1995. The appearance of this volume has a galvanising effect among those in literary studies with an interest in Deleuze. And yet there is a corrosive quality in even these interventions which renders any attempt to resurrect a general theory of literature an enterprise doomed in advance (a fact recognised by the most recent survey of Deleuze on literature at the time of writing by Ronald Bogue [Bogue 2003, 3]).⁵

Throughout Deleuze's work the literary has been the privileged site for the exploration of what he called the *clinical*.⁶ In particular, in the 1960s Deleuze devoted studies to Proust (1964) and Sacher-Masoch (1967); in the same period he published essays and prefaces addressing the work of Tournier, Klossowski and Zola respectively (all three of which are reprinted in *Logique du sens* [1969]). Between the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* came Deleuze's collaborative work with Guattari on *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975), while a wide range of literary authors would be examined from the point of view of the critical and clinical in Deleuze's final book (1993).⁷ To this list of work the focus

⁵ Philippe Mengue has also made an important statement on Deleuze and literature in Mengue (2002).

⁶ Which term is given a very specific range of meanings in Deleuze. The type of clinic to which the work of Kafka is subjected in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* is explicitly differentiated from those approaches to his work that persist in revealing the "dirty little secret" (D.H. Lawrence frequently cited but see, for instance, Deleuze 1995, 143).

⁷ In his Translator's Introduction to the English edition of *Critique et clinique*, Daniel Smith makes a strong case for Deleuze's systematic pursuit of a "Critical and Clinical project" beginning with *Proust et les signes* and

of which was primarily literary one would have to add the extended and piecemeal reflections that occur throughout Deleuze's solo and collaborative work on among others Henry Miller, Maurice Blanchot, Stéphane Mallarmé, Malcolm Lowry and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Finally there exist other spaces of citation and reference - which amount in many instances to no more than a sentence or two - and it is within these folds of Deleuzoguattarian thought that are lodged, for instance, responses to the work of Joyce and Woolf. The case of Beckett is peculiar, since aside from one inconsequential essay on the latter's *Film* (included in the French publication of the volume translated as *Essays Critical and Clinical*) we had to wait until 1992 for a work of any substance to fully underline the importance of Beckett (a fact also frequently underlined in *L'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*) to Deleuze's thought.⁸ In the midst of this eclectic list the only hierarchy that Deleuze would establish was a curious one regarding the alleged superiority of Anglo-American literature over its French and European counterparts.⁹

These authors are championed for the manner in which their work can generate what Deleuze describes as a 'world', which he understands in the Leibnizian sense of "possible worlds".¹⁰ In this respect Proust is indispensable, and in Deleuze's early study one can already

culminating in his collection of essays bearing that title. See Smith (1998).

⁸ Indeed this essay is arguably one of the most important published by Deleuze in the 1990s. Chapter 3 below examines it in detail.

⁹ This claim is curious in the extreme, as Tom Conley agrees (Conley 1997, 644, n. 5). When Deleuze speaks of the greatness of the achievement of a given author, he is often referring to their capacity for producing affects, for being (and acting as) Spinozists. Deleuzian criteria know nothing of New Critical principles, even less of deconstructive pedagogy. North American literature is founded for Deleuze on the operational principle of the *trajet*, the transversal movement which takes the subject elsewhere (as suggested in the title of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*) and which makes it impossible to say "I" (Melville, and *Moby Dick* in particular, is his primary example). His attachment to what he calls Anglo-American literature is to a literature which he regards as effectuating dispersal and fragmentation rather than totalisation. See Bryden in Khalfa ed. (2000).

¹⁰ "A great novelist is above all an artist who invents unknown or unrecognized affects and brings them to light as the becoming of his characters" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 174). Criticism, in Deleuze's understanding of the term, outlines a plane of consistency, a 'sieve' which enables, activates or prolongs fluxes and becomings. The Clinic, on the other hand entails the outline of lines on this plane, which are, in effect dead-ends. However dead

locate in miniature the concept of the fold that would so encompass Deleuze's later work.¹¹ Later Proust returns in the form of an epigraph that can be said to resonate throughout the collection *Critique et clinique*: "les beaux livres sont écrit dans une sorte de langue étrangère". The great writers (and certainly those admired by Deleuze and Guattari) work at a *molecular* level against the *molar* grain of what they call the 'major' language.¹² Minor language makes language itself "stammer" – as the work of Beckett among others attests (Deleuze 1993). But the great authors are also, in the terms elaborated in *Critique et Clinique*, expert "symptomalogists" who can, to paraphrase Foucault, diagnose our current becomings.¹³ Diagnostic 'testing' need not, however, lead through the teleology of the 'pharmacy' to a cure for a given malaise, but it can produce, in Deleuze's terms, "little healths". Great authors unfold a possible world which secretes and promotes impossibility, incommensurability, heterogeneity and multiplicity. An encounter with such a world entails the crossing of a threshold of becoming, a 'vectorial' displacement which scrambles spatio-temporal positioning. In the words of Guattari,

I have crossed a threshold of consistency. Before the hold of this block of sensation, this nucleus of partial subjectivation, everything was dull, beyond it, I am no longer as I was before, I am swept away by a becoming

ends do not, necessarily, result in blockage. Deleuze's clinic is one, he states, without psychoanalysis or interpretation, while criticism is without linguistics or signification (Deleuze 1998, 119-20). Elsewhere Deleuze and Guattari speak of "unfortunate psychoanalytic interpretations" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 9) and explain that "(t)he mistake of psychoanalysis was to trap itself and us, since it lives off the market value of neurosis from which it gains all its surplus value" (16).

¹¹ Proustism is described as "a semiology of regimes of signs which is anti-psychiatric, anti-psychoanalysis, anti-philosophical" (Deleuze 1998, 119-20)

¹² See Deleuze and Guattari (1986). See also Jean-Jacques Lecercle's convincing argument that what is at stake in the concept of minor literature is entirely compatible with Deleuze's theory of *sens* as developed in *Logique du sens*, in Lecercle (1995).

¹³ See also Joel Birman, 'Les signes et leurs excès: La clinique chez Deleuze', in Eric Alliez, ed., *Gilles Deleuze. Une vie philosophique* (Le Plessis-Robinson: Institut Synthélabo, 1998).

other, carried beyond my familiar existential Territories. (Guattari 1992, 93)¹⁴

For Deleuze writing is precisely an affair of becoming, and in particular what he calls a “becoming-animal”. As he states in the ‘manifesto’ of *Critique et clinique*, ‘La Littérature et la vie’:

It is a process, that is, a passage of Life which traverses the livable and the lived. Literature is inseparable from becoming: in writing one becomes-woman, one becomes-animal or vegetable, one becomes molecule to the extent of becoming-imperceptible. (Deleuze 1993, 11)

It is important to note that ‘becoming’ in Deleuzoguattarian terms does not entail the attainment of *form*, by means of identification, imitation, or mimesis but finding, rather, “the zone of *voisinage*, of indiscernibility or *indifférentiation*” such that it is not possible to identify or distinguish *this or that* animal, woman or molecule.¹⁵ It is not a question of imprecision or generality; rather it is one of the unforeseen, the unscripted, the “non-pre-existent” which is less determined in a form than by the manner in which it produces a singularity in “a population”.¹⁶ Despite the importance of *Critique et clinique* when it comes to an understanding of the importance of literature to the thinking of Deleuze, and of the specificity of his approach to it considered apart from his jointly authored oeuvre, it is not from this collection of Deleuze’s writings on literary authors that the present study takes its principle impetus and orientation but from a broad range of Deleuze’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s writings.

¹⁴ The notion of a vectorial crossing of thresholds of consistency contributed to Guattari’s own practice in the institutional context of psychiatry. See his comments on ‘machinic’ relations at the La Borde clinic in an essay translated as ‘On Machines’ (Guattari 1995a) and more generally the paradigm set out in *Chaosmosis*.

¹⁵ On literature and collective enunciation they write: “There isn’t a subject who emits the statement or a subject about which the statement could be emitted...minor literature...is an exemplary situation for the production of new statements” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 83).

¹⁶ Mireille Buydens chooses the term *aformel* to designate what is at play in Baroque aesthetics (Buydens 1990).

The Deleuzoguattarian approach to literature

The difficulty of negotiating the question of the relation of the work of Deleuze on a given art form to the tradition to which in some sense it demands to be regarded as a contribution but which in another sense it is resistant towards (I have never written anything but philosophy Deleuze says) is a refrain in Deleuzean criticism. Alain Ménil puts it well when he states “the very idea of assigning an art to some philosophical directive sits ill with the Deleuzean conception of art, science and philosophy” (Ménil in Khalfa ed. 2000, 93). For, many of the essays in *Critique et clinique* (translated as *Essays Critical and Clinical*) are about philosophy; despite the literary emphasis in appearance these are just as much essays in philosophy as his book on Hume (Deleuze 1953) was a book on philosophy. They continue the parallel project of another decade – the 1960s – when essays on Zola, Klossowski and Tournier find themselves glued together in the binding of *Logique du sens*. Not that Deleuze would worry about such distinctions, these essays are nonetheless thereby implicitly defined as works of philosophy.¹⁷

Badiou and Beckett (and Deleuze)

Alain Badiou approaches the question of the relation of literature to philosophy from a perspective opposed to that of Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari. His approach must be considered within the overall context provided by his recent work; not least it is important to consider his position in the light of his conception of “de-saturation”. Philosophy, he has written, “cannot begin, and cannot seize the real of politics, unless it substitutes the authority of the matheme for that of the poem” (Badiou [1998] 2005, 18). This re-statement (but radical reframing, it should be added) of the Platonic mistrust of poetry enables Badiou to castigate the new sophists who corrupt philosophy’s act of thought (18). Deleuze comes under this

¹⁷ It is perhaps for this very reason – one can only speculate, for Bogue does not address the matter himself – that Bogue’s recent book spends much time on the place of Lewis Carroll in *The Logic of Sense*, but almost none on either Klossowski and Tournier and none at all on Zola.

category. He finds himself in the unlikely company of the Hegelian tradition which has art as the sensible form of the idea. In disjoining art from philosophy, Badiou argues that Deleuze “leaves the destination of art as a form of thought entirely inapparent” (10). Not alone does Deleuze foreclose art as a form of thought with its own specificity, but he forecloses the infinity which Badiou sees as the province of art (he has a poor conception of the multiple would be another way of putting this). The thinking of Deleuze (yoked to Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés*) about the work of art as “chaoïde”, the outcome of a chance which cannot be abolished by the throw of dice does not fool Badiou into thinking that here we have a proper conception of multiplicity and singularity. Instead, he asserts that for Deleuze “art entertains with the chaotic infinite the most faithful of relationships precisely because it configures the chaotic within the infinite” (11). Where Beckett veers towards philosophy, and even, in the eyes of Alain Badiou, succeeds in writing a philosophical treatise in the shape of *Worstward Ho*, Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari are what Badiou calls sophists and cathect philosophy to art, literature and music the better to think otherwise, to force the encounter worthy of the name of thinking.

Beckett and his ‘critics’

As is so often the case with Beckett, few are the manoeuvres of the exegete that are not foreseen by the author. Not least caustic of the neutralising epithets bequeathed by Samuel Beckett to his interpreters (the “critics”) concerned that “loutishness of learning” with which - once he was at a safe distance from its threatening (albeit briefly nurturing) hold - he had the lack of charity to equate the practices of academic scholarship. Few are the authors who have elicited from their interpreters such labyrinthine preambles and such vertigo-inducing reliance on qualifying footnotes to extricate them in advance or in *media res* from the knotty situation which this pre-emptive lure betokens. It may even be the case that, as Bruno Clément recently expressed it, the work of Beckett “amène à poser de façon inédite le problème de la *subjectivité critique*” (Clément 2004, 220). Writing on this very issue before it became a matter to address from the point of view of an attachment to the work of Beckett by Badiou

and Deleuze (Clément's concern in his essay), for Steven Connor the problem is that while criticism mimics the gesture of Beckett's "shrug," in order "to assert humbly its own limits," in the very act of making this gesture criticism "defies those limits, affirming the possibility of speech and commentary even when these are denied" (Connor 1988, 190). The peculiarity of the place of Beckett within the elaboration of a *philosophical* system for that work, then, would lie in its very defiance *generally* in the face of recuperative critical endeavours and *specifically* in the face of the abstractions served up by philosophers and their intermediaries (see Critchley 142).¹⁸ For this reason Shira Wolosky, elsewhere, while alert to the presence of references and allusions to philosophy, cautions against citing these "toward full articulated structures" (Wolosky, in Budick and Iser eds. 1996, 175). Of all the critics who have broached the question of literature and philosophy it is only Deleuze and Guattari and Badiou that in opposed ways argue that Beckett creates philosophical concepts. In the first instance this is through half-philosophy (which puts us back in the no-man's land) and in the second in the limit case of *Worstward Ho*.

Jacques Rancière in his book *La Parole muette* exposes that which is inherently problematic in literary criticism's presumption of a hermeneutic right, of which the ventriloquising of philosophy through the medium of literature is but one example. Literature, in Rancière's formulation, may be the name of what lies between the novel and the discourse performed upon that novel, but it is also literature which in a paradoxical fashion at once attracts and repels such discursive operations. Hence to some degree every book about a literary author – in its partial or virtual participation in the literary – is in Rancière's assessment necessarily an intervention at once located in, and productive of, an intermezzine space of deceiving 'speech'. Literature is a mute utterance and yet speaking is done in its name. Every work of criticism becomes a fraudulent assumption of the power to perform this ventriloquism. But the reverse perspective will have *genre*, for example, cast in a similarly

¹⁸ The claim that in his own essay Critchley practices "bad faith" in deriding "philosophical interpretations" has been made by Lance St John Butler in his review of *Very Little...Almost Nothing* (Butler 1999).

tenuous and ambivalent position. It too at once derives from but cannot be adequate to that which it seeks to frame (such was the conviction of Blanchot himself when he wrote about the concept of genre). The situation is clearly not without its parallels in the case of the writings of Beckett; however what distinguishes the work *as a body of work* is the extent to which the aporia of hermeneutics is embedded in advance. Still, the temporality of criticism will attempt to resist the force of the aporia: if first comes the nothing to express, then, in its wake, there will assuredly be a discourse upon that nothing. As the industry of Beckett commentary attests, there is much mileage to be got out of this apparently already-running-on-empty vehicle. This is a phenomenon remarked upon by Connor, who shows how, even if destined for somewhere known as *Worstward* (or along the vector headed that way), a Beckettian text can, at the hands of a critic, nonetheless still find itself driven onward to general positivity (Connor 1992, 82).

In a book devoted to thinking about Beckett in relation to contemporary philosophical and theoretical traditions it is difficult to avoid the tendency to provide correctives and to indulge in polemics. It is therefore necessary briefly to consider the status of Beckett criticism in the light of the type of approach to his work I am calling Deleuzoguattarian. The solace of good form is something towards which all criticism almost inevitably finds itself drawn. In the case of the work of Beckett and the work devoted to this corpus this solace is often inadvertently a matter of secondary consolation: the form demanded by criticism itself and undertaken in the name of criticism rather than of Beckett's work. The dilemma has not been better put than by Connor:

Criticism borrows the gesture of Beckett's shrug, to assert humbly its own limits, but in the very act defies those limits, affirming the possibility of speech and commentary even when these are denied (Connor 1988, 190);

Criticism has the curious task of representing for its publics Beckett's disclaimers of the public aura and prestige of the writer, while at the same time ceaselessly reconstituting this willed-away mystique in its own operations. (191)

Beckett's philosopher readers

The writing of Beckett can be said to be unique in the extent of the hold it has exerted on many of the key figures in Continental Philosophy. Adorno, Bataille, Blanchot, Deleuze and Badiou have all devoted essay- or book-length interventions to his work. The task of elaborating upon this heritage in its many varieties has been done in other noble studies. Key studies by Connor, Locatelli, Begam, Uhlmann, Trezise, Katz, Gibson, Hill, Clément and Bryden all position Beckett's writing in proximity to contemporary French philosophy, several of them turning specifically to Deleuze and/or Deleuze and Guattari. Rather than address these contributions here in the introduction several of these important statements – to mention only the best known – will, rather, in most cases be referred to in specific and localised discussions throughout the book.¹⁹ That it is Badiou more than any of the others who is given most attention in this introductory essay and elsewhere in the book is in part explained by the fact that he intervenes in the “reception” of both of the authors which the present study juxtaposes, and does so in a manner which displays a similar hermeneutic strategy.²⁰ We return to Badiou below. But there have been other key statements by Beckett critics on the specific question of Beckett and philosophy.

For Pascale Casanova *Worstward Ho* is Beckett's most fully realised work in the quest for a specific mode of abstraction in literature. The emphasis of her study derives from a conviction that the singularity of what Beckett achieves derives from a specific modality of *generation*. Forgoing any account of the generative principle of his work which would have recourse to a conception of Beckett as merely bequeathing to criticism a body of work which it will remain relatively unproblematic – albeit challenging – for that critic to embark upon *as critic*, Casanova alights on the figure of autogeneration.

¹⁹ See Gibson (2003) for an overview of certain trends in recent Beckett scholarship in the continental tradition.

²⁰ See Badiou (1992, 1995 and 1997).

Though arguments of this sort (for example that Beckett's is an "Art poétique qui énonce à la fois ce qu'il fait et comment il le fait") are far from rare in Beckett studies,²¹ to the extent that at one level it is a banality to utter it, in Casanova's case the assertion has, perhaps, a new urgency:

C'est au contraire un travail vers la forme autonome, autoengendrée par la matrice mathématique et atteignant à une sorte de pureté *abstractive*. Beckett invente une *forme littéraire toujours inachevée* qui n'existe qu'en tant qu'elle est, pour reprendre ses termes, "une forme en mouvement". (166, my emphasis)

An *abstractive* purity? The processual aspect of this formulation is telling, as is the claim which it announces, viz. that Beckett invents a form of writing that is always below a threshold of being accomplished, a mobile and abeyant form (a nomadic "form" as we will call it below).

Perhaps the second major insight in the book as far as the present study is concerned lies in its astute judgement of the role of the philosophical in Beckett's writing. Like Bryden, Casanova is alert to the idiosyncratic positioning of the philosophical concept (or sensation of concept) in the work of Beckett.²² Noteworthy here it seems to me is that she underlines the fact that the philosophical does not simply exist in a one-dimensional manner in its host body, literature. Rather there is a form of parasitism:

Les texts philosophiques deviennent ainsi pour Beckett ce que l'on pourrait appeler des "opérateurs" littéraires. Il ne les utilise ni philosophiquement – pour exprimer, sur le mode littéraire, une vision speculative du monde – ni Littérairement: il ne faut voir dans ces texts ni métaphore ni allégorie, pas de sens excédant la surface

²¹ "Art poétique qui énonce à la fois ce qu'il fait et comment il le fait et qui élabore en pratique la théorie (et la pratique) de l'abstraction littéraire, *Cap au pire* totalise l'ensemble des innovations et des ouvertures beckettiennes" (167).

²² Both Colombat and Uhlmann use the idea of sensation of concept in order to describe the quasi-philosophical residue or emergent that is the "concept" in literature as opposed to philosophy (the domain of concepts proper). See Colombat (1997, 591) and Uhlmann (1999, 4-28).

textuelle, pas de message à décrypter sous l'apparence manifeste. (115)

However it is quite remarkable that the philosophical as literary “operator” generates material in a way that no other discipline can be said to in Beckett’s work. It alone has a purchase in Beckett’s writing which can be said in one sense to be generative of it and in another to be its motor force:

ils ne racontent que le processus de leur engendrement, soit l'épuisement des possibles et des conséquences logiques et formels d'une proposition donnée arbitrairement comme moteur et principe d'écriture. (115)

Though the specific example under scrutiny here is *Worstward Ho/Cap au pire*, it is as the most realised text in this respect that it is singled out.²³ The philosophical, nonetheless, provides according to Casanova a motor force and a generative principle for the rest of the corpus.

Nonetheless Casanova’s perspective arguably continues to participate in a reading reliant upon a conception of the *via negativa* to which the Deleuzoguattarian concept of abstract machinics would display a peremptory resistance. In this it shares much with what remains one of the most innovative readings of the evasion of figuration (or abstraction) in the work of Beckett. Wolosky suggests that the “reductions reduced” of his late writings entail “complex strategies of apotropism – the turning away from figures” (165), strategies which she suggest invoke “a broad context and history of negative mysticisms as a framework” (165).

For the apotropic and apohatic tradition, best exemplified by Plotinus, Wolosky points out how, given that the One cannot be positively described – to do so detracts from Him – it is best to detract from Him, “to speak of Him, if at all, only by way of abstraction, stripping away, removal”. Wolosky then goes on to suggest that this strategy accounts for

²³ A position with which the present study would seem to concur in placing the discussion of the text in question at the end.

Beckett's own approach to the figuration of his characters. Chapter 1 is a contribution to this debate, and we reserve our specific comments until then. However in ending her essay with a Beckettian constellation she forms a link with the next key voice in the overlapping debates concerning abstraction, philosophy and form.

The two abstractions

Philosophy and literature are, then, thought together in disjunctive relation in these pages. The specific and localised convergence by means of which the encounter is explored can be said to lie in the conceptions of and practices of form that are operative in each discipline. It is in the question of form that we find a bridge between the specific type of philosophical Beckett which is in part – but only in part – made possible by reading him after Deleuze and Guattari and the outlines of a conception of his oeuvre made possible by their notion of the abstract machine. This latter notion has enjoyed an increasingly central position in the attempt – in the approaches of Eric Alliez, Jacques Rancière and Ronald Bogue, Mireille Buydens and D. N. Rodowick among others – to articulate a Deleuzian aesthetics. And it is relation to this attempt that my own thinking of the Beckett Abstract Machine is positioned. In explaining Deleuze's recurrent attachment to the machinic, Mireille Buydens suggests a simple reason: the machinic is produced and not presupposed as a given; it is *ontologically contingent* rather than *ontologically necessary* (Buydens 1990, 67). The machinic is the *anti-organic* as this is understood by Deleuze and Guattari.

Philippe Mengue in his book *Gilles Deleuze ou le système du multiple* offers a useful summary of the salient characteristics of the Abstract Machine as it functions in the thought of Deleuze (and Guattari). The Abstract Machine names a phylum made up of 'particles' of 'matter' which cannot be completely converted into form; it is said to possess an 'anorganic vitality' which by definition is opposed to and resistant to an organic composite formation. In this sense it is virtual rather than actual, real rather than realised.²⁴ The Abstract Machine is

²⁴ This aspect is perhaps not fully developed in *Anti-Oedipus* where the concept of the virtual is not yet in place.

not static but is rather involved in continual movement and subject to agitation. For all its propulsional force, however, it is not susceptible to being traced in terms of an evolutionary or teleological template. Nonetheless the Abstract Machine is said to be 'creative' and is linked to the idea of creation, including the creation of a work, of works, even of an oeuvre (with the proviso that totality be only one part alongside the other parts), but it is also more generalised that this suggests. Whether in philosophy, literature or Life, the Abstract Machine, as either phylum or plane of continuous variation, and involution, generates abstract lines which operate in an immanent manner on/in the composition and decomposition of strata:

It is the mobility of creation, in so far as this mobility is conceived of as the placement in conjugation of intensive elements which define life, even before plasticity, formation and the production of substance. So much that it is, for its part, an *aformal* power, a pure power of combination or conjugation of intensities which is the 'closest' possible to chance, which represents the minimum of order or of unity possible capable of separating it from total chaos. (Mengue 1994, 82-3)

The concept of the abstract machine then, hovers above an area of enquiry in metaphysics going back to Plato's *Timaeus* and the *Physics* of Aristotle but endures in Kant.

Deleuze characterises the problem with transcendental philosophy in its Kantian form as being its offering of a choice between three:

either an undifferentiated ground, a groundlessness, formless nonbeing, *or* an abyss without differences and without properties, *or* a supremely individuated Being and an intensely impersonalised Form. (Deleuze 1991, 106)

The concept of the Abstract Machine is explicitly opposed by Deleuze and Guattari to each of these choices. Despite this it would be a mistake to associate the machinic exclusively with a principle of deformation or the aformal with a vector of deterritorialisation. As the penultimate plateau counsels, it will take more than an Abstract Machine to save us. Something of the significance of this concept, not to mention its philosophical complexity, is to be gleaned

from the place it occupies in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In the only ‘fixed’ plateau of the book, ‘Conclusion: Concrete Rules and Abstract Machines’, not only is it given half the chapter title but the section devoted to it is reserved until the end. *A Thousand Plateaus* thus begins by describing the book as a “little machine” and ends with a celebration of the Abstract Machine.

The Abstract Machine is a concept that emerges out of the general machinics and the concept of a “machinic unconscious” of Guattari’s early writings, then as these find their way into *Anti-Oedipus* and later in the subsequent joint writings.²⁵ Its most sustained evocation, however, is in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Notably it is referred to in the final plateau under the heading ‘Concrete Rules and Abstract Machines’.

But this accounts for only one of the meanings given the term in the writings of Deleuze and Guattari. In *Anti-Oedipus* the term does not appear, despite the fact that there the outlines of the conceptual framework of the machinic are articulated. In this book the world (reality), the book (representation) and the author (subjectivity) as fields are not divided; rather, “an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of the orders”. The concept does appear in the second collaboration on Kafka. The fact that *Proust et les signes* in its second edition has a section on the machinic is probably testimony to the influence of Guattari though, as Bogue points out, the use made by Deleuze writing alone of the concept of the machine is radically different to that made of it by Deleuze writing *à deux*. It is for a similar reason then that the Beckett of Deleuze’s solo authored essay is quite a different Beckett than might have been featured if Deleuze and Guattari had ever written in a sustained way on the author. The clearest statement on abstract machines as the concept informs the present study is here quoted in full:

Abstract machines know nothing of forms and substances. This is what makes them abstract, and also defines the concept of the machine in the strict sense. They surpass any kind of mechanics. They are opposed to the

²⁵ The same is true of the concept of becoming-woman, as Bryden points out (Bryden 1993). To the best of my knowledge, Guattari first uses the term ‘*machines abstraites*’ in the course of a seminar at Columbia University in 1973. A transcript and translation of this talk is published in *Chimères* (see Guattari 1994).

abstract in the ordinary sense. Abstract machines consist of unformed matters and nonformal functions. Every abstract machine is a consolidated aggregate of matters-functions (phylum and diagram). This is evident on a technological “plane”: such a plane is not made up simply of formed substances (aluminium, plastic, electric wire, etc.) or organising forms (programme, prototypes etc.), but of a composite of unformed matters exhibiting only degrees of intensity (resistance, conductivity, heating, stretching, speed or delay, induction, transduction...) and diagrammatic functions exhibiting only differential equations or, more generally, “tensors”. (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 511)

In *Chaosmosis*, under the heading ‘Machinic heterogenesis’, Guattari argues that it is reductive to consider the machine as merely a subset of technology. Instead of thinking of the machine as the expression of technology, it should be thought of, Guattari continues, as the *pre-requisite* of technology. “(A) machine is never simply technical,” Deleuze and Guattari had written in their study of Kafka (81). It is this inversion, of what for the sake of argument we can describe as the orthodox view, which partially enables the non-mechanistic reading of technology and its machinic underpinning in *Chaosmosis*. The machine and the machinic are not then the concrete expression of technology, but are, rather, abstractly, the constitutive requirements for the existence of the technological itself. It is a way of thinking about the machinic which Guattari is aware might need some persuasive amplification, and for the current purposes the latter can be supplied by returning to the book on Kafka.

In chapter 9 of the Kafka book Deleuze and Guattari revisit the machinic terminology of *The Anti-Oedipus*. Under the heading “What is an Assemblage?” they define the machine as “connections”:

There is no machinic assemblage that is not a social assemblage of desire, no social assemblage of desire that is not a collective assemblage of enunciation. (Deleuze & Guattari 1986, 82)

The assemblage, insofar as it requires a territorialising action, takes the place of what might have been a subject. Deleuze and Guattari cite the manner in which Beckett’s characters territorialise a given site (Deleuze & Guattari 1988, 503). However, in order to place this

reifying and stratifying force in its proper context it is necessary to look to the other side of the process. While on one side are to be located the assemblages, the machinic assemblages (of for instance the artifice of enunciation that might - under certain circumstances - be mistaken for the subject), on the other side is the “abstract machine” which serves to open assemblages to the molecular, to “becoming” (510). From a certain perspective, then, these two sides are opposed. The assemblage is on the side of molarity, coalescence and stratification, the abstract machine on the side of the molecular. This does not prevent the abstract machine from serving, under certain conditions, as a transcendent model (512).²⁶ Fogs (illusions) of transcendence, however, are common on the plane of immanence, as *What is Philosophy?* informs us. A conception of the literary work in machinic terms permits, in revealing these fogs to be illusory, in Kafka’s case, a “continuous oeuvre in which intensities are produced and in which are inscribed all sorts of connections and polyvalences” (Deleuze & Guattari 1986, 88); assemblages that move towards the abstract machine in a process of continuous variation and oscillation. What is at work is what Manuel De Landa has described as “a flow that does not allow the intensive process to become hidden underneath the extensive results” (De Landa in Grosz 1999, 32). One of the lessons of this conception of literature as abstract machine is that the critic must attempt to avoid simply converting the abstract machine (intensive) into a transcendent model, seizing up the abstract machine by means of “symbolical and allegorical exegeses” (extensive). It would be an example of schizoanalysis brought to bear on a particular regime of signs:

Schizoanalysis does not pertain to elements or aggregates, nor to subjects, relations, or structures. It pertains to lineaments running through groups as well as individuals. Schizoanalysis, as the analysis of desire, is immediately practical and political, whether it is a question of an individual, group, or society. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 203)

²⁶ The doctrine of hylomorphism derives from Aristotle, but is also present in Plato’s *Timaeus*. Matter, according to the hylomorphic view, is an inert receptacle for forms that come from the outside, these taking the form of transcendental essences.

Machinic levels can be identified and enumerated in terms of material, cognitive, affective and social loci or points of reference. By contrast to these points of concretion, abstract machines - as opposed to technology per se, which is concrete - install themselves “transversally to the machinic levels” in question. Such a conception radically challenges the resources of anthropocentric thinking, and of conceptions of the machine and the human respectively as grounded entities (and unities) with identifiable boundaries.

Guattari’s reflections on the machinic in his final work are the continuation of themes already well-developed in *The Anti-Oedipus*. For Deleuze and Guattari all systems are machinic, and this includes social, political and economic systems.

Looking back at the context in which *Anti-Oedipus* intervened, Guattari provides a succinct explanation of the book’s emphasis on the machinic:

Our conception of desire was completely contrary to some ode to spontaneity or a eulogy to some unruly liberation. It was precisely in order to underline the artificial, “constructivist” nature of desire that we defined it as a “machine”, which is to say, articulated with the most actual, the most “urgent” machinic types. (Guattari in Genosko 1996, 128)

From both the hydraulic model of the unconscious promulgated by Freud, and anthropomorphic residues of Barthesian *jouissance*, the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of desire is a radical departure. *It* flows, connects and cuts. “Desire constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 5). Desire is at once cause, substance and term. Desire as configured in *Anti-Oedipus* is not what resides in the subject; rather it is the machine in desire. Desiring-machines - the earlier version of assemblages - are formative, but not in the hylomorphic sense, not in the sense of an Aristotelian prime-mover or its surrogate. As Ansell Pearson notes “formativity is possible only through functional misfirings; that is, formation requires deformation, and what makes [...] a machinic process is the fact that it takes place through

cuttings, breakages, slippages, breakdowns, and so on” (Ansell Pearson 1997, 143). The continuous flows and partial objects of the body without organs - an earlier variant of the abstract machine - are subject to couplings which are the operation of desire and the function of the desiring-machines. The formative nature of the desiring-machines/assemblages can yield coalescences, atrophying the body without organs/abstract machine. Binary and dialectical thought, however, are entirely absent from this configuration. It is not simply a question for Deleuze and Guattari of the body without organs as something to be celebrated while the desiring-machine is negated. Rather, desiring machines break down: “the automata stop dead and set free the unorganised mass they once served to articulate” (8). This is why the full Body without organs belongs to anti-production (8). The body without organs is a surface of resistance but also a threshold - a space-time of undifferentiated flows and inarticulate murmur as opposed to connection and communication; an open-ended processual phenomenon and not a closed product (the abstract machine entails an opening to molecularity).²⁷

Both organism and technical machine are cut across by what *A Thousand Plateaus* calls the phylum. The phylum, or “unformed matter”, as Deleuze and Guattari understand it, is a larval, fluid and machinic *matter*. Thus for example - and the illustration is their own - the waves in Virginia Woolf’s eponymous novel constitute a kind of phylum. “Waves are vibrations, shifting borderlines inscribed on the plane of consistency as so many abstractions. The abstract machine of the waves” (252). The individual characters in the novel are each said to designate a multiplicity. They are at once, Deleuze and Guattari explain, this multiplicity and its edge, that is the edge which marks the tipping over of one into the other, the point of crossing or of passage into other multiplicities. No less is it true, however, that there is a phylum to be discerned in hard technology - a fluid transversal lineage (not subject to evolutionary overcoding purely in terms of succeeding generations), what they call “itinerant

²⁷ “In order to resist linked, connected, and interrupted flows it [the body without organs] sets up a counterflow of amorphous, undifferentiated fluid. In order to resist using words composed of articulated phoentic units, it utters only gasps and cries that are sheer unarticulated locks of sound” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 9).

technological lineages” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 512). Deleuze and Guattari do not have in mind a hylomorphic conception of raw material formed by human hands, or of a natural flux subject to human perception: there will be no Miltonian God or its human stand-in to set a boundary on “matter unformed and void” (Milton 1980, 283, l. 233).²⁸ The point is well made in *Anti-Oedipus*. In assessing ‘The Book of the Machine’ section of Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon*, Deleuze and Guattari first argue that his achievement is twofold, disavowing on the one hand the vitalist argument by challenging the alleged “specific or personal unity of the organism,” and on the other shattering the mechanist argument by challenging the alleged “structural unity of the machine” (284). Both unities are challenged, then, by the phylum; the transversal constituent force and material of dispersal (matter existing only in its unformed state will fuse supposed distinct bodies, organisms and utensils in a generalised “ooze”, to use a term central to Beckett’s *Worstward Ho*) undermines the possibility of hylomorphism. The human-machine interface (via the phylum) leads to the following equation: “The two definitions are exact equivalents: man as a “vertebro-machinate mammal”, or as an “aphidian parasite of machines” (285).

Deleuze and Guattari employ the concept of the Abstract Machine in a variety of contexts throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*. It does not amount to a unified theory, not least of literature, and yet the notion of a literary author as engendering her/his Abstract Machine is stated by them. One of the orienting notions uniting the set of interrelated essays presented here is that in the case of the work of Beckett we are in the presence of the author whose specific Abstract machine (oeuvre as abstract machine), whose signed and dated oeuvre, sustains the most pervasive engagement with and critique of literary form, and whose work thereby exemplifies to an extent and on a scale greater than any other author an experimental tendency in literature coterminous with the operations of abstract machinics as these are defined by Deleuze and Guattari.

²⁸ For a reading of Deleuze and Guattari’s opposition to hylomorphism and an informative digression on Milton see Welchman (1992).

Note On Alain Badiou

The parasitism regarded as Casanova as being central to the mode of operation of the philosophical in Beckett's work – a kind of inverted Platonism - is precisely the contaminated ground Badiou wants to purge in the name of restoring philosophy to philosophy in an undoing of what for him is a problematic and debilitating *suture* (see Badiou's *Manifesto for Philosophy*) to its conditions (one of which is literature). Ironically, Badiou is intensely interested in the work of Beckett. It is hardly surprising therefore, given his avowed suspicion of the suture in question that his Beckett as it emerges in his book and essays on Beckett is not one that would find favour with the hybrid version which will be described in these pages.

The essays which Badiou devoted to the work of Beckett over a period of 10 years (and recently collected in one English translation) are in the course of giving rise to what will no doubt be a prolonged engagement on the part of Beckett scholars. He, then, will be merely the latest of the French philosophers to be coupled to the work of Beckett. It helps of course that he has devoted a book to the author. Deleuze's essay had a similar effect in causing the Deleuze-Beckett cottage industry to increase production, while many Derridean essayists waited on tenterhooks to see if the latter's playful evasions and statements of reluctance would eventually give way to a work proper (in the end they did not).²⁹

Badiou's landmark essay on Beckett in *Conditions* begins by arguing that a state of flux governs Beckett's ontology, such that it could never be thought of as a synthesis of being and non-being, and, moreover, that it should not, therefore, be thought of as somehow akin to an onward-bound Hegelian resolution. The '*lieu de l'être*' of Beckett's work is, he points out, antidialectical: generative of a *noir-gris* without contrast: no light can be offered as an other. Thus if *on* (one, the being) confronts *no* (non-being) it will not result, unproblematically in 'on' (as in the phrase "to go on"). Instead Badiou seems to suggest, Beckett's work leaves us

²⁹ Via satellite at the Sydney 2003 conference devoted to Beckett's work another philosopher, Luce Irigaray, looked like she was in the course of writing on Beckett but then retreated behind the general theme of waiting. So, for that statement on the work we also wait, in this case, one suspects, interminably.

in the space of a knot, the knot formed, and here I reprise the play made on the name Knott at the close of Simon Critchley's Beckett essay (Critchley 1997), when Knott (the being) includes not (negation) but does not thereby survive as Knott moving forward, but as Knott, knotted. The nothing is subject to a modality of liaison or coupling (335).

For Badiou, however, writing establishes itself at the limit of the encounter with its non-being, "at the point when, at the edge of disappearance, the thing is exposed to the undecidable question of its stability" (330). It is this encounter for Badiou which inaugurates the imperative 'on'. This imperative, which seems to be posited as a general condition of writing, but one of which for Badiou the work of Beckett is the exemplary and unique manifestation, translates in Badiou's view as a series of questions. These are questions first posed by Kant and comically reprised by Beckett in *Texts for Nothing*. The questions of course are: What can I know? What should I do? What can I hope for?

Badiou goes on to distinguish the three questions and to show how they become reformulated - as answers one presumes - in Beckett's work, organised around three principal verbs - *aller*, *être* and *dire*. Thus is yielded "l'homme d'un trajet (aller), l'homme d'une immobilité (être), et l'homme d'un monologue (dire)".

For any commentator seeking to reconfigure or by means of an intervention re-work the landscape of Beckett studies there have arguably, in recent years been two dominant methodological orientations, each with their illustrious partisans. The first of these entails aligning that work with a theory or a theoretical paradigm, broadly or restrictively conceived. The second entails rigorous work on distinction and demarcation. In terms of this latter labour, there has, for example, been work which addresses the relation between Beckett's work written originally in English and the writings which he initially forged in French; poetry versus prose; relations of contiguity and/or separation have been explored between the drama and prose works respectively; there have been considerations of tensions and/or continuities as we move from early to late work and vice-versa. Another approach within this category - that of a labour of demarcation - is the very traditional chronological distinction which might offer us the prospect of a Beckettian turn by means of which the critic might better locate

herself or himself and her or his relation to the corpus. It is to this noble tradition in Beckett scholarship that Badiou makes a contribution by declaring *How It Is* the turning point away from Cartesian solipsism and towards “alerité, de la rencontre, de la figure de l’Autre, qui fissure et déplace l’enfermement solipsiste” (344).

There is more to this however than evidence of a desire for order and classification according to chronology. Badiou also makes a contribution to the other noble tradition which seeks to elaborate a relation between poetry and prose (as for example in Perloff) in Beckett’s case by stating that a key development in the post *How It Is* work is that the prose works come to be governed by what he calls a “latent poem”.³⁰ (I do not mean to ignore the fact that Badiou’s argument has a specificity marked by its place in his philosophical oeuvre, or, at least, do so only for the moment). This suggestion offers an explanation in Badiou’s eyes for the fact that while the pre-*How It Is* works seem to lend themselves quite readily to allegorical readings, the late work, with its “appareil semi-poétique” yields, rather (in a distinctly Badiouian idiom) “situations”.

The poetic here stands for something resistant, residual and beyond the grasp of the critic or interpreter. Part of the development in Beckett’s oeuvre detected by Badiou is precisely its progressively moving beyond the range of the critic’s radar. If this quality is not yet present in *Watt* it is to be found in abundance in works such as *Ill Seen Ill Said*. Whereas in *Watt* we remain imprisoned in signification (349), in texts such as *Ill Seen Ill Said* there is said to be an accord “between the event and the poetic of its name” (350). By staging the event - a fundamental concept in Badiou’s work - *Ill Seen Ill Said* would not be as reducible to or as recuperable as was *Watt* in terms of signification: “ouvert par l’alterité ontologique, le brèche dans l’être qui cristallise la soundaineté de l’événement, le brilliance du mal vu” (351).³¹

³⁰ This idea has been taken up by [insert name and year].

³¹ “Ontology, as Badiou defines it, is a consideration of being which suspends the question of the actual material existence of what is considered, so as to isolate in all its purity the presentation of multiplicity itself” (Hallward 1998, 90).

Thus, so far, the work of Beckett has functioned as an ally in Badiou's elaboration of a philosophy of the event. In his closing sections on *The Lost Ones* and *How It Is* Beckett's work is enlisted to illustrate another central concept of Badiou's work, *le Deux*.

An initial response to this interpretation of Beckett would be to suggest that it is dependent on a wilfully naive reading. Nina Power and Alberto Toscano, editing the collected writings of Badiou on Beckett, call it a strong reading (Power and Toscano 2003). This is especially the case with Badiou's argument about what he calls love. Now, even if the latter has a philosophical specificity in the hands of Badiou which might be resistant to criticism, Badiou effectively elides the *literary* specificity of Beckett's text. In doing so he is enabled to rewrite Beckett on "the clothes line of memory" (*P*): the lovers on the boat among the rocks in *Krapp's Last Tape* become from Badiou's perspective alternately sentimental detritus in the author's (Beckett's) memory and frozen in a keepsake in a play remodelled to include a soap-opera style analepsis. In this his reading is not as far from the supposedly humanist readings to which his work is explicitly set up as a direct challenge.

Beckett and literary form

In *A Thousand Plateaus* writing is given a privileged link to the *informe* (512).³² One writes, write Deleuze and Guattari, at the same level as that of an unformed matter. It is now time to suggest a way in to the work of Beckett, one which will display the Abstract Machine (*through attention to assemblages at the edge of the abstract machine*) of Beckett's oeuvre without merely applying the model which it might provide. The Abstract Machine is at times coextensive in the thought of Deleuze & Guattari with the plane of immanence and with 'a life' - the latter of which has a special relationship with literature in Deleuze's work; upon this plane there are only relations of speeds and of slownesses, "a plane of proliferation, peopling, contagion; but this proliferation has nothing to do with an evolution, the development of a form or the filiation of forms....it is...an involution, in which form is constantly being

³² For more on this see Sch erer's essay on Deleuze's "four formulas" (Sch erer YR).

dissolved, freeing times and speeds”. Involution is a modality of folding, but is not confined to a *formative* function. Deleuze’s vitalism has been the source for many of the objections raised against him; equally however it has inspired some of his most fervent supporters, notably in respect of this specific element of his thought, Brian Massumi and Keith Ansell Pearson. It is on the grounds of his vitalism that Badiou bases his critique of the Deleuzian adherence to continua. The concept of the plane of immanence (sometimes also called – depending on the context – the plane of composition) is an antiarchitectonic concept which serves to oppose – but not in a dualistic way – the plane of organisation. When the Abstract Machine follows the vector toward the former it is veering by definition away from the yoke of the latter thereby freeing times and speeds. Badiou’s objection, made in the specific context of his discussion of *Le Pli: Leibniz et le baroque* (but which is in essence taken up elsewhere) is that the commitment which Deleuzian philosophy displays toward the fold, immanence, multiplicity, and flux in fact depends upon a presupposed “background of totality” (Badiou, in Boundas and Olkowski eds. 1994, 60). In the Leibnizian context in which this analysis takes place this makes Deleuze an advocate of “the Great Animal Totality” (63). So it is that apparently contrary to Deleuze’s intentions his concept of ‘a life’ is in fact a “captor of life”. For Agamben this would be wrong: by contrast to Aristotelian conception of life – as the ground, and the principle “allowing for the attribution of life to a subject” (in Khalifa ed. 2000, 162) - “a life” as conceived by Deleuze “is precisely what can never be attributed to a subject, being instead the matrix of infinite desubjectivation...a life marks the radical impossibility of establishing hierarchies and separations” (163). It is the failure to think the event as a founding separation for which Badiou ultimately criticises Deleuze. There will be an opportunity to return to the divergent responses to the work of Beckett as a writer of “stellar separation” (Badiou) and “abstract machine” (Deleuze and Guattari) in sections of chapters 3, 4 and 5.

A sense of the specific ways in which literature participates in the production of the abstract machine is given in an essential section of *A Thousand Plateaus*. There the authors consider the arts in terms of the specific planes which can be thought of as characterising

them. In music there is a sound plane (Deleuze and Guattari's example is from John Cage), in cinema a visual plane (Godard provides their example) and in literature a "writing plane". As far as the current study is concerned what the authors say of their example, Nathalie Sarraute, is instructive insofar as it articulates the specificity of the literature connection in Deleuze and Guattari. Sarraute establishes, the authors point out, a clear distinction between two planes of writing: a transcendent plan(e) that organises and develops forms (genres, themes, motifs) and assigns and develops subjects (personae, characters, feelings); and an altogether different plane that liberates the particles of an "anonymous matter", allowing them to communicate through the 'envelope' of forms and subjects, retaining between them only relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness, floating affects, so that the plane itself is perceived at the same time as it allows us to perceive the imperceptible - or what the authors call the "microplane" or the "molecular" plane (Deleuze & Guattari 1988, 267).³³

From the evidence of their three examples (Cage, Godard and Sarraute), Deleuze and Guattari conclude that form and subject are only inferred - they are not given on the plane - whereas what is given is unformed elements 'between' which (or pertaining to which) can be identified speeds and slownesses, and nonsubjectified powers between which pass affects. By contrast to a conception of the plane as giving rise to forms and subjects as an after-effect of the processes occurring upon that plane, if form and subject are only ever inferred, then the plane is coextensive and coterminous with that to which it gives rise. In short this is an immanentist as opposed to a transcendent conception of, in our example, the writing plane:

between substantial forms and determined subjects, between the two, there is not only a whole operation of demonic local transports but a natural play of haecceities, degrees, intensities, events, and accidents that compose individuations totally different from those of the well-formed subjects that receive them. (253)

In exploring philosophy and Samuel Beckett *after* Deleuze and Guattari, then, it will be

³³ The fundamental accord between Deleuze's concept of sense (as developed in *The Logic of Sense*) and the later collaborative concept of the plane of immanence is indisputable.

necessary to observe the extent to which his own work concerns demonic local transports. To this end the next chapter combines the dual tasks which the book sets itself by discussing the philosophical problems of form and the one and the many in tandem with specific contributions to these problems by Deleuze and Guattari. It begins with *Murphy*'s demented particulars before moving on to consider the demonic transport system of *The Lost Ones*.