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“Astral language” or “aphasiac image”?: the strange proximity of Badiou and Deleuze in the ruins of Beckett’s *Worstward Ho*

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This is a version of a paper delivered at the Beckett centenary conference held at University College Cork, May 26-27, 2006. It was subsequently published under the title ‘Stellar Separation or Abstract Machine? Badiou and Deleuze and Guattari on Beckett’ in Beckett Re-Membered: After the Centenary, edited by James Carney, Michael O’Sullivan, Leonard Madden and Karl White (Cambridge Scholars Press), pp. 92-107, ISBN 1443835005. This is a pre-publication version of the paper as it appeared in the latter publication.

In the most important study to date of the respective use of Beckett’s writings in the work of Deleuze and Badiou, Jean-Jacques Lecercle concludes by surmising that “Perhaps the close proximity, in the French edition, of Deleuze’s essay, ‘The Exhausted’, to Beckett’s own text, is indeed more than a fortunate coincidence: perhaps it is a symptom”.¹ For, Lecercle, despite his long-term support for Deleuze and indeed despite his misgivings concerning Badiou’s characteristically strong reading of Beckett, decides that there may be, after all, something more compelling in the Badiou than in the less consistent Deleuze. This may also be, he suggests, attributable to Deleuze’s own modernism as a writer, which, though it gives him greater access to, and understanding of, the materiality of Beckett’s writing (Deleuze has, after all, his own *écriture*, not least in *Anti-Oedipus*), also in the final analysis, renders his reading of Beckett somewhat orthodox. By contrast, the defiantly declarative and unhesitatingly dogmatic reading advanced by Badiou, is able to disclose strikingly original insights, not least because of the co-implication and reversibility of the readings of Badiou-Beckett and Beckett-Badiou. This essay seeks to examine the symptomatology of one text in particular as it operates and produces or is indicative of symptoms in the work of Badiou and Deleuze respectively.²

Alain Badiou’s affinity for the work of Beckett is emphatically declared by the author when he describes his encounter with it as “a subjective blow of sorts which left an indelible mark.”³ However the feeling of kinship which would rapidly develop in this self-styled young “cretin” extends ultimately to his consideration of Beckett’s layte short prose work *Worstward Ho* as a “philosophical treatise.” Gilles Deleuze, for his part, considered Beckett the author of an important oeuvre which could deliver to philosophy an especially rich and rigorous version of literature’s untimely pedagogy, whereby the discipline might demolish the dogmatic image of thought to which it has always been susceptible. Further to weave the threads of proximity together, each philosopher also acknowledged the importance of the other’s work, with Badiou publishing a book review and later a book on Deleuze, and Deleuze commenting in

¹ Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Badiou and Deleuze Read Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010). I present a case for the consideration of the publication contexts in my own *Abstract Machines*.

² That it engaged with the thought of Lecercle before the published version of the present text led to the necessity to reframe it once, while the article was in press, Lecercle came to advance the insights contained in his earlier statements. The chronology of research, writing and publication fortuitously contributed to my engagement with Lecercle’s position, which was able, now to occupy this presiding position.

³ Badiou, Alain, *On Beckett*, edited and translated by Nina Power and Alberto Toscano, Postface by Andrew Gibson (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003), 37.

some detail on Badiou's theory of the event (a concept central to Badiou's reading of Beckett). In any case, the reading of Beckett which each produces must, on some level, be considered in the context of the larger philosophical projects of which they formed part, including their own *strange proximity* to each other.⁴

A *proximity* which is *strange* would combine convergence and divergence, both a recognition and a challenge to that recognition, in the manner of the uncanny for Freud. Badiou evokes the notion himself in his chapter title, for his study of Deleuze, "De si loin! de si pres!," and in its opening statement: "My non-rapport with Gilles Deleuze is a strange story."⁵ The relation of non-relation of Badiou and Deleuze may be examined with reference to the text by Beckett which for each philosopher functions as the culminating point (in ways other than strictly chronologically) in the author's project. *Worstward Ho*, the final prose piece to be published in the author's lifetime, is for Badiou a summation of the concerns of the late prose (after *Comment c'est*). *Worstward Ho* is a "philosophical treatise" in which there is *no latent poem*.⁶ Moreover, by virtue of the existence of intertextual traces in *Worstward Ho* of the entire *œuvre*, the late prose piece amounts to a "table of contents" (81) of the corpus.⁷ For Deleuze the text represents the extension into prose of the innovation worked out in the plays for television whereby Beckett attains 'the image' (understood in a technical sense outlined in "L'Épuisé," but also only being worked towards after and including the same pivotal novel, *Comment c'est*). For Badiou *Worstward Ho* is a kind of 'Discourse on Method', for Deleuze a 'Monadology'. This is a distinction apt for differentiating the two quite distinct conceptions of multiplicity. For, although both Badiou and Deleuze share Beckett's enjoyment of one in particular of the many "little pictures" furnished by Leibniz – a recursive infinity of fish within ponds within fish within ponds, from such a metaphor they will each produce quite different readings of Leibnizian manifold. Badiou is committed to a numerical, quantitative, extensive and actual multiple, while Deleuze endorses qualitative, intensive and virtual multiplicities, "the Great Animal Totality" as Badiou describes it.⁸

For Badiou, *Worstward Ho* is a commitment, an engagement which produces effects which he defines as *courage*: "Worsening is a labour, and inventive and arduous effectuation of the imperative of saying. Being an effort, holding to the worstward ho demands courage" (96). For Deleuze the procedure of worsening produces the effect of what he calls the *image*:

⁴ Gibson shows how on the one hand Badiou's approach to Beckett is of a piece with his larger philosophical project while also arguing on the other how there are fascinating divergences occasioned by the specificity of Beckett's oeuvre in Badiou's imaginary.

⁵ Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: "La clameur de l'Être"* (Paris: Hachette, 1995), 7.

⁶ *On Beckett*, 80. "Stirrings Still" and "Comment dire" were both published after *Worstward Ho*. For Lecercle *Worstward Ho* has a latent philosophy not a latent poem (Badiou and Deleuze, 134).

⁷ Badiou, *On Beckett*, 81. Strictly speaking, it is, as Badiou himself points out, an essay on the Edith Fournier translation, *Cap au pire* alone (*On Beckett*, xxxvi). A comparable point regarding the place of *Worstward Ho* is made by Enoch Brater: "Far from being abstract, however, the piece involves nothing less than an 'inventory' and a reconsideration of the complete Beckett vocabulary" (Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, 1994, 136). For Gibson it is a "résumé, even a *mise-en-abîme* of the Beckettian trajectory" (Gibson, "Beckett and Badiou," 99). For Bersani and Dutoit, the work is in this respect an "opaque monad" (*Arts of Impoverishment*, 84).

⁸ Alain Badiou, "Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*." In Boundas and Olkowski eds., *Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy*, 51-69 (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 63.

The image is not defined by the sublimity of its content but by its form, that is, by its ‘internal tension’, or by the force it mobilises to create a void or to bore holes, to loosen the grip of words, to dry up the oozing of voices, so as to free itself from memory and reason: a small, alogical, amnesiac, and almost aphasiac image, sometimes standing in the void, sometimes shivering in the open. The image is not an object but a process.⁹

The inspiration for Deleuze’s theory of the image is Bergsonian (hence in part Badiou’s critique of vitalism in Deleuze). Both outcomes are described in language which suggests on the one hand a dynamism and on the other a solid endurance in the face of annihilation. Superficially, in these two statements of what for each author is the essential operation of *Worstward Ho*, there is apparently quite a bit in common. For each, the procedure of worsening is a labour with a pedagogical and demonstrative force. However, as we shall see, the distinct presiding spatial metaphors of each philosopher with regard to the work of literature (*qua* work of art) mean that they nonetheless speak radically opposed languages here which refuse translation into the terms of the other. I propose to call these idioms, in the language of each in turn, “astral language” and “aphasiac image.”

Multiples and ‘mimeticians’

At the risk of falling foul of the same problem which, in the view of Lecercle, compromises Badiou’s own approach to literature, and which is also in the eyes of some an insistent contradiction in that of Deleuze, let us begin with a transposition of the ‘action’ of *Worstward Ho* to the restricted and reductive exigencies of a certain type of literary-critical endeavour, the genre of synopsis.¹⁰ A being, defined by its emergence and withdrawal on to a scene, of what one might describe as ‘presencing’ (or disposition), is entrained by a series of experiments which will see it practice what the early Beckett story “Ding Dong” called “gression”, and in the course of this process of displacement, will attempt, *inter alia*, to summon itself as the addressee of its own utterance, to stand up and/or out, to experience a kind of community, and finally be subject to a collapse which may also be a consolidation into fixed fragments.

Ultimately for all here, for Beckett as much as for Deleuze and for Badiou, what is at stake is a question pertaining to the status of the work of art. Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* had formulated the question thus: “When the modern work of art develops its permutating series and its circular structures, it indicates to philosophy a path leading to the abandonment of representation.”¹¹ In *Logic of Sense* Lewis Carroll,

⁹ L’Épuisé.” In Samuel Beckett, *Quad*, 57-106. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1992. “The Exhausted.” *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Trans Daniel Smith and Michael Greco. London: Verso, 1998. Deleuze, “L’Épuisé,” 159.

¹⁰ Lecercle comments: “when he does give a close commentary of a Mallarmé poem (as I said, a model reading), he begins, *horrible dictu* for the average literary critic, by giving a prose paraphrase of the text” (Cantor, Lacan, Mao, Beckett, même combat,” 11): the reference is to what Badiou himself describes as the “retrieval” of the “latent prose” of Mallarmé’s poem (*Conditions*, 110). Lecercle, in his later study, points out how Badiou’s reading of the event in *Ill Seen Ill Said* only works by virtue of two distortions: the event is only mentioned once and in a passage more abstract than the rest of the text, and Badiou omits the opening and closing sentence of the paragraph from which the quoted passage is extracted, the omitted words being quite undermining of his argument regarding the passage’s “gleam of hope”.

¹¹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 68-9.

Stéphane Mallarmé and Jorge Luis Borges combine to offer the philosopher several installments of this pedagogy. What is to be abandoned is a regime in the service of the philosophical thought of time as Chronos. The undoing of Chronos sets free the other time, the time out of joint, of Aion, the third synthesis of time.¹² This is the temporality of suspension, of the infinite within the interstice. Hence, in his study of the television plays, Deleuze finally succeeds in giving systematic shape to the Beckett who had appeared so frequently in his writing. When he does so, however, it is in a manner inseparable from the earlier concerns in *Logic of Sense*.

While “L’Épuisé” is about the television plays, it is also to be accounted for by the late consolidation in Deleuze of one of his enduring concerns (in *Proust and Signs* for example) regarding writing – style. Lecercle has argued that, through the concept of style in the final book *Critique et clinique*, Deleuze attempts to overcome the tension between the high modernist in him and the “second poetics” which emerges through his collaborations with Guattari. ‘Style’ names this tension.¹³ In adopting the term, Lecercle claims that Deleuze wished to distance his thought from Barthes and Derrida.¹⁴ It gestures towards domains other than literature, for example painting and general behaviour:

style is a name not for a form of diction (the choice of the proper, or the metaphorical, word), not for a structure of signifiers, not for a deliberate organisation of language, not even for the result of spontaneous inspiration, but for the discord, the disequilibrium, the stuttering that affect language at its most alive.¹⁵

This contextualisation helps one to grasp the stakes which *Worstward Ho* represents in the essay. It is referred to twice as an example of the procedures of Language III, which find their ideal form in the pieces for television according to Deleuze. The image, Deleuze argues in a Bergsonian vein, is not a representation of an object; rather it is “a movement in the world of the mind.”¹⁶ As Keith Ansell Pearson has demonstrated, if Deleuze takes from Bergson the “unorthodox conception of matter as an aggregate of images,” he also departs from Bergson in his positing of the reservoir of virtuality which this latter conception entails not as *durée*, but rather as a “becoming of the infinite at any moment.”¹⁷ *Language III* relates neither to enumerable and combinable objects, nor to emitting voices, but to “immanent limits which do not cease to displace themselves.”¹⁸ It is linked to the “pure image” gestured towards in Beckett’s title *Imagination, Dead Imagine*. The pure image, in Deleuze’s neo-Bergsonian formulation, is not to be confused with the object of an idealism; rather what is being proposed is a materialist conception of the image. Language, under the emphasis which *Language III* brings to bear on it, proceeds (even if this is too teleological a manner to describe the displacement at work) to immanent limits. *Language III*, Deleuze argues, makes its first appearance in *How It Is* but becomes dominant only in the late plays for television *Quad*, *Nachte und Träume*, *Ghost Trio*

¹² See Bernard, “Les deux temps de Beckett.”

¹³ Lecercle, *Deleuze and Language*, 218.

¹⁴ Ibid., 220.

¹⁵ Ibid. 221.

¹⁶ Deleuze, “L’Épuisé,” 169.

¹⁷ Ansell Pearson, 142; 151

¹⁸ Deleuze, “L’Épuisé,” 158.

and ‘...but the clouds...’. But it is also there in *Worstward Ho*.¹⁹

Badiou on Deleuze

In a text published in *Court traité d’une ontologie transitoire*, Badiou, in opposition to Deleuze, has argued that “the work of art is in fact the only finite thing that exists...art is the creation of an intrinsically finite multiple, a multiple that exposes its own organisation in and by the finite framing of its presentation and that turns this border into the stakes of its existence.”²⁰ This is for Badiou a given. The consequence is that in the romantic conception of the work of art, in which lineage he positions Deleuze, art is the only truth there is. As such it would be, in Badiou’s conception of art as the only finite thing, equivalent to the “descent of the infinite-true into finitude.”²¹ It is for his continuation of this heritage that Deleuze must be criticised according to Badiou. His schema of art as configuring the chaotic infinite within the finite is, for Badiou, a schema of incarnation: “every fusion of the event and truth returns us to a ‘Christly’ vision of truth, because a truth is then nothing but its own eventual self-revelation.”²²

Elsewhere, in an appraisal sketched in the introduction to *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Deleuze is to be found in the unlikely company of the Hegelian tradition which conceives of 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.”²³ Not alone does Deleuze foreclose art as a form of thought with its own specificity, in Badiou’s estimation he also bars the opening to the infinite which by rights, in his view, is 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 dupe 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.”²⁴

Véronique Bergen has provided a detailed analysis of Badiou’s criticism of Deleuze. She shows how Badiou argues that Deleuze’s concept of the powers of the false is in fact the Deleuzian name for truth.²⁵ As Badiou sees it, the problem in Deleuze’s concept, which Deleuze himself devises as part of his aim to overturn Platonism and challenge the image of thought it bequeaths to philosophy, is that a true virtual totalisation of actual forms of the false is “one and the same thing as the eternity of the true.”²⁶ Bergen argues that in order to arrive at this conclusion Badiou has collapsed two distinct syntheses of time which in their original formulation are in fact carefully differentiated by Deleuze. The second synthesis of time is precisely inadequate in Deleuze’s account because it remains bound to representational thought.²⁷ The third synthesis – which goes by many names in Deleuze’s thought – is that of “time out of joint.” It is in the *encounter* and the disorder of the faculties

¹⁹ This is something on which Lecercle does not comment in his chapter.

²⁰ Badiou, *Short Treatise*, 11.

²¹ Ibid., 11.

²² Ibid.

²³ Badiou, *Handbook*, 10.

²⁴ Ibid. 11.

²⁵ Badiou, *Deleuze*, 89.

²⁶ Ibid., 91.

²⁷ Bergen, “A propos de la formule de Badiou,” 21

occasioned by the encounter that the new emerges for Deleuze (in his essentially modernist conception of experimentation and novelty).²⁸ However, once syntheses two and three are collapsed into one, as Badiou does, all novelty would thereby be reduced to a “selection of the past folded” and deprived, precisely, of its untimely (*intempestive*) dimension.²⁹ As Bergen argues, what Badiou does here is to condemn thought to the circle of foundation which is, precisely, criticised by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*.³⁰ The disorienting and rupturing force of the virtual in the temporality of Aion, which would, in Deleuze’s schema, fracture the harmonious deployment of memory, is thereby “limited to the orthodoxy of a vocation to the true.”³¹

This perspective on Deleuze helps to reveal the broader orientation of Badiou’s reading of Beckett, in which he will also declare himself, in his own terms, “a platonist of the multiple.” It also throws into relief quite to what extent the opposed readings of Beckett derive from incommensurable conceptions of multiplicity on the one hand and limit on the other. In another essay, this time devoted to Deleuze alone, Juliette Simont provides an inventory of what is lost once Badiou’s collapsing of the two syntheses of time restores Platonic conformity to the would-be dislocated Deleuzean universe presided over by a time that is out of joint:

The event only takes place in a linear time, free from all Gods, without origin or destination and which extends infinitely in both directions, past and future [...] the collapse of our stable mental limits (God, the Self, the closed universe, etc.) commits us to those strange *voyages to the limit*, where ‘limit’ does not designate what comforts us, the implicit harmony of the circle, but rather what constantly escapes us: the instant infinitely sectioned or spread along the line of time, the caesura which turns the 0 into a 1 and exhausts the 1 into a 0.³²

For Deleuze certain literary authors were capable of such voyages to the limit. To the list of authors whom Deleuze admired because they lived these voyages whether through alcoholism (in the case of Lowry for example), transgression (Klossowski being an interesting case for Deleuze by virtue of his semi-autobiographical ‘porno-theology’), or other forms of dispossession of self, he himself frequently adds the name of Beckett. If one accepts Badiou’s critique of Deleuzean multiplicity, however, then Deleuze (and Guattari’s) ‘staging’ of Beckett’s writing (to adopt the formulation of Timothy Murphy) participates in voyages to the limit which are revealed as mere phantom trips, hallucinatory reveries of the critical imagination brought on by over-identification (in perhaps the same way as Rancière argues is a problem for Deleuze on literature in general).

The principal generative metaphor in his account of the dissipation of Beckett’s prose (worsening in *Worstward Ho*) by the medium Badiou calls ‘poeticisation’ is that of the *latent poem*. This is the architectural metaphor of generative *arche*, albeit fastened on to Plato rather than to Aristotle. It is to the generic categories of humanity in the

²⁸ For a reading of the three Beckett texts collected as *Nohow On* in terms of ‘the encounter’ see Murphy, “Only Intensities Subsist.”

²⁹ Bergen, “A propos de la formule de Badiou,” 22.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 23

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Simont, “Intensity, or the Encounter,” 47.

Sophist rather than to the *Timaeus* that Badiou turns in order to taxonomise Beckett's "atemporal determinants of humanity." However the quest is for a *place* of being. Badiou attaches great importance to the identification and naming in fiction, *as fiction* of this place, and indeed he indicates the closed space works as key in this regard. But there are also open places: "In these open places the arrangement of the fiction seeks to capture in language the conversion times of being into nothingness."³³

Closed place and open place – these two *prosodic* entities – eventually fuse together he claims. Resuming the spatial metaphor, Badiou describes the prosodic construction of the place of being. Being *stands* towards non-being (in particular *Worstward Ho* discloses the point of transit from being to nothingness) in unclear, ambiguous and oscillating equivalence, but only in prose.

There is evidence here of a presupposition of a subject which, in naming the place, stands apart through the distance introduced in the act of naming. In this context the destitution or ruination of the voice is borne by and generated by 'poeticisation.' Thus the switch of genre becomes the generative source, and provides the essentially nourishing *choratic* hospitality: "on a background of anonymous being, the bustle of plural humanity, so as to classify its postures and inventory its functions."³⁴ In what he describes as such Dantean laboratories of the intermezzine space as *The Lost Ones* the classification of the plural humanity can commence. These are for Badiou the *generic* figures of humanity.

The difference between the reading proposed here and that of Deleuze may be posed, then, in terms of the distinction between the nominalism which characterises the 'roman familial' of psychoanalysis and the 'realism' of Deleuze (and Guattari). Love, the Two: these Badiou categorically states derive directly from the relationship of Samuel Beckett and Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil. If he is not building a domicile and situating himself in a relationship of identification not without its oedipal dimensions – as Gibson reports Badiou feels a link to Beckett partly because his own father also served in the Resistance – he is enclosing the work in a constellation which is also a facade – a face: the three pins of *Worstward Ho*.³⁵ The operation of the Beckettian text serves to perfect and complete the partition, the founding and instituting separation of the hermeneutic facing and countenancing.

Not that Deleuze's reading of Beckett is without its problems. Deleuze's commitment to a literature which will be an example of molecular revolution in action (that is in performance) through its formal properties, and deliberate transgression of good form, would appear, at first sight, to be compromised by his placing of the burden of that transgression on *character*.³⁶ In this respect Deleuze could be said merely to rearrange the terrain of mimesis rather than sunder it irrevocably, according to the aim, described by Rancière, as "the metaphysics of Maya's veil torn off, the wall of representation pierced to the groundless ground, the place where thought discovers its

³³ Badiou, *On Beckett*, 49.

³⁴ Badiou, *On Beckett*, 60.

³⁵ Badiou, *On Beckett*, 110.

³⁶ To cite merely one example of such a focus on character featuring Beckett, in *What is Philosophy?* Mercier and Camier are cited as examples of characters who become gigantic in literature by virtue of being "swollen by a life that no lived perception can attain" (171).

power is identical with the power of matter.”³⁷ Overturning Platonism would be a simple rearrangement of the furniture. Deleuze’s poetics constantly falls short of succeeding in the maintenance of the “purity of the rupture” from the world of representation.³⁸ Literature of the sort which produces itself by making itself invisible, through the operation of style – exemplified by Flaubert – ends up betraying its own poetics. As Rancière states, such a literature fails to safeguard the link to the “logic of sensation that grounds them.”³⁹ On two fronts literature falls back into the “mimetic universe”; on the one hand through incorporating that universe in the shape of “atmospheres” and on the other through the integration of the components of the work into an organic entity consonant with the very Platonic and Aristotelian principles of totality which the poetics set out to destabilise.⁴⁰ Deleuze’s response to this betrayal is, on Rancière’s account, to “bring literature back to its essential rupture from the world of representation.”⁴¹ For Deleuze, Beckett “[o]ppose[s] a purely intensive use of language to all symbolic or even significant or simply signifying uses of it. Arrive at a perfect and unformed expression, a materially intense expression.”⁴² He does so, specifically, in proceeding, in Deleuze’s own terms, “by dryness and sobriety, a willed poverty, pushing deterritorialisation to such an extreme that nothing remains but intensities.”⁴³ Thus perhaps Beckett is the author who seems to need least intervention from the critic in order to return literature to the powers betrayed by a failure to keep the rupture pure.

Scission and schizzes

Despite his invocation of the word surface of *Worstward Ho* at the close of “L’Épuisé,” if Deleuze is apt to find the burden of multiplicity to lie squarely with the specifically “eccentric” (as Rancière puts it) character, then it is worth examining the role of character in Badiou’s own differently reductive template.⁴⁴ Andrew Gibson has located the crux of the matter in the Lacanian doctrine adopted by Badiou of the scission which inaugurates the process of subjectification. One of the many definitions of this process and its maintenance as far as Badiou’s Beckett is concerned is: renounce interpretation in favour of naming.⁴⁵ A specific instance of how not to do this is the character of Watt. Watt’s interests, as Gibson reminds us, are hermeneutic.⁴⁶ Instead, then, of accommodating the event as a stimulus for thought, Watt misses it and “turns ineluctably towards origin and repetition,” in other words towards interpretation. This is undeniably the Watt of the first half, and Gibson is correct to warn us that Badiou only concerns himself with a few passages from sections concerning Watt’s stay in Mr Knott’s house. What is worth pausing on is the fact that Badiou, like Deleuze, but with quite a different objective, focuses on

³⁷ Rancière, *Flesh*, 150.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁴² Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 19

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*: “That is what style is, or rather the absence of style—asyntactic, agrammatical: the moment when language is no longer defined by what it says, even less by what makes it a signifying thing, but by what causes it to move, to flow, and to explode—desire. For literature is like schizophrenia: a process and not a goal, a production and not an expression” (133).

⁴⁵ Gibson, *Beckett and Badiou*, 160.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 158.

character. For Badiou this focus is mediated through the process of subjectification and for Deleuze of schizo-becomings.

The process of subjectification for Badiou begins in the recognition of a rift in the subject and an acknowledgement of the Two. It is in this context that Badiou's concept of Love is important. As far as Badiou on Beckett is concerned, his discussion of *Krapp's Last Tape* is the occasion for the clearest account of Love in the context of the scission which inaugurates the process of subjectification. Love is the encounter which confirms the scission, for Badiou as much as for Lacan, to whose thought he is fundamentally committed on this topic. Love, which is said to "depend upon a pure event: an encounter whose strength radically surpasses both sentimentality and sexuality", institutes the Two: "It induces a severance, a break with the One of the cogito" and opens the "passage to the limitless multiple without the limitations of Being."⁴⁷ As we have already seen, the reading of *Worstward Ho* wends its way toward another version of the limitless multiple, having gone through the phase of the Two (filial in this instance rather than amorous).

Suture and Beckettian inaesthetics

As Gibson comments, "The trouble with Badiou's reading of the plays is that it is more consistent with his philosophy than with the plays themselves."⁴⁸ But on this Beckett and Badiou concur: the event is rare. For both the event is rare, but for Badiou luminous and simple, for Beckett, who thinks the event from the point of view of the remainder, it takes the form of the "limit-figure" which, precisely, is *unclear*. In Beckett this "the event appears only in second-order, muted, veiled, distorted, equivocal, or compromised forms. These limit-figures prevent any clear separation of potentiality from impotentiality."⁴⁹ Deleuze's figure of the image however is only *opposed* to this limit figure if we accept Badiou's reading of Deleuzian multiplicity.

There are, commentators have been quick to point out, a wide range of problems with regard to the approach to literature of each philosopher. In particular Rancière has been critical of each on the grounds of quite distinct reductionisms.⁵⁰ In the case of Badiou he asks if within Badiou's conception of 'the poem' (key to his argument concerning Beckett), the latter is in fact allowed to say "only that which the philosopher needs it to say, and that it feigns to discover in the surprise of the poem."⁵¹ The poem, in this account, requires philosophy to dictate to it, or to ventriloquise its orientations (*sens*) on its behalf.⁵² According to Rancière, Deleuze,

⁴⁷ On Beckett, 28.

⁴⁸ Gibson, *Beckett and Badiou*, 233.

⁴⁹ Gibson, *Beckett and Badiou*, 290. In "Mimique" Mallarmé cedes the place of commentary and hands his own criticism over to the authority of fiction, of an account by the performer-turned-commentator (or Mallarmé as his mimic) of his own performance. This performance is said itself to be the milieu, the membrane. Which manoeuvre places Mallarmé's text on that very membrane itself, in that very milieu.

⁵⁰ "[E]very other poem that allows itself to be bent to the same demonstration, to be assigned the same task of speaking twice, to say the same event of the Idea twice: the first time as a maxim, the second time as an enigma (Rancière cited Lecercle, 136).

⁵¹ Rancière, *Malaise*, 109. For Badiou, in the 1994 essay "Language, Thought, Poetry," "The poem does not exist in communication. The poem has nothing to communicate. It is only a saying, a declaration that draws authority from itself alone" (*Theoretical Writings*, 239).

⁵² "It seems to me we are back with the conception of philosophy defended by Third International Marxism under the name of dialectical materialism: one claims to respect the capacity of each science to produce its type of knowledge independently, and the task of philosophy is to produce the general

by contrast, as we have seen, “privileges narratives that reveal, in their fable, what literature performs in its own work” (153), and in so doing relies too heavily on the labour of the “eccentric character”. The problem is exacerbated, as we have observed, when it comes to their responses to Beckett.⁵³ Hence, for Gibson, the encounter with Beckett in fact exposes problems extending far beyond Badiou’s reading of Beckett which have repercussions, unacknowledged by Badiou himself, and ramifications for his broader philosophical oeuvre.

Nonetheless, regardless of the distinct readings and the divergent philosophical outlooks, there is a remarkable proximity in the frozen, still, composed and arrested form the ‘final state’ of *Worstward Ho* takes for Badiou and Deleuze. The final state, which is the state Beckett achieves by virtue of his method of exhaustion, for Deleuze, is ‘the image’, a small, broken aphasiac image which stands sometimes in the open, sometimes in the void; the completion which Badiou finds, by contrast, lies, via the glimpse of the exit in the frozen picture of critical recognition as redemption, of a Mallarméan constellation: “the slow construction of a world fashioned so as to allow one to see – in a far-away point – the pinhole that saves us: through this hole truth and courage come.”⁵⁴ One might ask, faced with this text in particular, the text named after a trajectory and an exhortation, irresistibly luring our philosophers along its broken path, ruined with the sort of reversals, erasures, stumbling progress and divergent bifurcation errancy to which each philosopher in his way is not fully attuned, in what ways the text speaks to their larger projects. With Deleuze it speaks to his scattered observations on Beckett’s writing in its *style*. With Badiou it speaks to his *system*. Badiou recognises himself (by means of de-suture), Deleuze not (by virtue of untimely pedagogy).⁵⁵

For Mallarmé, in his prose piece “L’action restreinte,” writing is an inverted mirror effect wherein the astral alphabet is an interruptive force against which the *activity of writing* labours: “Tu remarquas, on n’écrit pas, lumineusement, sur champ obscur, l’alphabet des astres, seul, ainsi s’indique, ébauché ou interrompu; l’homme poursuit noir sur blanc.”⁵⁶ The metaphor of two writings countenancing one another is apt when it comes to considering the contributions of Deleuze and Badiou to the study of the work of Beckett, as it also is to their commentaries on each other’s philosophical systems. In the context of a finitude which the activity of criticism brings to literature,

laws (the laws of the dialectic) that apply to every science and compossibilise all sciences. By this means philosophy, which claims to be the servant of science, ‘miraculously’ recovers its position of superiority, as the science of generalities” (136).

⁵³ Bruno Clément makes a distinction between what he calls *mimetic criticism* which says only what the work says (a tradition exemplified by Blanchot) and *philosophical criticism* which he defines as often giving the impression of making Beckett’s text say something other than what it manifestly articulates (Clément, “Ce que les philosophes font,” 222). Rancière, it should be noted, does not directly discuss the work of either Badiou or Deleuze on Beckett.

⁵⁴ Badiou, *On Beckett*, 77

⁵⁵ “By ‘inaesthetics’ [Badiou writes in an epigraph] I understand a relation of philosophy to art that, maintaining that art is itself a producer of truths, makes no claim to turn art into an object for philosophy. Against aesthetic speculation, inaesthetics describes the strictly intraphilosophical effects produced by the independent existence of some works of art.” (Badiou, *Handbook*). Systematicity is defined by Badiou as “the prerequisite of a complete configuration of the four generic conditions of philosophy....by means of an exposition that also exposes its expository rule, then it is of the essence of philosophy to be systematic” (*Manifesto*, 65).

⁵⁶ Mallarmé, “Mimique,” 203.

it is interesting to note the conclusive force of *Worstward Ho* for both Badiou and Deleuze. For Badiou the text is a summary which in fact passes over to the side of philosophy, for Deleuze it is an instance of the athleticism of the percept/affect at its most supple.⁵⁷ It enables, and one might argue, programmes, the collision between the thought of two of the 20th century's (and the 21st in the case of Badiou) most divergent philosophers, of two of its most *intensively* opposed philosophical systems. In his review of Deleuze's book *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* Badiou had referred to "Unfathomable proximity, within what bears the name 'philosophy,' of its intimate other, of its internal adversary."⁵⁸ That strange proximity also underpins their respective encounters with the work of Beckett.

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⁵⁷ 'Percepts' and 'affects'—which in ontological terms inhabit the equivalent place in literature to that occupied by concepts in philosophy—as these are understood by Deleuze and Guattari, are to be differentiated from perceptions and affections as such; by contrast to the latter, which belong to formed subjects, and to representational thought, the former pertain to the pre-subjective or larval subject.

⁵⁸ Badiou, "Gilles Deleuze," 69. See Thelma Sowley's introduction to *Deleuze: the Clamour of Being* for more on this strange philosophical proximity.

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