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Refiguring the Wordscape: Merleau-Ponty, Beckett and the Body

By

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University of California, Berkeley

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Abstract

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An understanding of language as a variant of physical space, developed by the French post-war thinker, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, offers a point of departure for reading Beckett's late linguistic experimentation, exemplified by *Worstward Ho* (1983) and presaged in the spatial mosaic of bodies in *Quad* (1981), which, despite its wordlessness, is still a literary experiment. Playing on the double meaning of the French word *sens* (meaning and direction), Merleau-Ponty suggests that the relation of the physical body to its space founds the possibility of signification (in linguistic and non-linguistic modalities). Beckett's work, which tends to resist the dominance of *semantic* modes of meaning, similarly locates the rudiments of linguistic *sens* in the physical body's relation to space, and induces reconfigurations within existing language on this model.

Beckett's literary experiments—especially the minimalist works associated with his *dernière esthétique*—far from conveying *despair* at the inevitability of meaninglessness, are engaged in an exploration of the modes and manners in which literary language (which is not necessarily verbal, given *Quad*) forms and fashions "meaning." Works such as *L'innommable* (1953) and *Worstward Ho,* through syntactical deviations, reversals of letters and texturing of sounds, lay bare the somatic and spatial foundations of linguistic meaning as *sens,* while reconfiguring everyday language so as to affect the reader (viewer or listener) by means of unexpected aesthetic forms and associative links between sensations.

This reading of Beckett's experimental syntax as a bodily re-orientation of existing linguistic terrain builds on recent literature in Beckett studies, which is phenomenological insofar as it argues for the centrality of the body and the senses in Beckett's work. Attention to sensuous elements in Beckett might be said to constitute a "fourth wave" of Beckett studies; the edited volume, *Beckett and Phenomenology* (Continuum: 2009), strives to rectify tendencies among existentialist-humanist, formalist-poststructuralist and "empiricist" critics (those who focus on the emerging "gray canon" of Beckett's letters and manuscript drafts) to underemphasize the sensory—not always pleasant—experience of the lived body in Beckett's work. One critic, Ulrike Maude, explicitly engages Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "body-subject" in her argument for the centrality of the

body to Beckett's aesthetic (*Beckett, Technology and the Body*, Cambridge: 2009). My emphasis on the physical body's orientation of space as integral to the poetic and experimental reconfiguration of "meaning" weaves elements of post-humanist, poststructuralist analyses (that emphasize Beckettian language) with more humanist (even "phenomenological") approaches concerned with the experience of the physical body in Beckett's work.

But my dissertation is neither a phenomenological reading of Beckett nor an attempt to illuminate the doctrines of phenomenology with the wisdom of dramatic or literary performance. Rather, reading Beckett with and against Merleau-Ponty reveals a convergence between the body and language—a convergence that supports aesthetic alternatives to semantic meaning and reconfigurations (of language and experience) achievable by experimental literary practices such as Beckett's.

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Introduction

In the spring following the centennial of Beckett's birth, an exhibition at the Centre Pompidou featured a projection of *Quad* (1981). In this short play for television, four bodies in brightly colored robes bent forward, "braced as if against a cold wind,"[1] pace patterns across a white square to the beat of percussion instruments, unseen in the shadowy background. The museum visitor is presented with the hypnotic weaving of colorful bodies into, across and out of the pane of light on the wall of the exhibition space. Less than one loop of the fifteen-minute tape reveals the canon structure of this "ballet for television": each body traces its trajectory, its entrance timed precisely, and skirts, counter-clockwise, a center point, avoiding collision with the others. One has the impression of the endless circulation of bodies crossing and re-crossing, flooding and emptying of color and form the space of the illumined square.

The organizers of the Pompidou exhibit, probably to suggest an *enchaînement* between Beckett and minimalism in the visual arts (the work of Sol LeWitt, Robert Ryman and Richard Serra), describe *Quad* as a *reduction* to essential elements. Its spare setting, wordlessness and the uniform shape of the four bodies (slight, adolescent for preference, androgynous) are thought to evidence an interest in abstraction, pure form, and a winnowing down of sense data. An elimination of words, likewise, confirms the impossibility of expressing certain aspects of experience in verbal language. In this way, *Quad* is taken as representative of the "dernière esthétique de Beckett," which resolves in impasse, reduction, and abstraction towards pure form. Even if *Quad* is the "exemplaire des limites vers lesquelles l'écrivain veut aller," the exhibition literature at the Centre Pompidou labels it a "recherche prononcée de l'abstraction" and a grim allegory for human life: a movement from shadow to light to shadow.[2] Such minimalist interpretations of *Quad* find an analogue in Gilles Deleuze's essay "L'épuisé" (1992), which imagines *Quad* as a mathematical combinatorial designed to exhaust all of its possibilities.[3]

The canon of color and sound (each body is paired with a percussion instrument), the turn and torque of bodies, the kaleidoscopic variation of the white square, and the lively, irregular speeds of percussion all serve to resist interpretations of *Quad* as excessively bleak or as striving toward an exhaustion of possibilities. The sound of footsteps, the distinctive shuffle of the bodies and their human form, visible under their hooded robes, also complicate understandings of the piece as immaterial or purely abstract. This is not to say that mathematical permutations and geometrical patterning are

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[1] Jim Lewis, Beckett's cameraman, in a comment to Martha Fehsenfed. Quoted in "Beckett's Late Works: An appraisal," *Modern Drama* 25, (September 1982): 360.

[2] "Le carré abstrait, les figures analogues, l'absence totale de parole, le mouvement de sortie des danseurs à la lumière et de retour à l'obscurité, sont propres à la dernière esthétique de Beckett, de plus en plus réduite à des idées essentielles. Le retour aux ténèbres, après le bref intervalle sur la scène, est un mouvement qui peut traduire celui de la vie." Margherita Léoni-Figini, "Dossiers pédagogiques: Parcours Exposition Samuel Beckett," (March 2007), http://www.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/Ens-beckett/ENS-beckett.html, accessed 1 August 2011.

[3] Gilles Deleuze, "L'épuisé," *Quad et autres pièces pour la télévision,* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1992), 55-106.

unimportant to the piece, but that the accent should fall on the capacity of these repetitive paradigms to support mutation or change.

The curators of the Pompidou exhibit were right to identify in *Quad* themes that would dominate Beckett's late work, the *dernière esthétique* that reaches its zenith (or nadir) with the prose poem, *Worstward Ho* (1983). But rather than signaling mere diminution, reduction, exhaustion and immobility, *Quad* marks the institution of a style or mode of experimentation, in which the relation of the body to its space becomes the paradigm for reconfigurations of the field of language (in fiction). *Quad* typifies a development in Beckett's work whereby the body in space becomes a site of creative possibility, if not radical innovation.

There are important precedents for refusing to characterize Beckett as an author of impasse and despair. Indeed, such readings are usually associated with a first wave of existentialist-humanist Beckett criticism led by Hugh Kenner and Martin Esslin in the 1960's.[4] A second wave of readings, some of which extended formalist approaches and some of which associated Beckett with deconstruction, became especially prevalent in the 1990's. Though this approach yielded some fascinating, original readings, it did little to break the habit of situating Beckett's oeuvre on the side of impasse and despair.[5] More recent studies, on the other hand, have not only made existentialist readings *passé*, but have challenged renderings of Beckett's work as nihilist or despairingly absurdist, constituting what one scholar has named "third wave" Beckett criticism. This third wave is characterized by two approaches, which sometimes overlap: an empirical use of materials from Beckett's "gray canon" (biographical materials, theater notebooks, correspondence, reading notes and manuscripts, constituting a vast archive) and the tendency to read Beckett against specific, sometimes multiple, theoretical and philosophical horizons.[6]

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[4] Along with Hugh Kenner and Martin Esslin, Ruby Cohn and John Fletcher are also associated with first wave criticism, which, according to P.J. Murphy, tended to describe Beckett's work as existentialist and/or as formalist. P.J Murphy, *Critique of Beckett Criticism: A guide to research in English, French and German,* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994), 4.

[5] Such works are predominantly Anglophone and prevalent in the 1990's. Stanton B. Garner Jr., *Bodied Spaces* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) offers an excellent overview of the deconstructive criticism as it appears in Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), Lance St. John Butler and Robin J. Davis, eds., *Rethinking Beckett*: *A Collection of Critical Essays* (London: MacMillan, 1990), Thomas Tresize, *Into the Breach: Samuel Beckett and the Ends of Literature*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) and others. Garner, *Bodied spaces*, 18-26.

[6] Ulrike Maude follows P.J. Murphy and others in characterizing first wave Beckett criticism as "humanist-existentialist" and second wave criticism as poststructuralist. She describes third wave criticism as "divided into two schools that also at times productively overlap: empirical criticism which relies heavily on biography and the vast number of manuscripts, notebooks, and letters Beckett wrote, and an imaginative "fusion of horizons" […] consisting of readings produced by critics and philosophers 'who have known how to see in the oeuvres […] that which was appropriate to them,'" Ulrike Maude, "Review Essay, Centennial Beckett: The Gray Canon and the Fusion of Horizons," *Modernism/Modernity* 15, no. 1, (2008): 179–187. On the Gray Canon, see S.E. Gontarski, "Greying the Canon: Beckett in Performance," *Beckett after Beckett,* ed. S.E. Gontarski and Anthony Uhlmann, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 141-158.

Bruno Clément, in a study of three philosophical readings of Beckett, observes the tendency of philosophers to find in Beckett precisely their own philosophical agenda;[7] a particularly salient example is Alain Badiou, who views Beckett as a writer of the "event." Yet, despite a highly subjective reading on the part of the author of *L'Être et l'événement*, Badiou is one of the most vocal supporters of a Beckett characterized less by pessimism, nihilism and diminution than by an "openness to the unexpected"— "[l]'œuvre de Beckett va s'ouvrir au hasard, aux incidents, à des brusques modifications du donné"—and accentuates the tendency toward innovation in Beckett's work. For Badiou, Beckettian impasse and impotence is restricted to a middle period characterized by *L'innommable* and *Textes pour rien* and overcome with the publication of *Comment c'est*. From 1960, radical linguistic innovation (with a focus on syntax) breaks the closure of solipsism and opens the possibility of happiness. Badiou speculates, contrary to received wisdom, that in Beckett, "Il arrive que quelque chose arrive."[8] Despite its bias in favor of the event, Badiou's reading importantly contests a view of Beckett's work as a "nihilist denouement" displaying the "radical opacity of significations."[9]

Similarly, Theodor Adorno holds Beckett up as the exemplar of his philosophical aesthetics, dedicating his final work, *Aesthetic Theory*, to Beckett. For Adorno, Beckett's work constitutes a node of resistance (or of opacity) against the status quo—a determinate negation that, unlike the "committed" drama of Brecht and Sartre, offers a non-reactive critique of political reality. In particular, esoteric settings, the bizarreness of Beckett's inventions (bodies in trashcans) and the difficulty of assigning definitive meaning to events constitute enigmas that resist the status quo by gesturing toward alternative worlds or spaces, inaccessible though they may be. That Adorno's reading of *Fin de Partie*, on which he bases an early version of his argument,[10] was displeasing to

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[7] Bruno Clément, "What the Philosophers Do With Samuel Beckett," trans. Anthony Uhlmann, *Beckett After Beckett*, ed. S.E. Gontarski and Anthony Uhlmann (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 116-37. His examples are Alain Badiou, Gilles Deleuze, and Didier Anzieu.

[8] Alain Badiou, *Beckett: L'increvable désir*, (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 1995), 79.

[9] Badiou writes: "L'œuvre de Beckett va s'ouvrir au hasard, aux incidents, à des brusques modifications du donné, et ainsi, à l'idée du bonheur […] C'est pourquoi nous sommes tout à fait opposé à l'idée commune selon laquelle Beckett serait allé vers un dénuement nihiliste, vers une radicale opacité des significations," *L'increvable désir*, 39. He also claims: "L'oeuvre de Beckett, qu'on présent souvent comme un bloc, ou comme dirigée linéairement, quant au contenu, vers toujours plus de nihilisme, quant à la forme, vers toujours plus de concision, est en réalité un parcours complexe, dont les moyens littéraires sont très variés," 11. Badiou assimilates Beckett implicitly into his general aesthetics as follows: "[…] ces points d'exception, dont toute vérité procède, l'art a pour mission de les garder, de les faire briller, de les détenir, stellaires, dans le tissu reconstitué de notre patience. C'est un rude travail. Il y faut l'élément de la beauté, comme une sorte de la lumière diffuse dans les mots, un éclairage souterrain que nous avons nommé le poème latent de la prose. Un rythme, de rares couleurs, une nécessité contrôlée des images, la construction lente d'un monde fait pour laisser voir, en un point éloigné, le trou d'épingle qui nous sauve : par ce trou viennent à nous la vérité et le courage," 79-80. Badiou takes the image of the pinhole from Beckett's *Worstward Ho*. In *Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Andrew Gibson rightly criticizes Badiou for his aversion to pathos or melancholy, a condition that Gibson calls "pathophobia," 262.

[10] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (London: Continuum, 2004). See also "Trying to Understand Endgame [1961]" trans. Michael T. Jones, *New German Critique,* No. 26 (Spring-Summer 1982): 119-150. Adorno reads *Endgame* as reducing everything to the detritus of existence, claiming that this loss of meaning "undermines the dramatic form down to the innermost structure of its language," "Trying to

Beckett suggests that he appropriates Beckett for his own philosophical purposes.[11] It is nevertheless important that Adorno, like Badiou, links Beckett's oeuvre to strategies related to innovation (even if this innovation must occur by way of impasse).

Other philosophically inflected readings of Beckett imply that minimalism in Beckett's work may enable an expansion of creative possibilities. Deleuze expresses a subtle version of this idea in "L'épuisé": exhaustion is different from fatigue insofar as it exhausts *all* possibilities, thus, perhaps, revealing something insufficient about our thinking of the possible. Essays in the edited volume, *Phenomenology and Modernism,* relate the phenomenological reduction proposed by Husserl and the project of Modernist literature insofar as both might be said to abstract away from the habitual and the everyday in the interests of heightening the intensity of experience (of a de-familiarized quotidian).[12] In what he argues is a more radical version of Cartesianism, Husserl proposes a phenomenological *époché,* a temporary bracketing or suspension of empirical data (as well as judgments, presuppositions and positions), in order to uncover essential structures of consciousness. A paradox, relevant to Beckett perhaps, inheres in the necessity of *reducing* experience (departing from, or abstracting away from) in order to understand this very experience more clearly.[13] Carla Locatelli argues that Beckett's late minimalism performs a version of the phenomenological reduction: she suggests that the "unlessenable least" in *Worstward Ho* configures an "irreducible knowledge, a sort of Husserlian result of a transcendental-phenomenological reduction."[14] In a similar vein, Badiou explains the head in a jar of *L'innommable* as a strategy of "subtracting" certain factors (in this case mobility) so as to heighten his exploration of others (i.e. language).[15] But such readings imply that body and the senses are *impediments* to the mind's effort to understand its experience. Such dualism is parodied rather harshly in Beckett's work as an impossible desire to get rid of the body: the eponymous protagonist of *Murphy* ties himself down to a rocking chair in an attempt to "come alive in his mind"—an attempt that culminates, at the close of the novel, in the literal, bathetic sublimation of Murphy's body (he dies in a fire caused by a gas leak). But even incineration cannot completely

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Understand Endgame," as quoted in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett,* (New York: Grove Press, 1996)*,* 709.

[11]While listening to a public lecture in which Adorno argued that Hamm's name derived from "Hamlet" and Clov's from "clown" (after Beckett had explained to him that this was not the case), Beckett whispered: "This is the progress of science that professors can proceed with their errors." Recounted by Siegried Unseld (head of Suhrkamp publishing) in an address to the Second International Beckett Symposium (the Hague, April, 1992), as quoted in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 429.

[12] *Phenomenology, Modernism and Beyond,* eds. Carole Bourne-Taylor and Ariane Mildenberg, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010).

[13] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy, first book*, trans. F. Kersten, (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff publishers, 1983), 59-60.

[14] Carla Locatelli, *Unwording the World: Samuel Beckett's Prose Works After the Nobel Prize,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 250. Lois Oppenheim makes a similar observation with regard to Beckett's critical writing: "[Beckett's] brand of critical writing is comparable to the phenomenological *épokhè* insofar as it brackets all that is not part and parcel of the art itself—the value systems, ideologies, or other social constructs by which we judge it," *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art,* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 120.

[15] Badiou, *L'increvable désir,* 60.

annihilate the body, for Murphy's ashes must be strewn across the floor of a London public house.[16]

In a philosophical context, the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes (in ambivalent deference to Husserl) the impossibility of a total reduction.[17] Because the perceiving body is *of* the world, and is the condition for all sensation *and* intellection, it cannot, finally, be reduced. Merleau-Ponty liberally reinterprets the *époché* as that which, by slackening the "intentional threads" connecting us to the things we perceive, heightens our awareness of the fact that we are not separate from the objects of our perception. The body's inherence in the world motivates Merleau-Ponty to theorize an *embodied* version of subjectivity—a "body-subject" limited to a perspective. Even the most drastic reduction, according to Merleau-Ponty, can only recall us more forcefully to this bodily perspective, which subtends the emergence of both experiential meaning (*sens* as direction) and semantic meaning. Recognizing the body's perspectives in space as vectors meaning (spatial and linguistic) suggests an interpretive approach to Beckett's late style, vividly inaugurated by the wordless bodies in *Quad*.

Recent critical studies of Beckett have accented the importance of the body in Beckett's texts and dramatic productions, with particular emphasis on sense experience. Attention to sensuous elements in Beckett might be said to constitute a "fourth wave" of Beckett studies that takes a phenomenological approach (though not in the Husserlian sense, which would involve a bracketing of sense experience).[18] The edited volume *Beckett and Phenomenology* (2009) strives to rectify tendencies among existentialist-humanist, formalist and poststructuralist critics to underemphasize the sensory—not always pleasant—experience of bodies in Beckett's drama and prose.[19] In *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (2009)*, Ulrike Maude attempts to overturn notions of Beckett as a Cartesian dualist who tries to overcome the body so as to attend more closely to the life of the mind. Maude's analysis of the senses as they are evoked in Beckett's work is designed to show that Beckett, like Merleau-Ponty (who insists that perception is not possible in the absence of the body), emphasizes the "primacy of perception" over disembodied versions of meaning.

Importantly, Maude credits Beckett with his own version of the body-subject.[20] Although she claims her work is not *primarily* a comparison between Merleau-Ponty and Beckett, Maude emphasizes the convergence of these thinkers in their attempts to bring

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[16] Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* [1938]*, (New York: Grove Press, 1957).

[17] "Le plus grand enseignement de la réduction est l'impossibilité d'une réduction complète. Voilà pourquoi Husserl s'interroge toujours de nouveau sur la possibilité de la réduction. Si nous étions l'esprit absolu, la réduction ne serait pas problématique. Mais puisque au contraire nous sommes au monde, puisque même nos réflexions prennent place dans le flux temporel qu'elles cherchent à capter […] il n'y a pas de pensée qui embrasse toute notre pensée," Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 14, (hereafter cited in the text as PP).

[18] Ulrika Maude's *Beckett, Technology and the Body,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). A similar approach is Tajiri Yoshiki's *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: The Organs and Senses in Modernism,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[19] *Beckett and Phenomenology,* ed. Ulrike Maude and Matthew Feldman, (London: Continuum, 2009).

[20] Maude writes: "Beckett shares Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodied subjectivity, manifest in his emphasis on the body's role in cognition and the wider construction of identity […] The significance of embodiment in B's work can be evidenced in the extraordinary attention he devotes to sensory perception," *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, 135.

the body to the forefront of their respective fields (philosophy and literature).[21] Maude's *primary* aim is to resolve a problem she associates with "poststructuralist readings" of Beckett, which privilege a "discursive" or textual body over the material, fleshly one.[22] To offset this tendency Maude conducts what she calls a "materialist" reading of sensory experience in Beckett. (The senses, she admits, are shaped by culture, not least by technology.)

Building on this initial investigation of relations between Merleau-Ponty and Beckett's work, I read these two thinkers as exhibiting the fact that what Maude calls the "textual" body (produced by discourse) is not in fact separate from the physical, fleshly body in space. These two versions of the body (fleshly and linguistic) are united by the fact that both are *shaped by* (as much as they may produce reconfigurations *within*) their surrounding spaces and languages. The movements of the body within its structure or field, moreover, carve perspectives that subtend meaning, both spatial and literary (textual). Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's body-subject (which induces reconfigurations in the fields of existing meanings that continually shape it), I aim to show that Beckett's frustration with language, most marked in his work from the 1940's, translates into an investigation of the body's participation in processes of meaning, which is understood both as geographical direction and linguistic significance.

The body's passive activity of reconfiguration raises questions about the workings of creative agency in literature: how might the body's capacity to structure its space lead to new forms of literary meaning, or to languages within language? The potential of the body in space to restructure and reconfigure its surrounding language-space implies movement within even the most rigid and determining of structures (linguistic, technological, social, ideological). Concretely, the present project aims to locate spatial (dramatic), literary and linguistic mechanisms of creative novelty in Beckett's work founded on bodily orientation and movement.

Merleau-Ponty's rejects the versionof the subject as a willing agent (or "author") in favor of a bodily subject shaped by its linguistic, spatial, cultural and technological contexts.[23] The ability of the body-subject to affect and reconfigure these shaping

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[21] Consider also: "Merleau-Ponty's work, as we shall see, has at least this much in common with Beckett's writing: whereas Merleau-Ponty's *oeuvre* signals the first conscious effort in philosophy to bring the body to the forefront, Beckett's work can be read as one of the most serious inquiries of this kind in literature. The common denominator between the two writers is the phantom limb, which in the work of both writers is based on an idea of corporeal memory," Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body,* 5.

[22] Maude describes a "poststructuralist bias, which has emphasized the discursively produced body at the expense of the material, fleshly one. Yet the prominence of the maimed and visceral body in Beckett's work clearly signals the author's attempt to move beyond the confines of discourse […] In what could be broadly characterized as poststructuralist thought, the discursively produced body takes precedence over, if not eclipses, the flesh," *Beckett, Technology and the Body,* 2-3.

[23] Merleau-Ponty's structuralism, which is most evidenced in his work from the early 1950's ("Le langage indirect et les voix du silence," 1952), might be said to anticipate the movement in France nearly a decade after his death in which the subject or "author" was replaced by processes of language. In "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur" (1969), Michel Foucault compares writing to a game, which inevitably moves beyond its own rules to finally leave them behind. Foucault's idea of the author (and of the subject) as "functions of discourse" develops ideas expressed in Roland Barthes's "La mort de l'auteur" (1968), in which language *takes the place* of the subject previously thought to be its owner: "c'est le langage qui parle, ce n'est pas l'auteur; écrire, c'est […] atteindre ce point où seul le langage agit […]." See Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?",

contexts is most concretely presented in Merleau-Ponty's description of the way the physical body organizes its surrounding space, differentiating via its perspective. *Meaning* (directional or linguistic) is not the communication of a pre-existing *thought* belonging to a willing subject; it must emerge from the body's way of articulating or differentiating its surroundings. What protects the sane man against madness, Merleau-Ponty writes, is not his critical faculty, but the *structure of his space*.[24] Our everyday experience, in which objects appear at a safe distance from the body, masks its own contingency, and with it, the fundamental power of the body to polarize and re-order space through its projects and desires. Dreams, myth and art reveal this contingency, and, as content pregnant with form, shape meanings. The body attributes to the physical landscape hiding places, nooks for food-finding, and shapes its environment, where it can, to suit its biological needs. Even the execution of familiar tasks requires that we experience space according to our *body*'s possibilities for movement. This process of articulation, the body's *polarizing* of space—a process by which the body itself is also transformed—founds the possibility of signification (in language and otherwise), which Merleau-Ponty calls a "productivité qui fait l'essence la plus profond de l'homme."[25]

In the context of anatomy, the word "articulation" designates a joint, or, more broadly, the simultaneous separation and connection of bones that permit movement. In language, articulation is the "utterance of distinct elements of speech." Like the French word *sens,* which designates meaning and direction, the word "articulation" spans the semantic and physical registers, its two related meanings suggesting a similar project of structuring, or differentiating, at work across bodies, languages and spaces (articulation can also refer more generally to the activity of joining and is not restricted to the interior of the body). That the space of language is separated, cut, jointed, or *articulated* into meanings, gives rise to an idea of meaning as *differentiation,* which reflects Merleau-Ponty's interest in linguistic structuralism (and anticipates Derridean *différance*). A third meaning of articulation, as "the manifestation, demonstration, or expression of something immaterial or abstract,"[26] hints that the structuring potential of bodies may contain a performative element (meanings may be induced by saying, by moving). Articulation, in this third sense, may be understood less as a passage from the abstract to the concrete than as an expansion (via restructuration) of language and an invigoration of its ways of

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Dits et Écrits, (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), and Barthes, "La mort de l'auteur," *Le Bruissement de la langue,* (Paris, Seuil, 1984). Barthes also writes that a text is "un *espace* à dimensions multiples, où se marient et se contestent des écritures variées, dont aucune n'est originelle […]," 67, my emphasis.

[24] "Ce qui garantit l'homme sain contre le délire ou l'hallucination, ce n'est pas sa critique, c'est la structure de son espace: les objets restent devant lui, ils gardent leur distances […[Ce qui fait l'hallucination comme le mythe, c'est le rétrécissement de l'espace vécu, l'enracinement des choses dans notre corps, la vertigineuse proximité de l'objet, la solidarité de l'homme et du monde, qui est, non pas abolie, mais refoulée par la perception de tous les jours ou par la pensée objective, et que la conscience philosophique retrouve," PP, 344. This idea is related, for Merleau-Ponty, to the "symbolical pregnancy" of form in content, a formulation he borrows from Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophie der Symbolischen Formen*.

[25] Merleau-Ponty borrows this phrase from Kurt Goldstein's *L'analyse de l'aphasie et l'essence du langage*, 496, as quoted in PP, 238. He illustrates the manner in which a body might organize its space as follows: "Déjà la simple présence d'un être vivant transforme le monde physique, fait apparaître ici des « nourritures », ailleurs une « cachette », donne aux « stimuli » un sens qu'ils n'avaient pas," PP, 230.

[26] "Articulation," *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Third edition, September, 2008; online version, March 2011 <http://www.oed.com:80/Entry/11196>; accessed 09 May 2011.

meaning. Though this creative role is usually arrogated to the arts (especially poetry, sometimes associated with the power to invent language), Merleau-Ponty claims it for philosophy (phenomenology in particular). He describes phenomenology as a *movement,* "laborieuse comme l'œuvre de Balzac, celle de Proust, celle de Valéry ou celle de Cézanne" by reason of its desire to seize "le sens du monde ou de l'histoire à l'état naissant."[27]

Despite a passionate interest in philosophy,[28] Beckett takes pains to distance his own work from it, implying that it is overly intellectual. Claiming not to be a philosopher, he writes, in a now famous interview with Gabriel D'Aubarède in 1961, "All I am is feeling":

> "I never understand anything they [the philosophers] write […] I wouldn't have had any reason to write my novels if I could have expressed their subject in philosophic terms."
> "What was your reason then?"
> "I haven't the slightest idea. I'm no intellectual. All I am is feeling. Molloy and the others came to me the day I became aware of my own folly. Only then did I being to write the things I feel."[29]

Beckett's implication is that the intellect, which he associates with philosophy, cannot admit the chaos of pure feeling, or of pure sensation, and struggles to fix it in intelligible form. While the intellectualism of philosophy motivates Merleau-Ponty to reform the discipline (incidentally, by making it more "literary"), it causes Beckett to disavow philosophy in favor of "feeling" (un-bounded, chaotic experience). The interest in bringing Merleau-Ponty's work into dialogue with Beckett's is not related to disciplinary affinity: if anything, their different approaches bring into relief their common interest in the body's relation to space and language.

Though they shared the cultural, political and intellectual milieu of Paris from 1928 to 1961 (and the environment of the École Normale Supérieure from 1928 to 1930), it is unlikely that Beckett and Merleau-Ponty knew each other personally.[30] We know that Merleau-Ponty's library contained works by Beckett, and though Beckett, at least in 1946, did not have a formal knowledge of Merleau-Ponty, he had a number of friends in common with Merleau-Ponty, through whom he might have become acquainted with ideas important to French phenomenology: Beckett's friend at the ENS, Jean Beaufret, a

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[27] PP, 22.

[28] For an account of Beckett's reading of philosophy, see Matthew Feldman's *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of the Interwar Notes,* (London: Continuum, 2009), especially chapter 3, "'Fallor, Ergo Sum'!: The 'Philosophy Notes.'"

[29] Interview with Gabriel D'Aubarède, 1961, quoted in Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman eds., *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (Routledge and Kegan Ltd., London: 1997), 217. See also Beckett's interview with Tom Driver in the same volume: "I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that now is simply the mess. […] what I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else," 217.

[30] In a letter to Lois Oppenheim in 1995, Merleau-Ponty's wife wrote: "je ne sais pas si Beckett et mon mari se sont connus à l'ENS, mais ce dont je suis sûre, c'est qu'il n'y a pas eu de vraies relations entre eux au cours des années pendant lesquelles j'ai vécu avec mon mari […] Mon mari connaissait certainement l'œuvre de Beckett, il y a plusieurs livres de lui dans la bibliothèque, mais je n'ai pas trouvé de notes de lectures dans ses papiers," cited in Oppenheim, *The Painted Word,* 207.

Heidegger scholar who knew Merleau-Ponty's work well, Georges Duthuit, and Alberto Giacommetti.[31] Merleau-Ponty and Beckett also shared a deep interest in the paintings of Paul Cézanne. During the war, Beckett became an active member of the resistance and Merleau-Ponty served in the army. Their common historical landscape and "situation de la culture," more than any direct influence, is what gives them, to adapt Merleau-Ponty's phrase, "la qualité irrécusable de contemporains."[32]

But instead of looking for direct lines of influence or emphasizing their common cultural and historical context, this project brings Beckett and Merleau-Ponty together through the question of the relation of the body in space to the development of experimental literature. It is Merleau-Ponty's theorization of aesthetic space, then, that is most relevant to understanding Beckett's later linguistic experimentation, exemplified in *Worstward Ho* and presaged in the spatial mosaic of bodies in *Quad* (which, despite its wordlessness, I view as a literary experiment). I do not propose a phenomenological reading of Beckett, nor do I wish to prove that Beckett's work *performs* reconfigurations of meaning that philosophy (even under the pen of Merleau-Ponty) can merely describe. My more modest aim is to examine two major ideas suggested by Merleau-Ponty—the idea that the body in space founds the possibility of meaning, even in language, and that aesthetic experience opens spatial dimensions—in relation to the particular reconfigurations of language in Beckett's experimental late prose. I ask what the implications might be (for literary practices), if we are to understand literary and experiential *meaning* as a process of reconfiguring existing linguistic or spatial fields. This comparative study of a philosophical movement (that professes to be literary) and an artistic practice (that is in many ways philosophical) asks what kind of a relation exists between the body's possibilities for movement and the emergence of unexpected meanings in language.

Beckett's late experimental prose involves the invention of a peculiar language— one that feels like space or has the *quality* of space as much as it takes spatial *direction* as its theme (i.e. Worst*ward* Ho). The topographical quality of Beckett's language is reflected in the unusual prevalence of spatial tropes that appear in the critical literature: in the 1980's, Eoin O'Brien's book, *The Beckett Country*, visually maps Beckett's image-rich prose with photographs of Ireland, and S.E. Gontarski, in his introduction to the Grove critical companion, emphasizes the necessity of mapping and successfully navigating the terrain of Beckett's work.[33] In ways more directly relevant to body's power to organize or disrupt spatial logic, Daniel Albright describes the early protagonists, Murphy and Victor (from the posthumously published play, *Eleutheria*), as particular "densities" that soften and ruin rigidly defined external systems by their presence. Murphy, for instance, is a "field of force that warps space and time whenever

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[31] For a more detailed account of the biographical connections between Merleau-Ponty and Beckett, see Maude, *Beckett Technology and the Body,* 5, and Oppenheim, *The Painted Word,* 94-120.

[32] Merleau-Ponty, "L'homme et l'adversité," *Signes,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 367.

[33] See Eoin O'Brien, *The Beckett country: Samuel Beckett's Ireland*, (Dublin: Black Cat Press, 1986) and S.E. Gontarski, "Introduction: Anywhere and Nowhere: Mapping the Beckett Country," *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to his Works, Life and Thought,* eds. C.J. Ackerly and S.E. Gontarski, (New York: Grove Press, 2004). See also, "The Fictional Topography of Samuel Beckett," *The Modern English Novel: The Reader, the Writer and the Work,* ed. Gabriel Josipovici, (London: Open Books, 1976), 206-224.

he comes near," and Victor "manages to deform the stage he occupies."[34] I aim to show that the manner in which the body deforms or transforms space through its movement finds a correlate in the syntactical experimentation of Beckett's late prose—experimentation that begins, properly speaking, with *Comment C'est* (1960), though traces may be found in *Watt*.

In the early and middle phases of Beckett's career, meaning is bound up with voyage (we think of *Molloy*, in particular), whatever strange variations this notion must undergo. But as Badiou and Gontarski both note, the conversion from the picaresque to the internal reconfiguration of the phrase yields a language of strange syntactical forms that critics have gone to great lengths to explain. The ubiquity of *mud* in *Comment C'est* accents what the body's navigation of space and the (linguistic) emergence of new syntactical and semantic forms in have in common: the task of form-giving. The contemporary phenomenologist Michel Henry cites Tertullian, who in *De Carne Christi* links the flesh that Christ and mankind have in common with the *mud* through which, according to the Bible (Genesis 2, 7), mankind was shaped by God.[35] The form-giving mud, considered alongside the new syntactical forms of *Comment C'est* and the notion of divine and human flesh, becomes a powerful figure uniting space, language and the body in the process of the production of forms, new meanings and movements. Merleau-Ponty's later development of the body-subject into a philosophy of the *flesh* further accentuates this connection. A foregrounding, so to speak, of mud, dirt, ground, feet and especially *shoes* in Beckett ("Godot" is commonly thought to be a reference to *godillot* and *godasse*, the French slang for boot or shoe) links the hope of novelty, redemption, and even a version of transcendence (associated with the possibility of Godot's appearance) to the idea of walking somewhere, or to movement within and across space. In thinking of the much-anticipated Godot as an old pair of walking shoes, we have not so much the sense of Dorothy's ruby slipper (the idea that what he have been waiting for has been with us all along, a possibility immanent to our situation) as the idea that the transformation of the present—which in language is tantamount to the emergence of new forms or meanings—is on par with the body's movement (in space).

What seems at first like an analogy or *parallel* between language and space in Merleau-Ponty's work collapses when the physical body manifestly enters the scene of language in *Quad* and in *Worstward Ho*. Beckett's late works prompt us to exchange the parallel with the figure of a *graft*. A relation of intersection (intertwining) rather than parallel is also apparent in Merleau-Ponty's claim that *style*, which applies to the physical body (a style of walking) as much as to an original way of using language, founds signification. A body's style of movement, which structures space into sequential perspectives, usurps the task traditionally assigned to a Transcendental Subject (in some cases divine): the "creation" of meaning. This displacement resonates deeply in Beckett's work, especially at certain moments in *L'innommable* in which dialectical progress is mocked and eventually reconceived in terms of spatial dimensions. Like Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, Beckett's work suggests an alternative to the somewhat predictable movement of the dialectic (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) in the re-*mapping* and, thus, the

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[34] Daniel Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 40.

[35] Tertullian's *De Carne Christi* as cited and discussed in Michel Henri, *Incarnation: Une philosophie de la chair*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), 181.

re-*making* of space. Language, understood on the model of space, can say dimensions (and things) into being, creating possibilities through its variation of existing ones. The idea that meanings emerge with new ways of orienting language relates to and expands the notion of certain speech acts as *performative.* If language can support new possibilities, as well as effect concrete action by saying (under certain conditions), we might expand *performativity* to describe the power of experimental language to "invent" forms (through reconfiguration)—a power that only increases if, as Merleau-Ponty suggests in his late ontology, language shares and affects the structure of being. For Merleau-Ponty as for Beckett, *dimensions*, rather than dialectics, open possibilities for expression, as the physical body as a force of orientation is grafted onto the space of language.[36]

The first two chapters address the situations and problems that led Merleau-Ponty and Beckett to emphasize the body and to craft what we might call a spatial or bodily language. The first chapter focuses on a philosophical conflict formative for Merleau-Ponty—a conflict between post-enlightenment rationalism and a style of philosophy that was derided as "poetry," akin, though inferior, to mysticism. The stakes of this debate are echoed in Merleau-Ponty's preface to *La Phénoménologie de la perception*, which asks whether philosophy should be considered a kind of art. A lively written exchange between Bertrand Russell and Henri Bergson brings focus to the issue: should philosophy conform to reproducible and universally communicable *method* or should it appeal to the intuitions of its readers in an attempt to trace the trajectory of the philosopher's *body* of thought? Of central importance in this debate—variations of which occurred years later between Carnap and Heidegger, between Habermas and Derrida, and in Husserl's complicated view of philosophy as a first *science*—is the question of *language.* Russell deems Bergson's poetic, metaphor-laden prose "dangerous" to the progress of rational thought and to the work of philosophy. The influence of Bergson on Merleau-Ponty, manifest in the poetic ambitions of the latter's prose, implies a vision of philosophy as a performative and literary practice.

Bergson's attempt to create a language that would appeal to the bodies of his readers and insist on its own insufficiency (it would do this by presenting us with absurdities and contradictions, according to Bergson's description of a *romancier hardi*) resembles Beckett's aesthetic project of the 1940's. My second chapter traces Beckett's pressuring of language through the annals of *Watt*, to the picaresque voyage motifs of *Molloy*, to the spaces-of-words in *L'innommable* and across the strange, corporeal topography of Lucky's *glossolalia.* Beckett's frustration with the paradoxical power and impotence of language drives him to locate its limits. The "self-cannibalizing" structure of *Molloy* (and the trilogy as a whole) as well as Lucky's muteness-turned-*glossolalia* in *En Attendant Godot* exaggerate the obfuscations, betrayals and allusions that are of a part with language; like a disease in the blood, language carries traces of those who have

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[36] J.L. Austin distinguishes between illocutionary performatives (that act precisely as they are spoken) and perlocutionary performatives (that effect action as a result of speech). The above description focuses on perlocutionary utterances for the sake of simplicity, but action-as-speech (the illocutionary utterance) is also relevant to discussions of how language may effect existing circumstances. See Austin, *How to Do Things With Words,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 101.

come before, foreclosing the possibility of originality.[37] In certain works prior to 1960, it seems that Beckett drives language to the point of paradox and impasse. At the same time, these works mock notions of linear progress associated with the dialectic (thesis, antithesis, synthesis). Beckettian paradoxes of the 1940's call for a revision of what counts as "progress," the linear form of which is replaced with the figure of a circle.[38] Rather than synthesis or sublation, tension between thesis and antithesis in Beckettian fiction provokes reconfigurations of space—first geographical space, then, inevitably (because they are related) the space of language. The replacement of a messiah-like figure with a pair of walking shoes *(godot/godasses)* brings the divine power of meaning-making to earth, and anchors it in the body's negotiation of spatial limits.

But in order to understand how meaning can be *spatial* (and effected by a body's negotiation spatial limits), we must turn to Merleau-Ponty. In *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty describes a body-subject that articulates meaning (as perspective) through its involvement in the world. My third chapter asks whether this new concept of subjectivity, the body-subject, demands that we understand language as more intimately bound up with the body than a language of rationalism or philosophical logic. Merleau-Ponty's advocacy of a literary language for philosophy, which he attempts to put into practice, leads to some confusion in the *Phénoménologie* because we find ourselves unsure of the extent to which the body (as that which fashions significations in language) should be taken literally. For instance, does the body's way of structuring space by its movement merely serve as a *model* for the manner in which speech (*la parole*) selects from and rearranges the possibilities afforded by language? Or does the physical body itself enter the space of language to "speak" in some ill-defined, literal way, perhaps through "secretions" of meaning?

Chapter four shows that Merleau-Ponty develops his concept of *style* either as a way of evading or resolving the question of the relation between the physical body and language. As elucidated in the unfinished work, *La prose du monde,* and in a published version of one of its chapters, "Le langage indirect et les voix du silence" (1952), "style" can be *both* the physical body's organization of space *and* a poetic revitalization of language by shaking (*jaillir*) or reconfiguring existing (linguistic) significations in a novel way. In other words, style is a figure for creative originality (via variation), achievable by a body-subject as well as a "subject" of language. Understood rather differently in Beckett's writings as that which one must escape at all costs, style, for Merleau-Ponty, enables a sort of "passive agency" to emerge as a (linguistic or bodily) subject's mode of varying the structures in which it inheres. This possibility of variation is exemplified by the physical body's organization of surrounding space, which seems to carry over to (or apply equally to) the domain of language. Merleau-Ponty's reading of a passage by Stendhal offers a concrete example of the style of an "indirect language" that appeals to the body. In Merleau-Ponty's thinking, style spans the domains of space and

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[37] This is an early version of Beckett's view of language, which, I argue, is heavily modified when he comes to develop the syntactical innovations that distinguish works like *Comment C'est* and *Worstward Ho*. On the subject of Beckett and language see Ann Banfield, "Beckett's Tattered Syntax," *Representations* Vol. 84, (2004). Her example is not a disease of the blood, but mother's milk, through which influences and unwanted meanings are transmitted.

[38] This may be related to Beckett's reading of Vico and *Finnegans Wake* and the idea of history as circular.

language as the motor of creative originality and linguistic invention, but does not settle the question of how the fundamental power of the body to reconfigure its space might operate in language.

Beckett's *Quad* (1981) and *Worstward Ho* (1983) are the foci of Chapter five, which investigates how the body in space becomes an "agent" of language, producing reconfigurations in a landscape (prosescape) of words that open spaces in which new meanings might emerge. A more direct relation between linguistic meaning and the body in space is supported by the theory of the *flesh* (there is a flesh of language, a flesh of being, and a flesh of the body) outlined in Merleau-Ponty's late unfinished work, *Le visible et l'invisible.* The chapter begins with a "reading" of *Quad* as a wordless yet still literary experiment—one that establishes a relation between bodily movement and the emergence of "new" meaning as a re-combination of existing elements. *Quad*'s style is performative insofar as it enacts the meaning-production it seeks to explore; and the piece suggests that the drama of bodies reconfiguring spaces might be grafted onto the linguistic domain. The chapter then turns to *Worstward Ho* to suggest a similarity between the self-reflexive strangeness of its prose and Merleau-Ponty's conception of the *flesh*: the particular *parole* of the text *becomes* a body, which enables *Worstward Ho* to reconfigure the space of the language in which it inheres. *Worstward Ho* is hermetically self-referential; each new word or phrase varies one that has come before according to a system of codes. It shares, in this way, the self-reflexive structure of the flesh. According to Merleau-Ponty, the body can *touch* things only because of the possibility that it might touch itself touching (a possibility, Merleau-Ponty reminds us, that is never realized in fact). Language, as a fleshly body, can move reversibly between subject and object positions so as to reconfigure the language-space in which it inheres. In *Worstward Ho* language becomes a sentient body, expanding and reconfiguring its wordscape to allow for the possibility that new modes of meaning may arise.

What I propose is neither a phenomenological reading of Beckett, nor an attempt to illuminate or improve the doctrines of phenomenology with the wisdom of dramatic or literary performance. Reading Beckett with and against Merleau-Ponty not only challenges deeply embedded associations between Beckett, impasse and despair, but suggests that linguistic possibilities for meaning might be understood in terms of the body's relation to space. Literary innovation cannot be creation *ex nihilo*, but must be a reconfiguration of surrounding (literary and linguistic) space. This involves a thorough revision of "meaning," which cannot be absolute, but must be spatial, perspectival, and, ultimately, variable. For Merleau-Ponty, meaning is construed as *movement*, and Beckett's works create spaces that are as sensitive to the *parcours* of bodies as to styles of language. In one sense, an understanding of language as spatial and bodily confirms what fiction always was: a virtual *space* for bodies to inhabit, alter, disrupt and reconfigure. But Beckett's experimentation—his particular exploitation of the bodily and spatial qualities of language—leads us to wonder where the borders lie between fictional and actual space, and how the language-body's movements might alter the position and permeability of these boundaries.

Chapter 1
Mystic Poetry and Husserl in Paris: Philosophy as a Creative Praxis?

Spend the years of learning squandering
Courage for the years of wandering
Through a world politely turning
From the loutishness of learning.

      Samuel Beckett, "Gnome," *Collected Poems in English and French,* New York: Grove Press, 1977

      Beckett's 1934 poem, "Gnome," suggests that learning is loutish and gets in the way of the ostensibly more creative activity of *wandering.* Though Beckett, the erudite "moody man of letters," was not opposed to all kinds of learning, his antipathy toward a certain learning may be a symptom of the same *Zeitgeist* that motivated Bergson's philosophy of intuition, and, in a different vein, Husserl's project to radically reform the sciences (*Wissenschaften*).[39] If Beckett's poem expresses more than a passing frustration with the academy and its customs, we might ask: what is it about learning that gets in the way of wandering? Does pre-occupation with exactitude exclude the affective and sensuous qualities of experience—those that cannot be quantified or expressed cleanly without remainder? If so, what antidote or alternative to learning might we imagine?

      Philosophy at the beginning of the 20th century reached a point of crisis when its ability to furnish a clear and rational account of what can be known was called into question. Its efforts at self-reinvention during this period include Bergson's philosophy of intuition, as well as Husserl's bracketing of sense data to isolate philosophical "essences." Bertrand Russell sought to recuperate philosophy by purifying its language; he thought philosophy could be purged of inexactitude and error by adopting the methods of science and by recourse to an ideal language of logic. Russell's critique of Bergson in 1912, which argues that the latter's "excellent style" endangers philosophical reason, raises questions about what kind of language is best suited to philosophy. Bergson's prose appeals to the bodies and senses of his readers; it seeks to bypass the intellect and stimulate intuition directly. Husserl too, though criticized by Derrida for his inadequate attention to language,[40] invites a refashioning of accepted forms by seeking a radically new foundation for the sciences. His descriptions of the *époché* and of the disorientation that follows suspension of one's usual ways of knowing seem like prolegomena to the art of wandering. Whether or not they explicitly address the question of philosophical language, Russell, Bergson and Husserl understand philosophy to involve a meaning- and form-giving project in response to the crisis of reason.

      In his preface to *Phénoménologie de la perception* Merleau-Ponty compares the task of phenomenology to the work of novelists, poets and painters (Cézanne, Valéry,

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[39] Husserl and Bergson were a generation older than Beckett and Merleau-Ponty, but both philosophers published works in the 1930's: The first two parts of *The Crisis of the European Sciences* were published in 1936, and Bergson's *Les Deux sources de la morale et de la religion* appeared in 1932.

[40] Jacques Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène: Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl,* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France), 1967.

Balzac, Stendhal). He writes in an essay publishe the same year (1945): "tout change lorsqu'une philosophie phénoménologique ou existentielle se donne pour tâche, non pas d'expliquer le monde ou d'en découvrir les « conditions de possibilité », mais de formuler une expérience du monde, un contact avec le monde qui précède toute pensée sur le monde."[41] Like his more famous contemporaries, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty believed that philosophy should involve contact with concrete, sensory experience, which could involve something as quotidian as the taste of a cocktail in a café near Montparnasse.[42] Sartre, de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty rejected the intellectualist philosophy taught at the *École Normale Supérieure* where they were students and responded enthusiastically to Husserl's call, in his 1929 Paris Lectures, to return "to the things themselves."[43] The effort of formulating a concrete contact with the world was understood by Merleau-Ponty to be both a literary and a philosophical endeavor: "dès lors la tâche de la littérature et celle de la philosophie ne peuvent plus être séparées."[44] Debate over whether philosophy should adopt the methods of science or whether it should appeal to the *experience* of its readers (even if this necessitates the creation of fictions) finds reprisal in the disputes between Carnap and Heidegger in the 1930' and 40's and between between Habermas and Derrida in the 1980's and 90's.[45] By exiling Bergson's "cosmic poetry" from the domain of philosophy, Russell, like Carnap and Habermas, defends philosophical rigor, method, and universal communicability against a literary philosophy that would appeal directly to experience. Husserl's idea of philosophy as a rigorous science is more complicated, and tensions in his account cause us to wonder where the difference lies between freedom from established method (the things themselves determine the manner in which they are investigated) and the *invention*

[41] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Le Roman et la métaphysique" [1945], *Sens et non-sens,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 36.
[42] Simone de Beauvoir recounts an anecdote about Sartre's first encounter with phenomenology, at the Bec Bec de Gaz in the Rue Montparnasse: "We ordered the specialty of the house, apricot cocktails; [Raymond] Aron said, pointing to his glass: 'You see, my dear fellow, if you are a phenomenologist, you can talk about this cocktail and make philosophy out of it!' Sartre turned pale with emotion at this. Here was just the thing he had been longing to achieve for years—to describe objects just as he saw and touched them, and extract philosophy from the process." Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life,* trans. P. Green, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 112, as quoted in James Schmidt, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism,* (London: MacMillan, 1984), 18-19.
[43] On this point, see Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century,* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) and Vincent Descombes, *Le même et l'autre,* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1979).
[44] Merleau-Ponty, "Le Roman et la métaphysique," 36.
[45] A great deal has been written about these debates. Of principle importance is Martin Heidegger's, "What is Metaphysics?," *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, (London: Routledge, 1993), 82-97, and Rudolf Carnap's, "The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical analysis of Language," *Logical Positivism*, ed. A.J. Ayer, (London: Free Press, 1959), 60-81. See also James Luchte's "Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Carnap: Radical Phenomenology, Logical Positivism and the Roots of the Continental/Analytic Divide," *Philosophy Today* 51, no. 3 (Fall, 2007): 241-260, and Gottfried Gabriel's "Carnap's 'Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language.' A Retrospective Consideration of the Relationship between Continental and Analytic Philosophy," *Logical Empiricism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, trans. Andrew Inkpin, eds. Paolo Parrini, Wesley C. Salmon, Marrilee H. Salmon, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 30-42. On the Derrida-Habermas debate, see the chapters on Derrida in Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures,* trans. Thomas McCarthy, (Boston: The MIT Press, 1990).

of forms and fictions. Despite Husserl's bracketing of sense data, metaphors of *exploration* in his writing pair with assertions that new forms of description are necessary to express radically new experiences. The idea of phenomenology as the exploration of uncharted territory, furthermore, influenced Merleau-Ponty's assiduous if unfaithful reading of Husserl. A combination of Bergson's literary style, with its appeal to the body and to intuition, as well as tension in Husserl's work, lead Merleau-Ponty to a version of phenomenology that understands the necessity of reinventing language to be among its tasks, and which bears a resemblance to the path-making, wandering and form-giving we might associate with "experimental" literary arts.

I. Logical Analysis and Cosmic Poetry: Russell and Bergson's War in Words

I believe in this coupling of the grammarian and the stylist, the philosopher and the writer, the scientific intelligence and the literary intelligence. I believe in both […] philosophers have to strive continually to bring ordinary language back to life.
                                                                Michel Serres[46]

The following remarks constitute an investigation into varieties of philosophical language: two varieties in particular. We take as our premise the idea that language is more than a covering, a fashionable vestment in which one dresses one's thoughts, as the philosopher, Jacques Bouveresse, citing Karl Kraus, points out.[47] Rather than a means to express pre-linguistic thought, language is its own element, the soil within which the seeds of thought germinate and roots extend.[48] In his study of philosophical language, *La Parole Malheureuse,* Bouveresse observes that Wittgenstein, a philosopher known for his mistrust of language, found his deepest intellectual affinities not with Frege, Russell, Moore or Carnap, the analytic philosophers of his day, who he claimed misunderstood him, but with artistic, literary, and linguistically "experimental" writers such as Franz Kafka, Adolf Loos, and Robert Musil.[49] Bergson and Russell disagreed sharply about the task of philosophy and the character of its language. Yet both the French "intuitionist" thinker and the English "logical atomist" are motivated by perceptions of the inadequacy

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[46] From an interview conducted by Raoul Mortley in *French Philosophers in Conversation: Levinas, Schneider, Serres, Irigaray, Le Doeuff, Derrida,* (London: Routledge, 1991), 60.

[47] "'Que le langage n'habille pas la pensée,' a écrit précisément Karl Kraus, 'mais que la pensée s'enracine et se développe dans le langage, c'est ce que le créateur humble ne pourra jamais faire croire aux tailleurs éhontés.'" Bouveresse cites Kraus's *Beim Wort genommen* then describes how language acts as the medium in which the contours of thought develop. See also his chapters: "Carnap, le langage et la philosophie" and "Langue ordinaire et philosophie" in *La parole malheureuse: de l'alchimie linguistique à la grammaire philosophique,* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1971). Merleau-Ponty echoes this point in a course taught at the Sorbonne on language acquisition: "Le langage pour les écrivains depuis cent ans, est bien autre chose qu'« un revêtement de la pensée »," Merleau-Ponty, *Merleau-Ponty à la Sorbonne: resumé de cours 1949-1952* (Paris: Cynara, 1988), 11.

[48] This is related to Merleau-Ponty's use of the phrase *épaisseur sémantique,* which he attributes to Francis Ponge: "Les mots, même dans l'art de la prose, transportent celui qui parle et celui qui les entend dans un univers commun en les entraînant vers une signification nouvelle par une puissance de désignation qui excède leur définition reçue, par la vie sourde qu'ils ont menée et continuent de mener en nous, par ce que Ponge appelait heureusement leur « épaisseur sémantique » et Sartre leur « humus signifiant »," "Le langage indirect et les voix du silence," *Signes,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 94.

[49] Bouveresse, *La parole malheureuse,* 18.

of language—perceptions also prevalent in Beckett's work—to reinvent language for the purposes of philosophy.[50]

Russell begs the reader's forgiveness, insisting that a particular topic he wishes to discuss in one of his essays, that of "unities," is "one with which language, by its very nature, is unfitted to deal." He asks his reader "to be indulgent if what I say is not exactly what I mean, and to try to see what I mean in spite of unavoidable linguistic obstacles to clear expression."[51] Russell's conviction that logic is the "essence of philosophy" is well known, as is the fact that he devoted much of his career to the construction of an ideal, purely symbolic language that would purge ordinary language of the error and vagueness to which it is prone. Care and accuracy were his guiding principles, and he believed that philosophy should follow a strict, scientific methodology.[52]

Bergson's approach is different, as is the nature of his criticism of language; he argues that language is a conceptual framework made up of components that, because they are static, are incapable of capturing the real, the essence of which is continuous movement. If ordinary language impoverishes experience by superimposing its spatial concepts, its logical geometry, Bergson aims to stimulate awareness of the experience of duration (*la durée*) in a style that reminds readers that the specific language used is merely *one* way of describing a movement of intuition that inevitably exceeds—even as it alters—the language in which it develops.[53] Bergson's highly metaphorical prose serves as his practical attempt to reinvigorate ordinary language.

An investigation of Bergson and Russell's differing views of philosophical language foregrounds a larger question: to what extent can the creation of a philosophical

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[50] In a literary context the problem of the inadequacy of language vis-à-vis experience was formulated with particular urgency by the French Symbolists, who drew inspiration from Bergson. (Tancrède de Visan declared Bergson "the philosopher of Symbolism," notes Suzanne Guerlac in *Literary Polemics: Bataille, Sartre, Valery, Breton,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000,) 159.) Mallarmé also emphasized the insufficiency of language to represent experience in his discursive writings, and attempted, in his poetic ones, to stimulate experiences by means of linguistic images.

[51] Bertrand Russell, "Logical Atomism," *Logic and Knowledge,* ed. Robert Charles Marsh, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), 336.

[52] Russell, "Logical Atomism," 338. "The purpose of the foregoing discussion of an ideal logical language (which would of course be wholly useless for daily life) is twofold: first, to prevent inferences from the nature of language to the nature of the world, which are fallacious because they depend upon the logical defects of language; secondly, to suggest, by inquiring what logic requires of a language which is to avoid contradiction, what sort of a structure we may reasonably suppose the world to have." Here Russell's view is similar to the traditional Greek conception of *Logos*. Bergson takes the opposite view: that language cannot reveal the structure of the world because it is too *close* to logic.

[53] In his 1911 lecture, "L'intuition philosophique," Bergson meditates on the relation between the terms that comprise a philosopher's lexicon and the structure of his or her thought. He describes thought as an imprint of intuition that is fashioned from contemporary concepts and inherited terms. Thus a truly penetrating analysis of a philosopher's thought would require that we dispense with the strategy of deducing his original intuition from the terms he uses, and look past the terms to the pattern suggested by relations between them. In other words, there is a "grammar" of a philosopher's language, and it is the *relations* between the words he uses rather than the words themselves that give us the shape of his thought. This is what Bergson means when he insists that we must *inhabit* the movement of a philosopher's thought. Since words themselves are always inherited and never sufficient, we must look for a system of thought, which changes them and accommodates them to its meaning. Henri Bergson, "L'intuition philosophique" *La Pensée et le Mouvant: Essais et conférences,* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1938), 117-142, (*La Pensée et le Mouvant* is henceforth cited in the text as PM).

idiom be related to experiments in language performed by writers such as Kafka, Musil, Proust or by the writer-philosopher most obsessed with the inadequacy of language: Beckett? This question demands that we reconsider the task of philosophy: should it aspire to the rank of a rigorous science?[54] Or does it align itself more with creative practice, as Merleau-Ponty suggests in the *Phénoménologie* when he describes it as "laborieuse comme l'œuvre de Balzac, celle de Proust, celle de Valéry ou celle de Cézanne," insofar as it endeavors to seize the meaning of the world as it is being created.[55] The idea of philosophy as a literary or creative endeavor—an ancient idea, renewed in the history of philosophy—attributes to philosophy a form-giving power that relates it to the experimentation within language that has been a defining innovation of 20th-century literature. It also suggests that language creation is a necessary and privileged means of exploring the world and our being within it.

In highly suggestive language, charged with metaphors and suffused with a lyrical grace that won him the Nobel Prize for literature in 1927 (interestingly, Russell also won the Nobel Prize for literature, in 1950), Bergson elaborates a philosophy of *intuition*. For Bergson, scientific, rational thinking, which operates by means of analysis, is unable to achieve contact with the real, which he understands as the ever-changing, irreducible singularity of experience as it is lived. Bergson compares philosophers who proceed methodologically, by means of concepts and symbols, to children who attempt to clasp their hands around fleeting billows of smoke: "Est-il étonnant que les philosophes voient si souvent fuir devant eux l'objet qu'ils prétendent étreindre, comme des enfants qui voudraient, en fermant la main, capter de la fumée?" (PM, 206). The symbolizing tendency of the sciences must give way to a philosophy whose job it is to stimulate the effort of intuition. This is why Bergson claims that the task of metaphysics is to dispense with symbols (*se dépasser des symboles*). In *L'évolution créatrice* (1907), he criticizes the intellect because it fails to situate itself *within* the movement of evolution. Intuition involves placing oneself *inside* what is being observed and adopting its movement. Such bodily sympathy avoids distorting (by fixing) what we wish to investigate, enabling us to grasp the fluid nature of experience. Bergson's theory of intuition is subtended at every stage by his critique of language, for one can appeal to intuition only by using or by inhabiting language in a particular way. But Bergson's suggestive, metaphoric language is clearly at odds with Russell's attempt to abolish metaphysics in favor of an ideal language of mathematical symbols.

Russell's critique of Bergson is most cogently executed in a short piece entitled "The Philosophy of Bergson," published in 1912. In this piece, by means of parody and by "disproving" Bergson's "doctrines" of space and time, Russell dismisses Bergson by calling him a poet rather than a philosopher and by targeting with particular animosity

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[54] Richard Rorty makes an interesting comparison between Husserl and Russell by claiming that efforts to secure rigorous certainty led Russell and Husserl to discover "logical forms" and "formal essences" (respectively) as that which remain when non-formal content has been bracketed. Rorty writes that the paradigmatic figures in an "attempt to recapture the mathematical spirit [of philosophy] were Husserl and Russell." Summarizing Ryle's critique of *Sein and Zeit*. Rorty then shows the extent to which later versions of phenomenology differed from Husserl's original idea: "Ryle's prescient point was that the coming of 'existential phenomenology' meant the end of 'philosophy as a rigorous science.'" Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2008), 166-168.

[55] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 22.

Bergson's "excellent style," which, Russell argues, takes the place of reasoned argument. Russell's critique of Bergson brings the latter's theories of duration and intuition as well as his literary writing style into relief, revealing an intimate relationship between the content of Bergson's ideas and the forms in which they appear. Said another way, Russell's critique stages the problem of *language* in philosophy as it emerges in two very different thinkers with methods that correspond to irreconcilable ideas about what constitutes experience, the real, or the structure of the world. Insofar as Russell's critique of Bergson isolates what is innovative, dynamic and controversial in Bergson's philosophy, it is through the lens of this critique that we may best explore Bergson's mistrust of language—a distrust shared by Beckett and Merleau-Ponty—and his poetic effort to stimulate the "self-transcending" effort of intuition in his readers.

Russell's Critique of Bergson

H. Wildon Carr, the British scholar and translator of Bergson, describes Russell's attack on Bergson as follows: "Mr. Russell has shown something like the anatomical skill of the paralyzing wasp in one of Bergson's best known illustrations; if the argument gets home, it will destroy all power for harm the philosophy may have without killing it outright, for Mr. Russell is willing to leave us its poetry."[56] Even in defending Bergson, Wildon Carr supports Russell's view that argument and reason make up the life force of philosophy. Deprived of these, only a flimsy husk of poetry would remain, the empty flourishes of a gifted stylist. And yet Russell sees in Bergson's "poetry" a serious threat to his method of philosophical analysis; he fears that Bergson's critique of the intellect might encourage sloppy thinking and lead to lazy philosophy. Russell adds an ironical elaboration to Bergson's conclusions: "Incapacity for mathematics is therefore a sign of grace," he quips, "fortunately a very common one" (PB, 6). Overlooking the question of poetic style in his defense of Bergson, Wildon Carr attempts to prove the validity of what Russell identifies as Bergson's philosophical "doctrines" of space and time. Since Wildon Carr insists that he is "one to whom not the poetry but the metaphysics [of Bergson's thought] appeals," it is not surprising that he should occupy himself with Bergson's philosophical conclusions. But is reasoned argument, which operates by the demarcations Bergson terms "intellectual," an adequate defence for a philosophy of intuition? This section, by contrast, focuses less on Russell's dismantling of Bergson's "doctrines" (though I consider his refutations briefly)—for Bergson, like Nietzsche, is not a philosopher to whom a consistent *system* can be attributed—and more on Russell's parody and eventual *dismissal* of the most pernicious element of Bergson's philosophy: its style. By ridiculing Bergson's style, Russell presents it as something laughable, thus strategically breaking the spell of its poetic potency and restoring reason to philosophy.

Bergson enjoyed popular success as well as international acclaim in the early part of the 20th century. He received honors such as election to the *Académie française* and the Nobel Prize for literature, and influenced such prominent artists and intellectuals as William James, T.S. Eliot, Alfred Stieglitz, Georg Simmel, William Faulkner and

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[56] H. Wildon Carr's rejoinder to Russell's "On the Philosophy of Bergson," *The Monist* 22, (1912): 321-347, 26, (the essay and rejoinders are henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as PB).

Gertrude Stein. In her study of Bergson, *Thinking in Time,* Suzanne Guerlac attributes Bergson's popularity and influence to his engaging prose and to the emotional appeal of his ideas, but notes that the open and nonsystematic character of his philosophy left it vulnerable to inaccurate appropriations.[57] Bergson's work fell out of fashion after the 1920's, partly because of the distortion of his ideas by careless imitators, but also because of new trends (Heidegger, phenomenology, Marxism) that swept the French intellectual scene in the 1930's. It wasn't until after Gilles Deleuze re-popularized his work in the 1970's that scholars turned to revisit Bergson's texts.

Bergson's popular success, the novelty of his ideas, and what some would call his "unphilosophical" prose style, made him the subject of considerable controversy and criticism. His debate with Einstein over the general theory of relativity and his confrontation with Emile Durkheim in the so-called Sorbonne dispute[58] contributed to a dampening of enthusiasm for Bergson's work. And neo-Kantian rationalists, such as Gaston Bachelard, found much in his writing to criticize.[59] But of Bergson's detractors, Russell is perhaps the most scathing and vociferous, for Bergson's thinking explicitly threatened Russell's view of a world composed of separable parts—a world that lends itself to logical analysis.

Russell launches a concentrated attack on Bergson's writing style, which, he suggests, eclipses the kind of reasoned argument by which it could be refuted. "When [Bergson's] philosophy has triumphed," Russell cautions, "it is to be supposed that argument will cease, and intellect will be lulled to sleep on the heaving sea of intuition" (PB, 36). Russell responds to what he brands as rhetorical trickery on Bergson's part by structuring his essay strategically in two parts: first, he lays out Bergson's thought by parodying his metaphors. Second, he sets about the analytical work of dismantling what he calls Bergson's "doctrines," concluding that Bergson's entire philosophy must crumble (as if it were a system or an edifice) because it is based on fundamental confusions. Without Bergson's doctrines of space and time, Russell argues, "nothing remains except an imaginative epic, to be judged on esthetic rather than on intellectual grounds" (PB, 13). Dismissing Bergson's work as an epic or narrative excludes it from the domain of philosophy, where "blind instinct" is checked by the predictive power of the intellect.

In the first instance, Russell resorts not to the method of analysis that Bergson critiques, but to parody. Russell explains that in the first part of his essay he has "mainly

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[57] On the proliferation of various Bergsonisms, see Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: an introduction to Henri Bergson,* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 11. For further discussion of "democratic" appropriations of Bergson's work, see Julien Benda, *Sur le succès du Bergsonisme,* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1929).

[58] The Sorbonne dispute erupted over education reforms from 1902 and staged an opposition between Durkheim, who represented the values of scientific rationalism, and Bergson, who represented the value of humanities in the national education curriculum. For a more detailed account of the Sorbonne dispute, see Guerlac, *Literary Polemics*, 195-196. On the Einstein-Bergson debate see Alan D. Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Impostures Intellectuelles*, (Paris: éditions Odile Jacob), 1997 or its English translation: *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science,* (Picador USA: New York, 1998).

[59] For a discussion and refutation of Bachelard's critique of Bergson, see John Mullarkey, *Bergson and Philosophy*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 110. Mullarkey argues that Bachelard, in faulting Bergsonism for a lack of differentiation, has "forgotten" that continuity does not imply homogeneity.

endeavoured to state Bergson's views, without giving the reasons adduced by him in favour of their truth." "This is easier than it would be with most philosophers," Russell quips, since Bergson, "does not give reasons for his opinions, but relies on their inherent attractiveness, and on the charm of an excellent style." Russell continues:

> Like the advertisers of Oxo, [Bergson] relies upon picturesque and varied statement, and an apparent explanation of many obscure facts. Analogies and similes, especially, form a large part of the whole process by which he recommends his views to the reader. The number of similes for life to be found in his works exceed the number in any poet known to me (PB, 11).

The first section of Russell's essay is an entertaining pastiche of some of Bergson's most arresting metaphors, as well as an outright mockery of his style and the concepts expressed by means of it: duration and intuition. The idea that Bergson is in some subtle manner moving his readers by means of the hypnotic beauty of his words and similes—a suggestion conveyed by Russell's comparison between Bergson's philosophy and the popular British advertising campaign launched by Oxo in the early part of the 20th century—is further underscored by Russell's description of himself as, "a cool critic, who feels himself a mere spectator, perhaps an unsympathetic spectator." Russell has clearly resisted the temptation to get carried away by Bergson's imagery—life as a swelling wave, an exuberant cavalry charge, a shell bursting into fragments which are again shells—and cautions that "calm and careful thought is hardly compatible with this form of exercise" (PB, 12). For Russell, the business of a philosopher is with thought, which is obscured by the "passion and noise of violent motion" in which "there is no room for the fainter music of reason" (PB, 12). It is the purpose of Russell's parody to restore to the reader her reason, for Bergson's stunning metaphors, in Russell's view, endanger the logical method according to which philosophy should proceed.

Before leaving the subject of parody (a deconstructive tactic not unknown to fiction stylists and poets), it is necessary to show how Russell's parody works to break the spell of Bergson's poetic style and to prevent the kind of sympathy that Bergson aims to achieve. Bergson's own writing on laughter and the function of the comic is instructive in this context, since he contends that laughter has a normalizing function, and that mild transgressions against social norms are chastised through comedy (and irony).[60] Russell's parody, followed by a re-rendering of Bergson in common-sense, practical terms, has the effect of immobilizing the body of Bergson's thought—indeed in the manner of Bergson's paralyzing wasp—so that it is suitably prepared to undergo analysis, which Russell performs in the second part of his essay.

Russell begins his parody by professing to adopt a "less precise" classification system for Bergson's philosophy, which "cuts across all recognized divisions" (PB, 1). In a gesture he hopes will appeal to the "non-philosophical," he proposes to divide types of philosophy according to the "predominant *desire* that has led a philosopher to philosophize." This stab at Bergson, achieved by an ironic classification of philosophy according to desire, is intensified if we consider, as Russell does several pages later, Bergson's account of evolution as motivated by an undefined want: "M. Bergson maintains that evolution is truly *creative*, like the work of an artist […] For example, we may suppose some vague desire in sightless animals to be able to be aware of objects

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[60] Henri Bergson, *Le rire* [1913], (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1940). The most famous aspect of his argument is that the source of the comic is any kind of mechanism imposed upon the living.

before they were in contact with them. This led to efforts which finally resulted in the creation of eyes. Sight satisfied the desire, but could not have been imagined before hand" (PB, 3). This prefatory fumbling in the dark of desire aptly describes artistic practices that struggle to invent new forms. It is in similar terms, moreover, that Beckett describes his relation to his work in a 1962 letter to Arland Ussher: "I am with it [my work] a little in the dark and fumbling of making, as long as that lasts, then no more. I have no light to throw on it myself and it seems a stranger in the light that others throw."[61] Illuminating and *immobilizing* flashes of Russell's irony occur often throughout his short essay on Bergson.

Most striking in Russell's text are the vivid, overlapping, hyperbolic and child-like metaphors parodying Bergson's manner of expression. In one instance, Russell dismisses Bergson's philosophy as "a kind of Sandford and Merton, with instinct as the good boy and intellect as the bad boy. Instinct at its best is called *intuition.*" By comparing Bergson's philosophy to an 18th-century children's book (*The History of Sandford and Merton*), which is said to have been a way of disseminating Rousseau's philosophy to children, Russell dismisses Bergson's appeal to intuition as an unsophisticated philosophy suited for weaker minds.[62] Elsewhere in his essay, chicken carvers, funicular railways, and still other examples appear as whimsical, dismissive ways of mocking Bergson's metaphoric style as well as the substance of his ideas.

But beneath Russell's parody is the serious reproof of one who would defend the intellect against its potential detractors. He is wary of Bergson's "war" on the intellect first because it indemnifies Bergson's thought against criticism and second because it prevents analysis as philosophy's means of pursuing objective truth. Russell contends that philosophy is not designed to seek the truly *new*, and should base itself on logic to afford the possibility of agreement. Russell's dismissive gloss of Bergson's idea of duration emphasizes the difference between his own world view and that of Bergson: "Intellect is the power of seeing things as separate from one another, and matter is that which is separated into distinct things. *In reality there are no separate solid things, only an endless stream of becoming, in which nothing becomes and there is nothing that this nothing becomes*" (PB, 13). Russell admits there to be an element of question-begging in all refutations of Bergson: "[w]hen we have shown that this or that doctrine is self-contradictory, we have only shown that it does not appeal to the intellect; if the intellect is in fact misleading, as Bergson contends, it is useless to employ it against him" (PB, 36). He continues his complaint:

> Of course a large part of Bergson's philosophy, probably the part to which most of its popularity is due, does not depend upon argument, and cannot be upset by argument. His imaginative picture of the world, regarded as a poetic effort, is in the main not capable of proof or disproof. Shakespeare says life's but a walking shadow, Shelley says it is like a dome of many coloured glass, Bergson says it is a shell which bursts into parts that are again shells. If you like Bergson's image better, it is just as legitimate (PB, 24).

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[61] Samuel Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, 1929-1940,* eds. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), xi.

[62] *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*, 3rd ed. Rev. Brian Alderson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982), 145-146. This dissemination of (Rousseau's) philosophy in the form of fiction was thought to leave "a greater impression" on "the tender mind of a child."

Russell finds Bergson's work plagued by idiosyncrasies passed off as truths, and concludes that "in view of the mistakes in Bergson's reasoning, his conclusions remain mere imaginative possibilities to be placed alongside of the thousand of other possibilities invented by cosmic poets" (PB, 12).

It is only natural that Russell, who founds his philosophy on a vision of the world made up of atomic elements, amenable to analysis, should take umbrage at a philosophy that attempts to expose static symbols as provisional snapshots of an eternal becoming. Because he fears that Bergson's philosophy will foreclose argument and the exercise of analysis, which are crucial to clear communication and to progress, Russell scoffs at Bergson's "condemnation of the intellect" and wryly comments that "if [Bergson] fails in his condemnation of the intellect, the intellect will succeed in its condemnation of him, for between the two it is war to the knife" (PB, 13). Yet Russell's substantive critique of Bergson engages sensitively with the latter's thinking: his claim that Bergson confuses space with magnitude, for example, has been echoed by Merleau-Ponty, who is much more sympathetic to Bergson's general lines of thought.[63] Even so, Russell's critique reflects his own "logical atomism," his view of the world as separable and amenable to analysis.

Russell's substantive critique of Bergson consists of two claims: that the theory of duration results from a mere play of words and that Bergson confuses subject with object. Russell defends the mathematical view of change by defending against Bergson's sense that it "implies the absurd proposition that movement is made up of immobilities." This is only an apparent absurdity, Russell argues, due to verbal form. Motion implies relations, but motion is not made up of motions but of *things* that move, just as friendship is not made up of friendships but of friends and genealogy is not made of genealogies but of men. Russell writes: "So a motion is made out of what is moving, but not out of motions. It expresses the fact that a thing may be in different places at different times […] Bergson's argument against the mathematical view of motion, therefore, reduces itself, in the last analysis, to a mere play upon words" (PB, 20). The idea that Bergson confuses *relations* with *objects* is central to Russell's criticism, and repeats itself across variations. Russell isolates a phrase from *Matière et mémoire* to show that Bergson's definition of the past is circular. He takes Bergson's phrase, "[t]he past is essentially *that which acts no longer,*" and substitutes "no longer" for "past" so that the definition reveals itself as tautology: "the past is that of which the action is in the past."[64] Next, Russell accuses Bergson of confusing the real past with a memory of the past, and, thus, an *object* (of knowledge or remembrance) with the *act* of knowing or remembering. "When Bergson speaks of the past," Russell writes, "he does not mean the past, but our present memory of the past" (PB, 21). "The past," he continues, "in its day, was by no means only an idea, but was in its intrinsic character just what the present is now […] The real past does not

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[63] Russell accuses Bergson of dogmatically linking space to magnitude. Merleau-Ponty, too, will point out the limits of Bergson's notion of space as a homogenous medium; for Merleau-Ponty, space is a dynamic medium, "shaped" and expanded by the movements and interests of the body. See especially Merleau-Ponty, "Éloge de la philosophie" and "Bergson se faisant," *Éloge de la philosophie et autres essais,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), 11-70 and 237-254.

[64] Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1939), 74, (hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as MM).

mingle with the present." Such confusion between the act of knowing and the thing known is, Russell argues, prevalent among modern philosophers: "In perception, the act of knowing is mental, whereas what is known is (at least in one sense) physical or material; thus, by confusing the two, the distinction between mind and matter is blurred" (PB, 22). This happens just as the distinction between past and present was blurred. All this blurriness in Bergson's philosophy, in Russell's opinion, stems from his fundamental confusion between subject and object, which Russell defines (respectively) as the "mind which thinks and remembers," and what is thought about or remembered (PP, 23). Wildon Carr defends Bergson by claiming that the *identity* of subject and object is not confusion on Bergson's part, but "the very essence of [Bergson's] doctrine" (PB, 35).[65] To decide on the precise relation of subject and object in Bergson's thinking is beyond the scope of this project, but it is necessary to point out that an identity of subject and object is not the same as their inter-dependence or, as Merleau-Ponty will put it in the early 1960's, their *reversibility*. A rigid distinction between subject and object can be challenged without asserting that they (subject and object) coincide. Merleau-Ponty, for instance, asserts that the human body derives its (subjective) sentience from its being-as-object, making subject and object interdependent. But his description of the human body as seer-seen, toucher-touched (*voyant/visible*, *touchant/tangible*) involves the stipulation that the right hand (for instance) can never feel itself touching the things; once it passes into the realm of objects, it loses, momentarily, its sentient power. Merleau-Ponty insists not on a coincidence between subject and object, but on their reversibility. He illustrates this point through the figure of the chiasmus. In this way, elements of Russell's critique anticipate Merleau-Ponty's later emendations of Bergson's thinking.[66]

Insisting on the separation of subject and object, on atomism, and on analysis, Russell faults Bergson for underestimating the importance of objectivity. The force of Russell's claim is that Bergson is a poet, if we associate the poet, as Russell does, with a subjective domain where creation is not explicitly bound by contracts of universal and objective reason. "The subject is a mental here and now," Russell writes,

> if subject and object are one, the object is a mental here and now; my friend Jones, though he believes himself to be in South America and to exist on his own account, is really in my head and exists in virtue of my thinking about him; St. Mark's Campanile, in spite of its great size and the fact that it ceased to exist ten years ago, still exists and is to be found complete inside of me. These statements are no travesty of Bergson's theories of space and time; they are merely an attempt to show what is the actual concrete meaning of those theories (PB, 25).

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[65] Wildon Carr writes: "It can only be with regard to the knowledge that Bergson calls intuition that this charge of confusion can have any semblance of meaning, and there so far from the identity of subject and object being a confusion it is of the very essence of the doctrine. Mr. Russell is perfectly entitled to question or deny that we can have knowledge by intuition, but if there is such knowledge it is characterised by just this fact that it is consciousness of life in living. The act of knowing turns inward, itself knows its knowing […] Mr. Russell […] has no right to charge Bergson with confusing two things which if this knowledge exists are identical, namely, the act of knowing and that which is known," PB, 32.

[66] "Ma main gauche et toujours sur le point de toucher ma main droite en train de toucher les choses, mais, je ne parviens jamais a cette coïncidence." Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible,* ed. Claude Lefort, (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 191. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty describes the manner in which we resist melting into the visible world that surrounds us: "[C'est] comme s'il y avait de lui [le visible autour de nous] à nous une accointance aussi étroite que celle de la mer et de la plage. Et pourtant, il n'est pas possible que nous nous fondions en lui, ni qu'il passe en nous, car alors la vision s'évanouirait au moment de se faire, par disparition ou du voyant ou du visible," 171.

The thrust of Russell's critique is thus a charge of subjective idealism—a charge that has also been made against phenomenology (particularly that of Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty). The idea that these thinkers do not pay enough attention to the external world is often connected to attempts to restore the hegemony of reason against intuitive means of communication. Russell concludes his essay with a poignant indictment of such "blurry" philosophies as that of Bergson: "Those who desire some prevision of the end which action is to achieve are told that an end foreseen would be nothing new, because desire, like memory, is identified with its object" (PB, 25).

In pursuit of objectivity, Russell recommends the methodology of science, which promises an "imaginative liberation from *self.*" He muses: "It seems to me that science has a much greater likelihood of being true in the main than any philosophy hitherto advanced (I do not, of course, except my own). In science there are many matters about which people are agreed; in philosophy there are none."[67] Thus the possibility of agreement would, according to Russell, minimize error through cross verification.[68] And the methodology of science, as a model for philosophy, would also discourage the persistent anthropomorphism Russell associates with some kinds of philosophy. In his 1914 lecture, "On Scientific Method and Philosophy," Russell argues: "Human ethical notions […] are essentially anthropomorphic, and involve, when used in metaphysics, an attempt, however veiled, to legislate for the universe on the basis of the present desires of men. In this way they interfere with that receptivity to fact which is the essence of the scientific attitude toward the world."[69] Russell goes on to clarify the position implied in the lecture's title, that it is "from science, rather than from ethics and religion, that philosophy should draw its inspiration,"[70] by explaining the advantages of science rather than (say) ethics as a basis for philosophy: "As compared with science, it [ethics] fails to achieve the imaginative liberation from self which is necessary to such understanding of the world as men can hope to achieve, and the philosophy which it inspires is always more or less parochial, more or less infected with the prejudices of a time and place."[71] The only way for philosophy to free itself from subjectivism, therefore, is to adopt the methodology of science.

Russell follows his conviction that philosophy must be purged of all non-rational elements, so that it can conduct itself in the spirit of science, the findings of which are objective, reproducible and verifiable. He seeks to cut the connective tissue of intuition and advocates a philosophy of "logical atomism." In "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism," a course of eight lectures delivered in London in 1918 and based on his work with Wittgenstein from 1912-1914, Russell describes his logic as "atomistic" (as opposed to the "monistic" logic of Hegel), and explains: "When I say that my logic is atomistic, I mean that I share the common-sense belief that there are many separate things; I do not regard the apparent multiplicity of the world as consisting merely in phases and unreal

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[67] Russell, "Logical Atomism," *Logic and Knowledge,* 339.

[68] This reinforces Russell's sense that the most important part of philosophy "consists in criticizing and clarifying notions which are apt to be regarded as fundamental and accepted uncritically," "Logical Atomism," *Logic and Knowledge,* 341.

[69] Russell, "On Scientific Method in Philosophy" *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays,* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 103.

[70] Russell, "On Scientific Method in Philosophy," 98.

[71] Russell, "On Scientific Method in Philosophy," 109.

divisions of a single indivisible […] to justify the sort of philosophy I wish to advocate would consist in justifying the process of analysis."[72] Russell's idea that the world is made up of atoms or separable parts directly opposes Bergson's view of the real as flux and duration. Accordingly, Russell aligns truth with consensus and with objective thought and recommends logical analysis is the means by which philosophy may approach the objectivity of science.

Russell's philosophy of logical atomism shares certain affinities with the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle, which came to prominence in the late 1920's. Russell's project to invent a philosophical (logical) language was taken up by members of this circle, most notably Carnap (and, more problematically, Wittgenstein). Like Russell, the logical positivists sought to revolutionize philosophy according to the guidelines of objective reason, and some made important connections between the merits of objectivity and leftist political and social movements. Otto Neurath, for example, a social scientist and active neo-Marxist, took communities of natural scientists as models for a rationally organized human society which, operating by agreement and consensus, could stand in opposition to the dangers of fascism, which many associated ideologically with the individualistic, subjective nature of Heideggerian philosophy.[73]

The debate between Russell and Bergson is closely mirrored by the controversy between Carnap and Heidegger, if we attribute to Carnap the view that Heidegger's "subjective metaphysics"—his "poetry"—should be excluded from the realm of philosophy. In his 1932 essay, "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language," Carnap argues that logical analysis reveals the statements of metaphysics to be meaningless *pseudo-statements* because they do not conform to the vocabulary and syntax of a specified language. Pseudo-statements occur 1) because they contain words that are wrongly believed to be meaningful or 2) because their constituent words "are put together in a counter-syntactical way." Carnap excerpts examples from Heidegger's 1929 address "What is Metaphysics" to illustrate the "violation of logical syntax" as well as the contamination of language by meaningless words. He argues that "the possibility of forming pseudo-statements is based on a logical defect of language" and seeks, like Russell, to construct a logical language that would avoid such errors. For Carnap as for Russell, ordinary language, because of its illogical nature, is unsuitable for philosophical investigation, and we can imagine that the "poetic" language of Heidegger and Bergson were considered irresponsible exacerbations of this defect.[74]

The more general idea that poetry is dangerous to philosophy and to the betterment of a community of rational members is not new, as Plato's exile of the poets from his *Republic* serves to show. As in Russell's case, it was not because Plato was unsympathetic to poetry that he exiled the poets. On the contrary, it was because he felt himself susceptible to poetry's charms, which pander to one's most emotional and

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[72] Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism," *Logic and Knowledge,* ed. Robert Charles Marsh, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), 178.
[73] Friedman, Michael, "Logical positivism," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. Craig (1998), accessed June 15, 2011, http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/Q061.
[74] Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical analysis of Language," *Logical Positivism*, 61 and 69. See also Luchte, "Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Carnap: Radical Phenomenology, Logical Postivism and the Roots of the Continental/Analytic Divide."

irrational impulses. In his famous essay, "Mysticism and Logic," Russell argues that the best philosophers—he cites Plato and Heraclitus as examples—are those who combine a laborious scientific method with mysticism. Russell distinguishes mysticism, which he defines as immediate insight, from the artistic striving of poets, though he admits a similarity of purpose: "The poet, the artist, and the lover are the seekers after that glory: the haunting beauty that they pursue in the faint reflection of its sun. But the mystic lives in the full light of the vision: what others dimly seek he knows with a knowledge beside which all other knowledge is ignorance."[75] This emphasis on *direct* knowing is curiously similar to Bergson's descriptions of intuition, but Russell does not allow for a connection between mystic insight and aesthetic experience, which is at best an imitation of such insight. Russell contends that mysticism is best complemented not by poetry, but by the slow, humble, patient labor of philosophy. And yet, in a vivid and beautiful passage, he shows himself to be no stranger to an experience that seems to mirror at once subjective aesthetic creation and the disorientation of the *époché*: "All who are capable of absorption in an inward passion must have experienced at times the strange feeling of unreality in common objects, the loss of contact with daily things, in which the solidity of the outer world is lost, and the soul seems, in utter loneliness, to bring forth, out of its own depths, the mad dance of fantastic phantoms which have hitherto appeared as independently real and living."[76] But Russell concludes by affirming his commitment to objectivity and his belief that "scientific philosophy comes nearer to objectivity than any other human pursuit, and gives us, therefore the closest constant and the most intimate relation with the outer world that it is possible to achieve."[77] Russell advocates scientific procedure as that which will move us closest to an objective view of the world.

In the context of Russell's main ideas about philosophy and what it should do, it makes sense that he should call Bergson a "poet" rather than a philosopher. Russell's sense that philosophy is the modest work of the intellect stems from his conviction that science and philosophy should never have been divided (Plato is to be faulted for this). It is also because Russell fears that Bergsonism will threaten the work of intelligence that he perceives it as dangerous and feels the need to sap its charms from the memories of Bergson's readers. He writes:

> Those to whom activity without purpose seems a sufficient good will find in Bergson's books a pleasing picture of the universe. But those to whom action, if it is to be of any value, must be inspired by some vision, by some imaginative foreshadowing of a world less painful, less unjust, less full of strife than the world of our everyday life, those, in a word, whose action is built on contemplation, will find in this philosophy nothing of what they seek, and will not regret that there is no reason to think it true (PB, 25).

In short, Russell faults Bergsonism for impeding the betterment of a community of rational members.

Bergson, for his part, refused to respond to Russell's critique in Russell's language, responding by letter to a request that he contribute to the discussion: "Je trouve excellente la réponse que Mr. Wildon Carr a déjà faite, et qui porte sur les points spéciaux visés par la critique de Mr. Russell" (PB, 1). This tepid reply as well as Bergson's delegation of the task of response to "one to whom not the poetry but the

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[75] Russell, "Mysticism and Logic," *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays,* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 10.
[76] Russell, "Mysticism and Logic," 9.
[77] Russell, "Mysticism and Logic," 32.

metaphysics appeals," suggests that the "points spéciaux visés" by Russell are not those that interest Bergson, whose philosophical language contrasts sharply with the logical language called for by Russell. Bergson's language aims to stimulate the *body* and the senses of his readers, rather than appealing exclusively to the intellect. Elaborate metaphors, such as that of the stinging wasp and that of the swimmer, work to create a language of images that appeal to the intuition, bypassing the intellect, for intuition can be brought about by the work of highly subjective language. The development of a language designed to appeal to the intuition, I argue, is what relates Bergson's project to aesthetic and literary endeavors.

II. Bergson and the Language of Intuition: Philosophy as Exploration of Form

Bergson, Life and the Intellect

Is Bergson's philosophy, as Russell suggests, no more than popular entertainment, devoid of the conscientious rigor with which the intellect must work to discover facts about the world? The umbrage Russell takes against Bergson's critique of intelligence is in a sense well founded, for Bergson writes in *L'évolution créatrice* that the intelligence is characterized "par une incompréhension naturelle de la vie."[78] But interpretation of such statements demands that we take into account Bergson's specialized definition of "life." For Bergson, life is a vital impulse (*élan*), which he juxtaposes against inert matter.[79] His critique of the intellect, moreover, rests upon a division of the world into two frames or registers: one homogenous, designated by the notion of "space," the other heterogeneous, understood according to the description of "time" as duration. Insofar as his thinking performs a *critical* gesture, Bergson does not attack the intellect, but attempts to circumscribe its domain to assure its usefulness. It is by considering the differences between Bergson's two orders, vital and inert,[80] that we may appreciate why the intellect alone is not suited to an investigation of "life" in Bergson's sense of the term and investigate other modes of understanding suggested by Bergson's theory of intuition. The intellect has an important, albeit specialized function (to enable our practical mastery of matter), but it cannot cognize duration, intensity or the nature of the real. An investigation of vital or dynamic processes, Bergson explains, requires a special kind of attention, a new "method"—one that has important affinities with both aesthetic experience and artistic creation.

In part, Bergson envisaged his critique of the intellect as a remodeling of Kant's critical approach to reason. But Bergson opens access to a realm that Kant believed to be

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[78] Henri Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1941), 166, (henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as EC).

[79] For a detailed explanation of the term "life" in Bergson's thinking, see *L'évolution créatrice*, 88, as well as Kieth Ansell Pearson's *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual: Bergson and the Time of Life,* (London: Routledge, 2002), especially 13-18 and 71-74.

[80] For a discussion of the vital order vs. the material or physical order and the disorder that arises from their confusion, see *L'évolution créatrice,* "Le désordre et les deux ordres," 231. The distinction Bergson draws between the inert and the vital mirrors the division he marks between space, which is homogenous and static, and time, which is heterogeneous and flowing.

inaccessible: the noumenal realm of things-in-themselves. By replacing Kant's transcendental divide between phenomena and noumena with divisions between time and space (and between vital and inert matter), Bergson does not foreclose access to vital registers. Rather, he suggests that such domains demand a non-intellectual approach. Bergson credits Kant with having cleared a path toward a philosophy that might access the vital: "[Kant] frayait la voie à une philosophie nouvelle, qui se fût installée dans la matière extra-intellectuelle de la connaissance par un effort supérieur d'intuition." But Kant's philosophy stops short of this, according to Bergson, because it attempts to apply the intellect over the whole of nature, relegating what escapes it to a noumenal realm beyond the reach of human faculties. In her study of Bergson, Suzanne Guerlac elegantly argues that Bergson retranslates the Kantian framework so as to re-inscribe the noumenal into the "here and now." She claims that, "[f]or Bergson, the absolute is not separate from the world of experience; it runs through it."[81] Bergson's own description of Kant's "error" confirms his sense that intuition (as direct and intimate knowledge of a thing) does not require passage *beyond* the realm of the senses and of human consciousness: "Car il n'est pas nécessaire, pour aller à l'intuition, de se transporter hors du domaine des sens et de la conscience. L'erreur de Kant fut de le croire" (PI, 141). By restricting the scope of the intellect to the realm of inert matter—a realm also associated in Bergson's thinking with homogeneous, measurable space—Bergson shows that a non-intellectual approach is necessary to understand "life," duration and consciousness and that there is thus a non-intellectual form of understanding.

Bergson views the intellect as important for enabling scientific prediction and for preparing the sphere of social interaction (this was a draw for Neurath and his circle), but faults disciplines such as psychology, cosmology, and metaphysics for taking the intellect as *given* and uncritically applying its frameworks to domains for which they are ill-suited:[82] "En vain nous poussons le vivant dans tel ou tel de nos cadres. Tous les cadres craquent. Ils sont trop étroits, trop rigides surtout pour ce que nous voudrions y mettre."

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[81] Guerlac, *Thinking in Time,* 104. She writes: "Kant's critical project was to delimit the domain of reason, to separate what can be known from what cannot—the unknowable absolute. To this end, he imposes the distinction between phenomenon and noumenon. The two are separated by a transcendental divide, which delimits the world of nature, where objects are represented in time and space, from the realm of the thing in itself. For Bergson the dividing line must be redrawn to separate space absolutely from time. It is to this end that he invites us to consider duration […] The difference Kant depicted as a transcendental limit does not separate appearance from some ineffable thing in itself, in Bergson's thought. It carves out a radical difference between space and time, reconceived as duration." (Guerlac cites Alexis Philonenko's reading of Bergson and Kant, *Bergson: ou de la philosophie comme science rigoreuse,* Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 1994.) In a similar vein, Guerlac characterizes Husserl's project as a "radical gesture against neo-Kantian philosophy." She explains Husserl's project to purify empirical experience so as to yield knowledge of the thing itself as an "attempt to reconnect Kant's noumenal world (the world of the thing-in-itself) with the world of lived experience, the phenomenal world in Kant's sense," 184.

[82] We find Bergson's proposal to investigate the genesis of the intellect at the beginning of Chapter III of *L'évolution créatrice.* He objects to the fact that psychology, cosmology and metaphysics take intelligence as *given*, and proposes to study how intellect and materiality have been co-constituted by reciprocal adaptation: "le moment serait donc venu de tenter une genèse de l'intelligence en même temps qu'une genèse des corps—deux entreprises évidemment corrélatives l'une de l'autre, s'il est vrai que les grandes lignes de notre intelligence dessinent la forme générale de notre action sur la matière […] Intellectualité et matérialité se seraient constituées, dans le détail, par adaptation réciproque" EC, 188.

If our epistemological frames crack when applied to what is vital, it is because the intellect was designed to analyze that which is static (i.e. inert matter).[83] Bergson explains: "Notre raisonnement, si sûr de lui quand il circule à travers les choses inertes, se sent mal à son aise sur ce nouveau terrain […] Pourtant, la philosophie évolutionniste étend sans hésitation aux choses de la vie les procédés d'explication qui ont réussi pour la matière brute" (EC, vii). Rather than attacking the intellect, Bergson discourages its overextension, which happens, for example, when we divide time into homogenous, measurable units. Nevertheless, Russell is right to claim that Bergson privileges intuition over intellect, for intellect is the object of critique, while intuition becomes the mainstay of Bergson's philosophical method.[84] Bergson's emphasis on intuition may be in part compensatory; philosophy in his day championed reason, logic and quantitative method (at the expense of instinct and intuition) to the extent that determinism threatened to hold sway.[85] On the side of spontaneous agency, then, Bergson objected to disciplines such as empirical psychology and evolutionary philosophy that, by misapplying scientific modes of inquiry, confused life with inert matter and distorted lived experience, time, and the nature of the creative impulse he termed "life."

In Bergson's view, the threat posed by the intellect's overuse, or extension beyond its proper domain, entails more than a mere "cracking" of intellectual frames. Not only does the intellect become awkward (*mal à son aise*) the moment it touches the living, but it distorts our experience of the vital by translating it into fixed symbols (EC, 165). When the intellect is applied, for example, to our inner psychic life, it corrupts the radical singularity of experience as it is lived, disguising the heterogeneity of the real by making it amenable to quantitative systems of measurement. A symbolic representation of states of consciousness *modifies* the normal conditions of inner perception.[86] That

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[83] In a footnote, written in 1902, Bergson describes intelligence as practical rather than profound: "l'intelligence étant sans doute faite avant tout pour manipuler la matière et par conséquent pour la connaître, [n'ai…] pas pour destination spéciale d'en toucher le fond" PM, 216.

[84] On the controversy over whether or not intuition is a "method" see Deleuze's *Le bergsonisme*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004), and Geurlac's *Thinking in Time.* Guerlac criticizes Deleuze's description of intuition as method, arguing that Deleuze sought to attribute a fashionable "rigor" to Bergson's thinking that would not be considered passé in the context of an intellectual climate in France influenced by structuralism, 176-181.

[85] Bergson's opponents in this regard, namely Herbert Spencer, Auguste Comte, and Gustav Fechner, have in common the tendency to apply quantitative or scientific methodology to qualities that, in Bergson's view, are not amenable to measurement. Fechner's invention of psychophysics, which sought to quantify subjective experiences by correlating them with the intensity of external stimuli, is a prime example of the extension of the intellect beyond its useful domain. Guerlac prefaces her reading of the *Essai* and of *Matière et Mémoire* with an account of the manner in which positivism in the late nineteenth century sought to bring all human and social phenomena under the regulation of invariable laws, knowable through objective observation—a tendency that is paradigmatically illustrated by Comte's declaration in 1839: "all our notions of truth are rendered homogeneous." Bergson's emphasis on novelty—the *in*calculability of the future—is of particular relevance here, as is his insistence on the *hetero*geneity of successive stages of consciousness, each of which swells with the pressure of the past and cannot be isolated from the flow of what precedes and will succeed it.

[86] Bergson specifies: "la projection que nous faisons de nos états psychiques dans l'espace pour en former une multiplicité distincte doit influer sur ces états eux-mêmes, et leur donner dans la conscience réfléchie une forme nouvelle, que l'aperception immédiate ne leur attribuait pas," *Essai sur les données immédiates*

Bergson's critique of the intellect rests on the Heisenbergian notion (*avant la lettre*) that the process of observation alters the object observed is a subtle point in Bergson's thinking that Russell may not have appreciated.

Bergson rejects conceptions of philosophy on the model of science, a discipline that, in his view, relies exclusively on the intellect: "La science positive, en effet, est œuvre de pure intelligence." The intellect or the intelligence, moreover, can render no more than a symbolic truth (*une vérité symbolique*), which obscures the fluid nature of duration. Philosophy's role, by contrast, is to extricate itself from (*se dégager de*) the habitual forms and frames of the intellect so as to provoke a rediscovery of the vital: "Le devoir de la philosophie serait donc d'intervenir ici activement, d'examiner le vivant sans arrière-pensée d'utilisation pratique, en se dégageant des formes et des habitudes proprement intellectuelles" (EC, 197). In his first major work, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, Bergson adumbrates his idea of intuition as an alternative or complement to a strictly intellectual approach and often invokes the experience of reading and writing to illustrate his ideas. A literary text, that of the *romancier hardi,* serves as a primary illustration, both of the negative work of intuition (the necessity of undoing our habits of spatial reasoning) and its positive work, its gesturing toward the ineffable "real curve" of experience.

Images, Art, Intuition: Sympathie Spirituelle

In his 1903 essay, "Introduction à la métaphysique," Bergson formulates his most concise and schematic description of intuition, which he juxtaposes against analysis. Analysis and intuition are, for Bergson, the two ways in which one can know (*connaître*) a thing: "La première implique qu'on tourne autour de cette chose; la seconde, qu'on entre en elle" (PM, 177-178). While analysis requires symbols to expresses itself, intuition aspires to an *absolute* knowledge of its object by coinciding with it.[87] Bergson defines intuition as a kind of "mental sympathy" (*sympathie spirituelle*),[88] an imaginative effort by which we place ourselves inside others or things, assuming their positions: "Nous appelons ici intuition la *sympathie* par laquelle on se transporte à l'intérieure d'un objet pour coïncider avec ce qu'il a d'unique et par conséquent d'inexprimable" (PM, 181). The radical particularity of any object of investigation is not expressible in symbols or words, which afford a "symbolic truth," a mere approximation. Through its intermediary, science, the intellect moves *around* its object, taking views of it from outside. The intellect "attire [l'objet] chez elle, au lieu d'entrer chez lui." But the real

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de la conscience (1889), (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007), 67, (hereafter cited in the text as E).

[87] This rhetoric of coincidence in Bergson's thinking is something that Merleau-Ponty will revise in his own work, emphasizing that only partial knowledge of another consciousness is possible.

[88] Bergson describes intuition as "une sympathie spirituelle avec ce qu[e la réalité] a de plus intérieure," (PM, 226). Like the German word *geist,* the French word *esprit* does not translate easily into English. *Spirit* could be used, but the connotations of this word in English tend away from the idea of mind, or mental processes (not necessarily intellectual ones). T.E. Hulme, in his authorized translation of "Introduction à la métaphysique," translates *esprit* as "mind" and *spirituelle* as "intellectual," giving us the term "intellectual sympathy" to describe intuition. This is problematic given Bergson's critique of the intellect, though it does gesture toward the point that intuition and intellect are not radically separate, but interdependent.

movement of an object "ne sera plus saisi du dehors et, en quelque sorte, de chez moi, mais du dedans, en lui, en soi" (PM, 178). In order to enter into what is "other," we must adopt its rhythm, let ourselves go, or even do violence to ourselves (*se violente*) (PM, 213). Despite the fact that intuition requires a departure from one's "*chez soi*," so to speak, intuition is *subjective*. Bergson explains that because we feel our*selves* "from within," we can extend this special knowledge to the universe as a whole, by analogy:[89] "C'est notre moi qui dure. Nous pouvons ne sympathiser intellectuellement, ou plutôt spirituellement, avec aucune autre chose. Mais nous sympathisons sûrement avec nous-mêmes" (PM, 182). This idea of subjective universality, the notion that we transcend the self by means of entering more deeply into it, is not new in the history of philosophy (we find it in Husserl, for instance). Bergson supports his version of the idea by emphasizing the kinship (*parenté*) between our particular selves and "life" more generally. We are local manifestations of the vital, he explains, and we become aware of this fact when we adopt a certain direction, movement or attitude. That the orientation of one's *body* facilitates sympathy is a point Bergson mentions in the *Essai* and develops at length in *Matière et Mémoire* through his discussion of the *schéma moteur*. That intuition appeals more to the body and to the senses, as well as to the imagination, aligns it with aesthetic practices and experiences.

In *L'évolution créatrice,* Bergson describes intuition as "une recherche orientée dans le même sens que l'art" and relates it to the aesthetic faculty:

> Qu'un effort de ce genre n'est pas impossible, c'est ce que démontre déjà l'existence, chez l'homme, d'une faculté esthétique à côté de la perception normale. Notre œil aperçoit les traits de l'être vivant, mais juxtaposés les uns aux autres et non pas organisés entre eux. L'intention de la vie, le mouvement simple qui court à travers les lignes, qui les lie les unes aux autres et leur donne une signification, lui échappe. C'est cette intention que l'artiste vise à ressaisir en se replaçant à l'intérieur de l'objet par une espèce de sympathie, en abaissant, par un effort d'intuition, la barrière que l'espace interpose entre lui et le modèle (EC, 178).

When we perceive normally, we see only the static traits or traces of the vital. To grasp what exceeds such static representation, (movement, intention, direction, desire), we must fall into step with what we perceive, and sympathetically adopt, for a time, its movement. It is by analogy with the work of the (literary) artist that Bergson describes philosophical intuition, which is tantamount to an imaginative projection of the self into the living reality of another, whether this is a person, object or character. Bergson attributes an

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[89] Bergson's description of intuition as knowing from inside and his idea that we understand the signs of others by reference to our own (bodily) inner experience lead David Lapoujade to insist upon a distinction between intuition and sympathy in Bergson's thinking. In "Intuition and Sympathy in Bergson" *Pli* 15, *Lives of the Real: Bergsonian Perspectives* (2004), Lapoujade argues that intuition precedes sympathy as its complement. Intuition allows us to encounter alterity in ourselves, while sympathy is our projection of our inner states on to outer things so as to "get inside them." He writes: "Yet if sympathy rests upon an indirect reasoning, how can one associate it with intuition? For its part, can intuition be anything other than the 'direct vision' that defines it? How can Bergson continue to think of them in quasi-synonymous terms? One needs to take a moment to return to reasoning by analogy. Analogy comes into play only between our own interior movements and those of the universe in general. It is a movement of projection. We firstly uncover ourselves intuitively as spiritual, vital material through a series of 'dives' into ourselves […] Here we recognize the movement of intuition, but also the ground of analogy. Analogy always establishes itself dynamically between our proper tendencies intuitively perceived and those of the universe […] we are analogous to the universe," 9.

"interior" to what is moving, into which he inserts himself (*je m'insère*) "par un effort d'imagination" (PM, 178).

Bergson compares this effort of imagination, which is also the work of intuition, to the art of composing a literary oeuvre: "Quiconque s'est exercé avec succès à la composition littéraire sait bien que lorsque le sujet a été longuement étudié […] il faut, pour aborder le travail de composition lui-même, quelque chose de plus, un effort, souvent pénible, pour se placer tout d'un coup au cœur même du sujet" (PM, 226). The intellectual work of gathering information, while important, does not suffice to create a work of literature. The artist-author must place herself at the heart of her subject and locate a vital impulse, which, once intuited, she has only to follow. Bergson goes on to describe intuition as an "incitation au mouvement," which directs the mind (*l'esprit*) to a certain path (*chemin*). This idea of a path suggests that by following the traces of another body's movement, or by adopting its particular position, one may imaginatively penetrate the inner life of another subject. Bergson offers the example of identification with a protagonist in a novel: "Le romancier pourra multiplier les traits de caractère, faire parler et agir son héros autant qu'il lui plaira: tout cela ne vaudra pas le sentiment simple et indivisible que j'éprouverais si je coïncidais un instant avec le personnage lui-même" (PM, 178). Intuition, like composing or reading a novel, involves processes of imaginative projection that rely on the ability of the *body* to adopt alternative positions and situations, projecting itself imaginatively into spaces inhabited by others.

Russell's observation that Bergson, like the designers of Oxo ad campaigns, persuades his readers by suggestion, bypassing their intellectual faculties, is entirely in keeping with Bergson's aesthetic-intuitive idea of how philosophy should communicate. Bergson goes further even than Russell by comparing aesthetic experiences to states of hypnosis and self-forgetting. In the *Essai,* Bergson describes the regular movements of poetic rhythm by which "notre âme, bercée et endormie, s'oublie comme en un rêve pour penser et pour voir avec le poète" (E, 11). The forgetting of the self and of one's critical faculties is necessary if we are to think and see with the poet:

> En se plaçant à ce point de vue, on s'apercevra, croyons-nous, que l'objet de l'art est d'endormir les puissances actives ou plutôt résistantes de notre personnalité, et de nous amener ainsi à un état de docilité parfaite où nous réalisons l'idée qu'on nous suggère, où nous sympathisons avec le sentiment exprimé. Dans les procédés de l'art on retrouvera sous une forme atténuée […] les procédés par lesquels on obtient ordinairement l'état d'hypnose" (E, 11).

The goal of art, according to this passage, is to prepare us for intuition by *weakening* the critical faculties that would normally protect us from the power of suggestion. In a supple state of self-forgetting, we can fall into step with the object of our perception. For Bergson, intuition is a two-stage process whereby we break down the symbolizing habits of analytical thinking in order to assume the attitude or position of whatever we are seeking to know. In "Introduction à la métaphysique," Bergson claims that intuition involves a "recursive movement" (*marche inverse*) that allows us to adopt the *parcours* of a fluid and mobile reality:

> [notre esprit] peut *s'installer* dans la réalité mobile, en adopter *la direction* sans cesse changeante, enfin la saisir intuitivement. Il faut pour cela qu'il se violente, qu'il *renverse le sens* de l'opération par laquelle il pense habituellement, qu'il retourne ou plutôt *refonde sans cesse ses catégories*. Mais il aboutira ainsi à des concepts fluides, capables de suivre la réalité dans toutes ses sinuosités et *d'adopter le mouvement même de la vie intérieure des choses*" (PM, 213, my emphasis).

Bergson frequently uses words such as "adopter," "s'installer" or even "insérer" to

accentuate the manner in which intuition involves assuming the movements and attitudes of what is other. Installing oneself within an ever-changing current of experience and adopting the movement of the inner life of things require not only displacement but also a certain amount of freedom from the fixed forms and frames of intellectual analysis. This is the sense of Bergson's description of art as an attenuated form of hypnosis. But intuition also involves the overturning and continual re-making of categories, as well as the creation of new forms of expression. Once the negative work of intuition is accomplished and our habitual ways of knowing weakened, we are free to "let ourselves go," to follow a path strewn with clues in the form of words, which induce our bodies to adopt a particular attitude or move imaginatively in a particular direction.

In the *Essai,* Bergson describes intuition by recourse to the techniques of an artist, which, rather than causing us to *relive* complex experiences (Bergson uses the example of emotion), appeal to our physical *bodies* to encourage an experience of sympathy. Emotions, Bergson writes, are "grosses de milles sensations, sentiments ou idées qui les pénètrent." The unique complexity of their nature means that they are inimitable, and it would seem that the only way to intuit the emotion of another would be too live it oneself: "il semble qu'il faudrait revivre la vie de celui qui l'éprouve pour l'embrasser dans sa complexe originalité" (E, 13). This is, importantly for Bergson, where the artist intervenes by appealing to our physical bodies: "l'artiste vise à nous introduire dans cette émotion si riche, si personnelle, si nouvelle, et à nous faire éprouver ce qu'il ne saurait nous faire comprendre" (E, 13). Instead of appealing to our intellect, usually, the artist sets us in motion by appealing to our bodies: "Il fixera donc, parmi les manifestations extérieures de son sentiment, celles que notre corps imitera machinalement, quoique légèrement, en les apercevant, de manière à nous replacer tout d'un coup dans l'indéfinissable état psychologique qui les provoqua" (E, 13). By inducing our bodies to imitate, involuntarily, certain outward signs made by other bodies, the artist leads us to assume the physical position or attitude in which it is possible for us to feel a version of what is expressed. The idea that complex, ineffable experiences can be communicated by recourse to the physical body is an idea that both Beckett and Merleau-Ponty will take up in meaningful ways.[90]

Bergson develops this idea further in *Matière et mémoire* through an elaboration of what he calls the *schème moteur*. It is through our bodies, Bergson argues, that we come to understand language, since auditory impressions are accompanied by nascent bodily movements that allow us mark the articulations of a phrase: "Ces mouvements automatiques d'accompagnement intérieure […] finiraient par dessiner une figure simplifiée, où la personne qui écoute retrouverait, dans leurs grandes lignes et leurs

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[90] There is a particularly striking passage in *Molloy,* in which Molloy communicates with his aged mother, who is both blind and deaf, by knocking on her head. This development of a communicative code that involves physical contact is complemented in the episode by communication between Molloy and his mother via smell. "Elle savait que c'était moi, à mon odeur […] elle était contente de me sentir […] Je me mettais en communication avec elle en lui tapotant le crâne," *Molloy,* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1951), 22. Certainly, this mode of bodily communication differs markedly from the imitative one Bergson suggests. In an essay on Bergson, Marie Cariou traces Merleau-Ponty's interest in the body to Bergson's designation of it in *Matière et mémoire* as a privileged *image* that orders all the others. See "Bergson: the keyboards of forgetting," *The New Bergson,* ed. John Mullarkey, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 100.

directions principales, les mouvements mêmes de la personne qui parle."[91] The fact that these movements sketch the main directional lines of the speaker's movement suggest that linguistic communication in general is based on a sympathetic appeal to the body. Bergson concludes: "Ainsi se déroulerait dans notre conscience, sous forme de sensations musculaires naissantes, ce que nous appellerons le *schème moteur* de la parole entendue" (MM 121). While this emphasis on the body's role in understanding language occurs in service of Bergson's broader aim, in *Matière et mémoire*, to study the relation between body and mind (*corps et esprit*),[92] it underscores the manner in which, for Bergson, adopting the attitude, position or movement of another body is necessary for intuition.

If intuition involves an appeal to the body, or an understanding of the positions of other bodies by imagination, how does Bergson's philosophical writing work to stimulate direct experiences in his readers? Here the "image" emerges in Bergson's thinking as an intermediary between an (ideal) representation and the (material) body. Russell has hit the mark by calling Bergson's philosophy an "imaginative *picture*" of the world, and by observing that that Bergson's "thought is always conducted by means of visual images," (PB, 9). The image is a pivotal notion in Bergson's thinking, and, I argue, the means by which efforts of imagination may be stimulated in the minds (and bodies) of his readers. Bergson's own writing (as well as the "poetry" he praises) stretches the limits of language by suggesting *images* (instead of merely describing things). Bergson writes admiringly of the poet as "celui chez qui les sentiments se développent en images, et les images elles-mêmes en paroles." The words of the poet are developed images, designed to lead the reader, by way of these images, to feel a sentiment akin to the one that inspired the poet: "En voyant repasser devant nos yeux ces images, nous éprouverons à notre tour le sentiment qui en était pour ainsi dire l'équivalent émotionnel" (E, 11). But how exactly does an image affect the physical body? Like the term "life," "image" takes on a specialized meaning in Bergson's lexicon. In the opening pages of *Matière et mémoire,* we learn that "image" designates all of one's sensations, and that the body is a special image, insofar as it is known not from the outside, by perceptions, but from within, by "affections" (MM, 11-12). As John Mullarkey notes, the Bergsonian image is neither matter nor mind and pre-exists "any bifurcation between outside and inside, subject and object."[93] The fact that the body is an image that can select from among other images means that the organization and configuration of images might enable us to intuit

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[91] MM, 100.

[92] On this point see Frédéric Worms, "*Matter and Memory* on mind and body: final statements and new perspectives," trans. Pelagia Goulimari in *The New Bergson*. Worms argues that by using the action of the body as a point of departure Bergson is able to "go beyond the thesis of dualism," and that "the action of the body can and must be thought as a mediation between two different orders of representation and of reality," 91.

[93] John Mullarkey, "Introduction," *The New Bergson,* 1-16, 7. A comprehensive discussion of Bergson's use of the term "image" or the different kinds of images he describes is not possible here given the focus of the current project. But of principal importance is the manner in which Bergson conceives the *body* as an image, for this situates the image between the material and the ideal and blurs the distinction between mind and matter. Frédéric Worms discusses this point in "*Matter and Memory* on mind and body," and Anthony Uhlmann's *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), also contains a useful account of Bergson's notion of the "image."

the position and movements of another body. It is in this way that the image yields an intuition of what another body must have experienced (i.e. how it has moved).

In a 1911 lecture, "L'intuition philosophique," Bergson describes the task of understanding a philosopher's discourse by means of physical sympathy. He does this by recourse to the "image," describing it as an intermediary between the philosopher's intuition and the abstractions with which he translates it in order to express it. Bergson describes this image as a shadow that haunts the mind of the philosopher. It is an "image fuyante et évanouissante, qui hante, inaperçue peut-être, l'esprit du philosophe, qui le suit comme son ombre à travers les tours et détours de sa pensée." Yet this image is visible to others, and it provides us with the opportunity to imitate the attitude of the philosopher's body so as to see what he saw: "Regardons bien cette ombre: nous devinerons l'attitude du corps qui la projette. Et si nous faisons effort pour imiter cette attitude, ou mieux pour nous y insérer, nous reverrons, dans la mesure du possible, ce que le philosophe a vu" (PM, 120). Thus the physical sympathy Bergson describes in the context of art is equally applicable to philosophical discourse, provided that it employs not a language of concepts, but a language that preserves the trace of the philosopher's *body*, a language of shadows, or, more broadly, of images.[94]

Like many of Bergson's metaphors, that of the shadow skillfully conforms to the dynamic idea it is meant to suggest. Not only is a shadow the projection of a body (that marks its physical position), but, insofar as it is a *negative* image, the shadow suggests an important stage in Bergson's intuitive methodology: that of negation. Bergson emphasizes the "puissance de negation" that the image carries within it, and argues that intuition operates in the realm of speculation just as the *daimon* of Socrates intervenes in practical life (*preventing* his interlocutor's course of action, challenging his mode of thinking, rather than telling him what he should do). Frequently intuition serves to undermine theses and theories previously held as true: "Devant des idées couramment acceptées, des thèses qui paraissaient évidentes, des affirmations qui avaient passé jusque-là pour scientifiques, elle souffle à l'oreille du philosophe le mot: *Impossible*" (PM, 121). Paradoxically, since Bergson must philosophize in words, the primary target of intuition's negation is language.

Bergson's critique of language follows lines similar to his critique of the intellect: the word paves over the fluid, particular quality of experience by forcing it into fixed forms of expression. Bergson contends that words deceive us (*nous tromper*) "sur le caractère de la sensation éprouvée" (E, 98),[95] and describes the manner in which the "mot brutal" with "contours bien arrêtés" "emmagasine ce qu'il y a de stable, de commun et par conséquent d'impersonnel dans les impressions de l'humanité, écrase ou tout au moins recouvre les impressions délicates et fugitives de notre conscience individuelle" (E, 98). Bergson's views on language resonate with the famous critique of conceptual

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[94] A comparison between Bergson's "language of images" and the "image language" (*langue III*) Deleuze associates with Beckett's television plays would be worthwhile, for their shared emphasis on the image as a means of furthering non-conventional kinds of linguistic communication may imply that the image is fundamental to the workings of non-conventional language in experimental literature. See Gilles Deleuze, "L'Épuisé," *Quad*, (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1992). This essay is the subject of further discussion in Chapter 5.

[95] In a similar vein, he complains: "nous sommes encore dupes des mots," EC, 58.

language waged by the early Nietzsche[96] and with Beckett's desire to "tear apart" the veil of a language, which, he surmised, could refer to nothing outside itself. In his famous "German letter" to Axel Kaun in 1937, Beckett writes: "And more and more my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it."[97] Like Beckett, Bergson suggests that a kind of violence against conventional language is necessary to counteract its obfuscating effects. He writes: "Pour lutter à armes égales, celles-ci [les impressions] devraient s'exprimer par des mots précis" (E, 99).[98] But even the most precise words, Bergson reminds us, will eventually rigidify, imposing their own stability on sensations, despite the fact that they were invented as witnesses to instability and fluidity. Given the nature of language, we can see why its negation is necessary to the creative work of intuition.

      To illustrate how our spatial, linguistic reasoning might be challenged, Bergson draws again from the arts, conjuring the image of a bold novelist (*romancier hardi*) who rips apart the fabric (not a veil but a canvas) of conventional forms of knowing by revealing their fundamental absurdity. Bergson imagines that "quelque romancier hardi, déchirant la toile habilement tissée de notre moi conventionnel, nous montre sous cette logique apparente une absurdité fondamentale, sous cette juxtaposition d'états simples une pénétration infinie de mille impressions diverses qui ont déjà cessé d'être au moment où on les nomme (E, 99). Here Bergson is concerned not only with destabilizing the fixed forms of language, but also with negating the notion of a self that is stable over time. It is significant that the bold novelist tears apart such skillfully woven conventions by deconstructing them, or by causing them to betray the absurdity inherent in their attempt to capture what is moving and ineffable in fixed and stable forms. But the novelist runs into a problem, Bergson acknowledges, since he, too, "déroule notre sentiment dans un temps homogène et en exprime les éléments par des mots." Thus the novelist "ne nous en présente qu'une ombre à son tour:" The difference, however, is that:

> il a disposé cette ombre de manière à nous faire soupçonner la nature extraordinaire et illogique de l'objet qui la projette; il nous a invités à la réflexion en mettant dans l'expression extérieure quelque chose de cette contradiction, de cette pénétration mutuelle, qui constitue l'essence même des éléments exprimés. Encouragés par lui, nous avons écarté pour un instant le voile que nous interposions entre notre conscience et nous" (E, 99-100).

By playing with the medium of language, by testing its capacities, the clever or bold novelist manages to turn words against themselves. He creates a shadow (an image) that insists upon its own inadequacy, its own illegitimacy, thus inviting us to reflect. Our reflection on the insufficiency of words may then provoke us to return, if we are in search of truth, to our sensations themselves. Thus a certain kind of artist (the bold novelist) is capable of performing the negative function of intuition through a manipulation or

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[96] See Nietzsche "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense" in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings,* trans. Ronald Spiers, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[97] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett 1929-1940*, 518.

[98] Guerlac writes in *Thinking and Time*: "The only way to fight back against the conventionality of language would be to seek a very precise language." She compares Mallarmé's attempt to "counteract the ordinary state of language [*l'état brut*] with a pure state of poetic language, which operates through sensation, not naming," 73.

purposeful abuse of language. Bergson's description of the bold novelist foreshadows, in a sense, the playful abuse of language that marks Beckett's literary oeuvre.[99]

For Bergson, the *positive* work of intuition is to gesture toward that which resists conceptual representation, and it is to this end that his philosophical prose is thickened with images and metaphors. Among Bergson's "writing strategies," Guerlac identifies "thought experiments" designed to "stimulate the reader's intuition of that which cannot be presented discursively through concepts" and "scenes with multiple valences that anticipate the ideas he will eventually deploy, giving us time to feel or live them concretely before picking them up again discursively."[100] Guerlac supports these assertions with analyses of metaphors in the *Essai* and in *Matière and Mémoire,* the most striking of which is a metaphor of a dancer, whose graceful, flowing movement prepares Bergson's explanation of duration.[101] Bergson continues and develops his metaphoric technique for stimulating intuition in *L'évolution créatrice,* where he illustrates the difference between intuitive knowledge (related to instinct) and intellectual knowledge by recourse to the Sphex, a stinging wasp that lays its eggs in the still-living body of its victim. In order to do this, the Sphex must paralyze its victim (usually a spider, beetle or caterpillar) without killing it completely, so that its developing larvae will have fresh meat on which to feed as they mature. The wasp must sting with uncanny precision the locus of motor ganglia in its victim—a procedure that varies according to the victim's species and particular anatomy. The wasp, Bergson argues, has a *vital* interest; it does not go about learning the anatomy of the caterpillar by scientific experiment, recording the effects of its sting, but has an alternative way of knowing. For the Sphex there is, according to Bergson, "une *sympathie* (au sens étymologique du mot) qui le renseignât du dedans […] sur la vulnérabilité de la Chenille" (EC, 175). The Sphex example illustrates that there must be an alternative to intellectual knowledge gleaned from "outside." If such intuitive knowledge is possible for the Sphex, then, by analogy, it is also possible for us: "Dans des phénomènes de sentiment, dans des sympathies et des antipathies irréfléchies, nous expérimentons en nous-mêmes, sous une forme bien plus vague, et trop pénétrée aussi d'intelligence, quelque chose de ce qui doit passer dans la conscience d'un insecte agissant par instinct" (EC, 175). In this illustration, it is a certain *bodily* sympathy that distinguishes intellectual knowing from an intuitive knowing that derives its knowledge from inside (*du dedans*). The Sphex gleans its knowledge "tout autrement que par un processus de connaissance, par une intuition (*vécue* plutôt que *représentée*) qui ressemble sans doute à ce qui s'appelle chez nous sympathie divinatrice" (EC, 177). From this we might surmise that it is by imaginatively assuming the position of its victim's body that the Sphex can know its anatomy directly. In this metaphor, as elsewhere, the notion of imaginative bodily sympathy is integral to intuition.

To illustrate the leap from intelligent to intuitive thinking, Bergson uses the metaphor of a person learning to swim. Mastery of particular strokes notwithstanding (which Bergson does not mention), it is only by jumping into the water and by

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[99] Jean Paulhan's observation pertains to both Beckett and Bergson: "No writer is more preoccupied with words than the one who is determined at every term to get rid of them." Paulhan, *Les fleurs de Tarbes,* cited in Guerlac, *Thinking in Time,* 74.

[100] Guerlac, *Thinking in Time,* 63.

[101] Guerlac, *Thinking in Time,* 47-50.

experiencing the unique kind of resistance it affords that we can learn to move in it: "si, tout bonnement, je me jette à l'eau sans avoir peur, je me soutiendrai d'abord sur l'eau tant bien que mal en me débattant contre elle, et peu à peu je m'adapterai à ce nouveau milieu, j'apprendrai à nager" (EC, 193-194). For Bergson, intuition, which is tantamount to a leap from solid ground into a liquid element, resolves various difficulties generated by static, propositional thinking, since it exposes these difficulties as part of an intellectual way of knowing that is not all-encompassing. The swimming metaphor shows that what seems impossible when *thought about,* (we might think, for instance, that swimming is impossible because in order to learn to swim we must be able to keep afloat in water, and, thus, know how to swim already),[102] becomes likely and natural when lived or acted: "l'action tranchera peut-être le nœud que le raisonnement a noué et qu'il ne dénouera pas" (EC, 194). Making the "leap" or "jump" to intuition from intellectual thinking is even easier than learning to swim, Bergson tells us, because there is a fundamental affinity between intellect and intuition. The intellect, figured in his illustration as solid ground, is but a local condensation of a greater being: "notre être, ou du moins l'intelligence qui le guide, s'y est formé par une espèce de solidification locale." It follows that the aim of *philosophy*, for Bergson, is to reverse this solidification of the intellect, to dissolve it back into the whole so that it discovers itself as a product of the flux it seeks to understand: "La philosophie ne peut être qu'un effort pour se fondre à nouveau dans le tout" (EC, 193). That the intellect contains within itself latent intuition, from which it was formed, is in keeping with Bergson's sense of the interrelation between things, which differ merely by degree or by intensity. An image-rich, metaphoric language is *necessary* to philosophy as Bergson understands it, though perhaps not *sufficient*, since Bergson explicates his images rather than letting them stand alone.

As much as Bergson objects to the idea of philosophy as science, he does not equate it with art. In Bergson's view, an artist's work is only ever preparatory to philosophy, because art remains immanent to individual experience. To render an intensive subjectivity universal, the philosopher must weave in and out of intuition and analysis, moving away from himself and returning to himself. The intellect, harboring intuition latent within itself, is the force that frees philosophy from an inability to move beyond individual experience (an inability that Bergson attributes—perhaps wrongly—to art).[103] If aesthetic intuition, which remains close to its object, were to extend its insight into a communicable reflection, it would enable an understanding of "life." Bergson writes: "L'instinct est sympathie. Si cette sympathie pouvait étendre son objet et aussi réfléchir sur elle-même, elle nous donnerait la clef des opérations vitales" (EC, 177). Intuition performs the negative work of revealing the intellect's insufficiencies and the positive work of gesturing toward what escapes representation by concepts. But without

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[102] Bergson explains the circular "knot" of reason as follows: "Il est l'essence du raisonnement de nous enfermer dans le cercle du donné. Mais l'action brise le cercle. Si vous n'aviez jamais vu un homme nager, vous me diriez peut-être que nager est une chose impossible, attendu que, pour apprendre à nager, il faudrait commencer par se tenir sur l'eau, et par conséquent savoir nager déjà," EC, 193.

[103] Bergson's idea that philosophical method is predicated on cooperation between intuition and intellect, which are not wholly separate, since intuition resides within the intellect, is expressed concisely in *L'évolution créatrice*, 183. Of the intellect, which provides a model for consciousness, Bergson writes: "Une fois libérée, elle peut d'ailleurs se replier à l'intérieur, et réveiller les virtualités d'intuition qui sommeillent encore en elle." Thus intellect can re-invigorate intuition, which is latent at its core.

the intellect, intuition would remain immanent to itself, or "rivée à l'objet spécial qui l'intéresse."[104] Intuition introduces us, "par la dilatation qu'elle obtiendra de notre conscience," into the "domaine propre de la vie," but "c'est de l'intelligence que sera venue la secousse qui l'aura fait monter au point où elle est" (EC, 179). Philosophy is then a blending or interweaving of intuition and intellect, which are not entirely separate. In "L'intuition philosophique," Bergson represents the necessity of philosophy's "two directions," intuition and intellect, through the figure of the zigzag line: "Ayant quitté en effet la courbe de sa pensée pour suivre tout droit la tangente, [le philosophe] est devenu extérieur à lui-même. Il rentre en lui quand il revient à l'intuition. De ces départs et de ces retours sont faits les zigzags d'une doctrine qui se « développe », c'est-à-dire qui se perd, se retrouve, et se corrige indéfiniment elle-même" (PM, 121).[105] The philosopher, lost, perhaps, amidst intellectual concepts, must return to himself via intuition, then go out again to conceptualize what he has felt. This intermittent contact with a subjective, and perhaps creative force, and the task of continuously creating new forms by which to express or exteriorize such experiences, culminates in a philosophy that emphasizes the effort of form-giving. Such form-giving is akin not only to practices of artistic creation (broadly construed, not in Bergson's sense of subjective "aesthetic intuition"), but also to the related task of developing a new means of communicating—a language that would more closely approach the fluid dynamism of the "vital."

Both Bergson and Russell view the re-invention of language as necessary to overcome what Russell calls "the linguistic obstacles to clear expression."[106] But while Russell invents a mathematical language of symbols in the interests of increasing precision, Bergson rebels against symbols in favor of a language of suggestive images. Russell openly admits the pitfalls of rigorous precision: "In the language of mathematical logic it is much easier to say what I want to say, but much harder to induce people to understand what I mean when I say it."[107] Greater precision is also the motivation for Bergson's language of images, which he invents to render the singularity of sensation with greater accuracy. But Bergson opposes Russell by insisting that the methods of science are inadequate to a study of "life" and by attacking representation via symbols as symptomatic of a pervasive obsession with *space*, which he understands as divisible, homogeneous, and amenable to measurement. Bergson's 1903 conception of metaphysics renders it something of a self-deconstruction of science; he calls metaphysics a "science" that seeks to go beyond (*se passer de*) symbols (PM, 182) and defines its purpose as "une rupture avec les symboles" (PM, 219). Only by overcoming habitual symbols and concepts can new representations come into being—ones that are "souples, mobiles,

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[104] Bergson describes the double function of intuition and its relation to intelligence: "L'intelligence reste le noyau lumineux autour duquel l'instinct, même élargi et épuré en intuition, ne forme qu'une nébulosité vague […] D'un côté, en effet, [l'intuition] utilisera le mécanisme même de l'intelligence à montrer comment les cadres intellectuels ne trouvent plus ici leur exacte application, et, d'autre part, par son travail propre, elle nous suggérera tout au moins le sentiment vague de ce qu'il faut mettre à la place des cadres intellectuelles," EC, 179.

[105] See also Guerlac's treatment of this theme in "The 'Zigzags of a Doctrine': Bergson, Deleuze, and the Question of Experience," *Pli* 15: *Lives of the Real: Bergsonian Perspectives* (2004): 34-53.

[106] Russell, "Logical Atomism," *Logic and Knowledge,* 336.

[107] Russell, "Logical Atomism," *Logic and Knowledge,* 337.

presque fluides, toujours prêtes à se mouler sur les formes fuyantes de l'intuition" (PM, 188). In *L'évolution créatrice,* Bergson criticizes ordinary language because of the tendency of the sign to transfer itself from one object to another. The sign can do this, Bergson argues, because it has an arbitrary relation to the object it signifies. As an alternative Bergson imagines an intuitive language in which the sign would be "adherent," or related in some way to what it signifies. He concludes: "Le signe instinctif est un signe adhérent, le signe intelligent est un signe mobile" (EC, 159). Though Bergson's images do have a direct, perhaps unrepeatable connection to what they are meant to suggest, the question of whether or not they qualify as "adherent" signs is complicated by the fact that Bergson cautions against any idolatry of the image. More precise and malleable than the concept, the image too can rigidify and impose false stability on an evanescent sensation. In "Introduction à la métaphysique" Bergson describes how intuition may be evoked through the use of *multiple* images:

> Nulle image ne remplacera l'intuition de la durée, mais beaucoup d'images diverses, empruntées à des ordres de choses très différents, pourront, par la convergence de leur action, *diriger la conscience sur le point précis où il y a une certaine intuition à saisir.* En choisissant les images aussi disparates que possible, on empêchera l'une quelconque d'entre elles d'usurper la place de l'intuition qu'elle est chargée d'appeler, puisqu'elle serait alors chassée tout de suite par ses rivales. En faisant qu'elles exigent toutes de notre esprit, malgré leurs différences d'aspect, le même degré de tension, on accoutumera peu à peu la conscience à *une disposition toute particulière et bien déterminée, celle précisément qu'elle devra adopter pour s'apparaître sans voile*" (PM, 186, my emphasis).

A constellation of overlapping, even contradictory images are less representational than suggestive, and it is by inducing consciousness to adopt a certain disposition, or to follow a certain *direction*, that such images may stimulate intuition. It is important that there are multiple images so that no single one gains ascendancy and replaces the singularity of the impression itself. The aim of Bergson's alternative language is to direct consciousness toward intuition, bypassing the mediation of ordinary language. It does this by way of images that suggest to the body a position, attitude (disposition), or direction.

Different as their approaches are, Russell and Bergson's attempts to re-invent philosophical language emphasize the necessity of new and radical forms. Husserl's project to re-found the sciences involves a related imperative to dispense with old and tired forms. We will find this echoed (in a different key) when Merleau-Ponty insists that philosophy forge its own path and that it can never know in advance where it is going. A notion of philosophy as the practice of finding or founding *forms* (of expression) involves both a *creative* ethos (associated with art) and methods to enable discovery (typified by science). The necessity of a form-founding that is continually linked to the body's way of orienting itself and forging pathways in new terrain also links artistic creation to scientific discovery, which, like art, can be exploratory and experimental.

III. Husserl in Paris: Phenomenology as a Rigorous Science?

We know that for Bergson philosophy zigzags between intuition and analysis, requiring a language that undercuts its own fixity and incites bodily positions to stimulate intuition. For Russell, philosophy entails the creation of a universal, logical language to guard against subjectivism, irrationality and error. In Husserl's writings we find a series

of tensions that constitute an alternative to these opposing views, situating him as something of a transition figure between Russell and Bergson. Husserl proclaims the necessity of scientific rigor, yet "rigor" for him entails overturning the foundations of the existing sciences. The effort of radicalizing science (*Wissenschaft*) in this way is certainly vertiginous, and it entails the emergence of new forms. It is by emphasizing the radicalism of Husserl's project that we may understand how phenomenology under the pen of Merleau-Ponty comes to resemble a creative practice—enough to provoke Emile Bréhier's remark that Merleau-Ponty's ideas would be more aptly expressed in the form of literature.[108] Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology departs significantly from the scientific spirit embraced by Husserl; his later works, *L'œil et l'esprit* and *Le visible et l'invisible*, explicitly criticize the scientific viewpoint in language reminiscent of Bergson's polemic against the intellect.[109] With just reason, then, it has been asked *how* Merleau-Ponty, a philosopher of embodiment and worldliness, could have drawn inspiration from Husserl, whose ambition was to fashion philosophy as a pure foundation for the sciences. A possible response would be to assume that Merleau-Ponty misread Husserl, or that he read him "creatively," as James Schmidt suggests, "appropriating what he needed, rewriting what he could, overlooking what was irrelevant or antithetical to the project he had sketched for himself."[110] But the differences between Merleau-Pontian and Husserlian phenomenology derive less from a *mis*reading on Merleau-Ponty's part than from his exacerbation of tensions existing within Husserl's work. We could say that Merleau-Ponty performs a dramatic shift of emphasis. *French* phenomenology of the 1940's finds its inception where Husserl's search for firm ground leads him to bracket existing systems in search of new modes of description. The radicalism of Husserl's

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[108] Bréhier asks: "De telle sorte que votre doctrine, pour ne pas être contradictoire, devrait rester non formulée, mais seulement vécue. Mais une doctrine seulement vécue, est-elle encore une doctrine philosophique?" He then observes: "Je vois vos idées s'exprimant par le roman, par la peinture, plutôt que par la philosophie. Votre philosophie aboutit au roman. Ce n'est pas un défaut, mais je crois vraiment qu'elle aboutit à cette suggestion immédiate des réalités telle qu'on la voit dans les œuvres des romanciers," *Le Primat de la perception et ses conséquences philosophiques* [1946]*,* (Paris: Éditions Verdier, 1996), 77-78.

[109] For example, the opening of *L'oeil et l'esprit*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1964) laments the inability of science to achieve contact with the world: "La science manipule les choses et renonce à les habiter. Elle s'en donne des modèles internes et, opérant sur ces indices ou variables les transformations permises par leur définition, ne se confronte que de loin en loin avec le monde actuel," 9.

[110] On Merleau-Ponty's reading or misreading of Husserl, see Schmidt, *Between Phenomenology and Structuralism,* 20. Another solution would be to divide Husserl's oeuvre into early and late stages, arguing that while Merleau-Ponty found little to agree with in the early works in which Husserl sought foundations in pure logic, the later work, in particular *The Crisis of the European Sciences* and its discussion of the "life world" resonated more deeply with Merleau-Ponty. Schmidt suggests that Merleau-Ponty, while studying the *Nachlass* at the Husserl archive in Louvain, "discovered a radically different phenomenology from the one he found in Husserl's published works" and that it was with this "other phenomenology, the phenomenology towards which Husserl moved as he advanced from 'the eidetic method or logicism of his earlier stage to the existentialism of his later stage' that Merleau-Ponty cast his lot." Rather than attributing something of an "existential turn" to Husserl, I read certain tensions as already existing in the earlier works. Schmidt's own reading of the preface to the *Phénoménologie* shows that Merleau-Ponty ascribes to Husserl two contradictory objectives: to study *pure* essences *and* to put essences back into existence. For further discussion of Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of Husserl, see *Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl*, eds. Ted Toadvine and Lester Embree, (Dordecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002).

project, as Merleau-Ponty re-renders it, comes to resemble something of a creative effort—one not entirely divorced from the art of *wandering*, which can entail pursuing new directions, leaving the beaten path and developing new modes of articulation and forms that follow more closely the contours of experience.

This ambivalence or tension in Husserl's work comes into focus most clearly in the contrast between an essay published in 1910, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science" (*Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*), and descriptions of the phenomenological *époché* found in the first book of *Ideas* (1913). The *époché*, as Husserl conceived it, is not *simply* a retreat from the world to a state of immanent subjectivity. He stipulates that the world and all our natural attitudes *remain* but are suspended, "put out of action," or preserved in parentheses.[111] By means of the *époché,* Husserl attempts to reach objectivity, which is his ultimate aim, by means of the *radically* subjective. This paradoxical strategy becomes the mainstay of Husserl's phenomenological method. The idea that objectivity can be reached by way of radical subjectivity is supported by the *intentional* structure of consciousness, the idea that consciousness must always be *about something*, which is revealed to us by the *époché* (Husserl develops his version of intentionality from Brentano, who in turn adapts it from medieval Scholasticism.)[112] In the first book of *Ideas,* Husserl supplements his characterization of phenomenology as a "*beginning science*" by emphasizing the necessity of description. "[O]ne thing we may and must strive for," he writes, is that "at each step we faithfully describe what we see, from our point of view and after the most serious study, actually see."[113] This combination of *study, learning* and intuitive description from a particular point of view reveals an intimacy between the objective and the subjective and works to expand conceptions of science (*Wissenschaft*) that restrict it to study and learning (rather than, say, creative invention). Earlier in *Ideas,* Husserl claims that "to *learn* to see, distinguish, and describe what lies within view, require[s], moreover, *peculiar and laborious studies.*"[114] That a certain kind of learning, both laborious and "peculiar" can be put in the service of seeing and describing (as well as distinguishing, differentiating and recognizing) reveals a tension in Husserl's work that becomes more prominent in *The Crisis of the European Sciences.* Here, reversibility between subjectivity and objectivity calls into question the usual distinctions between the arts, with their emphasis on creating forms, and radical science.

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[111] In this way, Husserl distinguishes the *époché* from Descartes' "attempt to doubt universally," which for Husserl is too close to "an attempt to negate universally." Husserl characterizes the *époché* as a "*certain refraining from judgment which is compatible with the unshaken conviction of truth*" and insists that the *époché* is *not* a psychologizing "I think" or an "It seems to me." He writes: "The consciousness of which we are speaking is even further from being a matter of just thinking of something in the sense of *'assuming'* or *'presupposing.'* It is every positing or judgment *related* to objectivity rather than the objectivity itself that undergoes reduction." Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy, first book*. Trans. F. Kersten, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff publishers, 1983), 59-60.

[112] Hanna Meretoja, "Against Pre-Established Meanings: Revisiting Robbe-Grillet's Relation to Phenomenology," *Phenomenology , Modernism and Beyond,* eds. Carole Bourne-Taylor and Ariane Mildenberg, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), 131. See also Franz Brentano, *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte: Erster Band* [1874], (Leibzig: Felix Meiner, 1924), 124-5.

[113] Husserl, *Ideas,* 235.

[114] Husserl, *Ideas,* xix, my emphasis.

Husserl himself would never admit that elements of his phenomenology conflate science with artistic creation. He upheld the distinction between science and art until the end of his life, despite bold claims that seem, at first, to reverse his earlier position. Husserl's famous claim of 1935, "Philosophy as science, as serious, rigorous, indeed apodictically rigorous, science—the dream is over,"[115] is best read, following Maurice Natanson's interpretation, as "a measure of Husserl's historical discernment rather than philosophical self-doubt."[116] Husserl is not renouncing his ideal of philosophy as a rigorous science, but lamenting that the historical conditions of Europe in the 1930's are inhospitable to such an enterprise. In the same appendix to *The Crisis of the European Sciences* (titled "Denial of Scientific Philosophy") he writes: "Some regard philosophies as art works of great artistic spirits and consider philosophy 'as such' to have the unity of an art." With this statement Husserl distances himself from those who associate philosophy with "artistic" practices. But we must not look to Husserl's explicit statements, which express discouragement about historical circumstances rather than a disavowal of his life's project, for possible connections between phenomenology and the artistic project of crafting new forms. Like Merleau-Ponty, we must attend to what is unsaid, or to what lies between Husserl's statements and manifests itself only as a marked tension within his work.[117]

Like Bergson and Russell, Husserl sought to redefine philosophy in the midst of an enthusiasm for positivism that dominated the early part of the 20th century. As we've discussed, faith in scientific method led to its application beyond the realms of matter and "plain fact" for which its methods were designed. The idea that science might be used to investigate intangibles, such as thought or feeling, led to the development of the *human* sciences, in particular the discipline of psychology, which was of special interest to Husserl. But corrupt methods caused by the overextension of science beyond its proper domain led to twin impulses: to *limit* the domain of investigation to the plain, positive facts to which science is suited, and to *reform* science so that it might approach higher, "ultimate" questions. As is well known, Husserl's late work, *The Crisis of the European Sciences,* is a reaction against what he perceived as the corruption or "sickness" of the European sciences, which rested on naïve foundations and operated on the basis of uncritical assumptions.[118] On the one hand, Husserl's effort to *restore* the sciences by

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[115] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology,* trans. David Carr, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 389. In his translator's introduction, David Carr suggests that Merleau-Ponty reads this line to suggest (in the *Phénoménolgie*) that Husserl in his last period became fully conscious of what the return to the phenomenon meant and broke tacitly with the philosophy of essences. But Carr adds that the context of the line implies that Husserl was referring to the adverse historical conditions of tather than his condemning his own philosophy, xxx-xxxi.

[116] Maurice Natanson, *Edmund Husserl: Philosopher of Infinite Tasks,* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), xvi.

[117] Perhaps another place to look for evidence of this tension, apart from in Husserl's texts themselves, is in the field of phenomenoligcal aesthetics, especially in the work of Mikel Dufrenne and Edward Casey. See the entries on these and other thinkers in *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics,* eds. Hans Rainer Sepp and Lester Embree, (Dordecht, Heidelberg, London, New York: Springer, 2010).

[118] The "crisis" also manifested itself, according to Woodruff Smith, "in the way in which mathematical physics has lost touch with everyday human experience. Galileo's vision of science began the ideal of a "mathematization" of nature, which in the early twentieth century produced the first general relativity theory and then quantum theory. As widely discussed, both relativity theory and quantum theory seem

securing their foundations echoes Kant's campaign to restore reason by subjecting it to critique. But Husserl's project also overlaps, as David Woodruff Smith notes, with the efforts of thinkers such as Carnap, who were "working on the foundations of mathematics, logic and science."[119] Woodruff Smith characterizes Husserl's early vision, typified by the section title "Prolegomena to a Pure Logic" in *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901), as "full of hope for the model of any science as a formal, ideally mathematical theory of a given domain supported by evident experience or intuition of an appropriate type." This project becomes untenable, Woodruff Smith argues, by the time of the *Crisis*, when, for Husserl, "mathematical physics no longer seems tied to human experience."[120] Given that phenomenology begins as an attempt to secure a pure, formal or theoretical foundation for the sciences (especially for psychology), we might find in Husserl's desire to establish foundations free of error a faint echo of Russell's insistence on a pure, logical language.[121]

But Husserl did not wish to limit the domain of philosophical inquiry to matters of fact. Knowing almost nothing of each other's work, Husserl and Bergson sought to circumscribe the domain of scientific method, arguing, in vastly different styles and by very different means, that there is something that exceeds the grasp of a scientific world view and the atomism (the belief that the world is composed of separate particles without flow or interpenetration) that subtends it.[122] Like Bergson and many modernist writers who were his contemporaries,[123] Husserl objected to the way in which what he called a "positivistic concept of science" excluded questions he deemed "ultimate and highest,"

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incompatible with our *Lebenswelt* (life-world) experience and our everyday knowledge of the world around us." David Woodruff Smith, *"Science, Intentionality, and Historical Background," Science and the Life-World: Essays on Husserl's 'Crisis of the European Sciences,'* eds. David Hyder and Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 1-26, 3.

[119] Woodruff Smith admits that "philosophers of science do not usually associate Carnap's project with Husserl's," but points out that "[b]oth [Carnap and Husserl] develop a logical structure of sentences or propositions supported by empirical evidence." He adds that Husserl, however, "casts his system in a framework of ideal propositional meanings expressible in principle by an appropriate language […]," Woodruff Smith, "Science, Intentionality, and Historical Background," 16.

[120] Woodruff Smith, "Science, Intentionality, and Historical Background," 3.

[121] Despite a shared emphasis on securing foundations, I do not wish to conflate Husserl's project either with Russell's or with that of logical positivism, to which he was not sympathetic. Despite his sense that the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle protected against irrationalism, Husserl wrote in a letter to Roman Ingarden that against "irrationalistic skepticism" "the bulwark of mathematical positivism will not help for long, since people will ultimately discover that it is a sham philosophy and not a true philosophy" *Briefe an Roman Ingarden,* (The Hague: Nijihoff, 1968), 93 as quoted in David Carr "Translators Introduction," *The Crisis of the European Sciences,* xxvi-xxvii.

[122] There is no evidence that Husserl and Bergson studied one another's works, but we do know that Husserl advised Roman Ingarden's thesis on Bergson. Husserl is reputed to have said, after reading the first chapter of Ingarden's thesis (1916-1917), "It is almost as if I were Bergson." For further discussion of the relation between Husserl and Bergson, see Peter Gorsen, *Die Phänomenologie des Bewusstseinsstroms: Bergson, Dilthey, Husserl, Simmel und die Lebensphilosophischen Antinomien,* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1966), especially 197-199.

[123] For an interesting comparison of modernism and phenomenology (in particular a study of Husserl in relation to Gerard Manley Hopkins), see Eoghan Walls, "A Flaw in the Science of Transcendence: Hopkins and Husserl on 'Thisness,'" *Phenomenology, Modernism and Beyond*, 167-189.

particularly metaphysical ones.[124] Positivism excludes too much by limiting its investigation to the "plain positive facts of experience."[125] According to Husserl: "Positivism, in a manner of speaking, decapitates philosophy."[126] *The Crisis of the European Sciences,* still unfinished at the time of Husserl's death in 1937, was Husserl's final attempt to forge a science radical enough to treat the ultimate, highest questions (metaphysical ones) at a time when historical circumstances underscored a crisis of epistemological grounding.

Like Bergson, Husserl was critical of existing scientific methodologies, which were applied too liberally to domains outside their purview and therefore threatened to interfere with intuition of pure phenomena. Accordingly, the *époché* was designed to "put out of action" usual perceptual attitudes, habits and judgments so as to access a "new region of being never before delimited in its own peculiarity—a region which, like any other genuine region, is a region of *individual* being."[127] An investigation of subjective being will permit an eventual return to the natural attitude, which Husserl *preserves* in the bracket of the *époché*, and rehabilitate the natural sciences by establishing for them firm foundations. The problem with the natural attitude, for Husserl, is that it obscures the phenomenological one: "[i]n the natural attitude nothing else but the natural world is seen." Similarly: "As long as the possibility of the phenomenological attitude had not been recognized, and the method for bringing about an originary seizing upon the objectivities that arise with that attitude had not been developed, the phenomenological world had to remain unknown."[128] We might think of the *époché* as a technique for inciting us to adopt an *attitude* in which we might intuit universal structures of consciousness. In his emphasis on direct, immediate and radically *individual* experience,

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[124] Husserl writes: "the positivistic concept of science in our time […] has dropped all the questions which had been considered under the now narrower, now broader concepts of metaphysics, including all questions vaguely termed 'ultimate and highest' […] All these 'metaphysical questions,' taken broadly—commonly called specifically philosophical questions—surpass the world understood as the universe of mere facts," *The Crisis of the European Sciences,* 9.

[125] I borrow this concise definition of the "positivist spirit" from Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century,* 8. We might apply Gutting's definition to describe a general trend of positivism in Europe between 1870 and 1920.

[126] Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences,* 9. Consider also "If 'positivism' is tantamount to an absolutely unprejudiced grounding of all sciences on the 'positive,' that is to say, on what can be seized upon originaliter, then *we* are the genuine positivists. In fact, we allow *no* authority to curtail our right to accept all kinds of intuition as equally valuable legitimating sources of cognition—not even the authority of 'modern natural science,'" *Ideas,* 39.

[127] Husserl, *Ideas,* 62-64. Husserl distinguishes the *époché* from positivism, insisting that the phenomenological reduction is more radical than a mere bracketing of scientific theories, for we must bracket even the "natural attitude" in which we perceive: "It is not now a matter of excluding all prejudices that cloud the pure objectivity of research, not a matter of constituting a science 'free of theories,' 'free of metaphysics,' by groundings all of which go back to the immediate findings […] What we demand is another direction. The whole prediscovered world posited in the natural attitude, actually found in experience and taken with perfect 'freedom from theories' as it is actually experienced, as it clearly shows itself in the concatenations of experience, is now without validity for us; without being tested and also without being contested, it shall be parenthesized. In like manner all theories and sciences which relate to this world, no matter how well they may be grounded positivistically or otherwise, shall meet the same fate," *Ideas,* 62.

[128] Husserl, *Ideas,* 66.

Husserl's thinking has, in certain respects, an affinity with Bergsonian intuition,[129] but Husserl's version of intuition is more sympathetic to science, insofar as he attempts to (re)-ground science in eidetic intuition. In this way, science and intuition are not polarized in Husserl's thinking.

Like Bergsonian intuition, Husserl's science of essences calls for the *rejection* of pre-existing methods and systems; it differentiates itself thus from existing natural and empirical sciences. For Husserl:

> to the extent that philosophy goes back to ultimate origins, it belongs precisely to its very essence that its scientific work move in spheres of direct intuition [… W]ith the philosophical intuition in the correct sense, the phenomenological grasp of essences, a limitless field of work opens out, a science that without all indirectly symbolical and mathematical methods, without the apparatus of premises and conclusions, still attains a plenitude of the most rigorous and […] decisive cognitions.[130]

A limited comparison between Bergson and Husserl is possible, especially given that Husserl's new and rigorous science moves "in spheres of direct intuition" and frees itself of "symbolical and mathematical methods." Husserl and Bergson share a caution about the effectiveness of existing scientific methodology in the domain of philosophy, as well as a drive toward purity of experience that is possible only after such forms are bracketed or given up in favor of alternative modes of knowing. Moreover, Husserlian *Anschauung* (intuition) retains a close relationship to the experience of seeing (*anschauen*) and to images (his version of intuition is qualified as *eidetic*).

In *The Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl further distinguishes his rigorous, genuine "science" from science in the traditional sense by emphasizing that the "genuine concept of science" cannot be attained "by a process of abstraction based on a comparing of the *de facto* sciences."[131] Husserl's earlier essay, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science" (1911), most clearly describes the ways in which *rigorous* science differs from the existing sciences. First, Husserl criticizes natural science as "naïve in regard to its point of departure," and insists that it "can never in any way serve as a foundation for philosophy."[132] Husserl then characterizes *scientific philosophy*, by contrast, as an entrance into "a new dimension," as requiring "fundamentally new attitudes," and as

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[129] For another useful discussion of the relation between Husserl and Bergson see Ansell Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual*. Ansell Pearson points out that both Levinas and Deleuze find profound affinities between Bergsonism and phenomenology, and adds that Bergson's thought shares with phenomenology "an obsession with the pure," 12 (see also his discussion in the footnote on page 206). Alternatively, Richard A. Cohen suggests that common ground between Bergson and Husserl might be found on the subject of intuiting essences (a convergence that Merleau-Ponty also appreciates). He writes: "The Husserlian 'intuition of essences' serves for Merleau-Ponty not to alter or deepen but to refine Bergson's method of 'intuition.'" Richard A. Cohen, "Philo, Spinoza, Bergson: The Rise of an Ecological Age," *The New Bergson*, ed. John Mullarkey, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 27. But we should not put too much stock in similar vocabulary, since the Husserlian concept of intuition derives from the word *Anshauung*, which, with its emphasis on "seeing," differs markedly from Bergson's explanation of intuition. For a helpful discussion of Husserlian *Anshauung*, see Henry Pietersma, "Intuition and Horizon in the Philosophy of Husserl," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 34, no. 1 (September 1973): 95-101.

[130] Edmund Husserl, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," trans. Quentin Lauer, *Husserl: Shorter Works,* eds. Peter McCormick and Frederick Elliston, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 196.

[131] Edmund Husserl, *The Cartesian Meditations*, trans. D. Cairns, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 9.

[132] Husserl, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," 171-172.

beginning "from the ground up with a foundation free of doubt."[133] We gain appreciation of the difference between philosophical science and empirical science through the distinction Husserl draws between phenomenology and psychology. Psychology is content to take empirical consciousness as its object, while phenomenology interests itself in "pure consciousness," access to which requires a special "orientation" and effort.[134] Phenomenology is more radical than psychology, for it can succeed only if "we accept nothing given in advance, allow nothing traditional to pass as a beginning, nor ourselves to be dazzled by any names however great, but rather seek to attain the beginnings in a free dedication to the problems themselves and to the demands stemming from them."[135] Allowing specific content (the problems themselves) to dictate its *own* method and form seems far from our usual conceptions of science, which involve the application of tried-and-true methods to enable a sure-footed approach to what is not yet known. Even as it alters our conception of science, Husserl's phenomenology does not by any stretch equal an "artistic" philosophy of intuition, for it aspires toward "conceptual distinctness and clarity" and seeks to "recast the conjectures of profundity into unequivocal rational forms."[136] Nevertheless it is certain that Husserl's ideal of a rigorous, *radical* science—one that dispenses with existing systems in favor of intuitions—significantly expands our usual understanding of "science" (*Wissenschaft*).

Embedded in Husserl's descriptions of a truly radical science is the motif of a new world, dimension, or terrain—a *landscape* populated by pure phenomena that requires exploration. Figurations such as these present themselves with particular frequency in Husserl's discussions of the *époché,* a procedure that involves de-familiarization, loss of bearings, and vertiginous newness.[137] In bracketing the natural attitude, "putting out of

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[133] Husserl, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," 167. In a 1933 essay on Husserl, Eugen Fink suggests that Husserl's work transforms the idea of science insofar as it extends the usual conception of science as "world-immanent knowledge" to develop a kind of knowledge that would be "world-transcendent." For Fink, this is why phenomenology is "in a definite sense prior to all worldly knowledge." My argument is related in that I'm attempting to show that "science" undergoes transformation in Husserl's work, but rather than focusing on its transcendence, I wish to emphasize its power to invent new forms. Eugen Fink, "The Phenomenological Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Contemporary Criticism," *The Phenomenology of Husserl,* ed. R.O. Elveton, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 98, as quoted in Schmidt, *Beyond Phenomenology and Structuralism,* 21.

[134] Husserl, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," 174. Husserl asserts that phenomenology is superior to and subtends psychology: "The critical separation of the psychological and the phenomenological methods shows that the latter is the true way to a scientific theory of reason and, by the same token, to an adequate psychology,"185.

[135] Husserl, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," 195. Husserl emphasizes the radical nature of his science as follows: "The science concerned with what is radical must from every point of view be radical itself in its procedure. Above all it must not rest until it has attained its own absolutely clear beginnings," 196.

[136] Husserl's remarks on profundity align his rigorous science with more traditional associations between science and order, clarity and rational form: "philosophy's adopting the form and language of genuine science [involves] recognizing as an imperfection one of its much-praised and even imitated qualities, profundity […] Genuine science, so far as its real doctrine extends, knows no profundity. Every bit of completed science is a whole composed of "thought steps" each of which is immediately understood, and so not at all profound. Profundity is an affair of wisdom; conceptual distinctness and clarity is an affair of rigorous theory. To recast the conjectures of profundity into unequivocal rational forms—that is the essential process in constituting anew the rigorous sciences," "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," 195.

[137] One might object that it is a misrepresentation of Husserl to pluck the few moments of metaphor from the voluminous tomes of Husserl's writing marked by its dry tone and systemizing. (Woodruff Smith ranks

action" our usual ways of perceiving, we isolate and access phenomenological *residua*: the transcendental ego and the intentional structure of consciousness. In *Ideas*, Husserl demands that we "set aside all hitherto prevailing habits of thinking, that we recognize and *tear down* the intellectual barrier with which they confine the horizon of our thinking and […] with full freedom of thought, seize upon the genuine philosophical problems to be set completely anew made accessible to us only by the *horizon open on all sides*."[138] A land with its "horizon open on all sides" involves no small measure of disorientation, yet this horizon-less world is the goal of Husserl's attempt to "divert the one-sided direction of regard proper to every natural style of research." The metaphoric phenomenological landscape reveals itself as a strange chimera: half physical terrain, unmarked by travelers, half world of imagination with horizons open on all sides. What kind of attitude or orientation, we might ask, would be possible in such a world? For it is certain that our previous approaches and orientations are not adequate. Accordingly, Husserl goes on to describe phenomenology as a "new style of attitude" that permits access to and free movement within this "peculiar" "new world," with its "free vista of 'transcendentally' purified phenomena." In this horizon-less world we must "learn to see, distinguish, and describe what lies within view." As explorers we must orient ourselves and forge a new attitude or style, so that we might create new names, forms and categories for the rich experiences that confront us. This figuration of phenomenology as exploration, with its emphasis on new attitudes, styles, names, and forms, suggests a point of convergence between artistic and scientific endeavors,[139] for the project of *describing* the newness of what we see joins scientific observation to the necessity of creating new forms of expression—forms that are immanent to their content, and emerge *within* what they delimit. Phenomenology, figured as exploration, is not only a scientific endeavor, but assumes roles we might associate with experimental artistic practices, as the development of the field of phenomenological aesthetics in the wake of Husserl's phenomenology suggests.[140]

     With exploration, Husserl suggests, comes the necessity of finding new *forms* to describe the newness of what one sees. Literary experimentation and phenomenological

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Husserl with Kant and Aristotle as "among the most systematic of philosophers," "Science, Intentionality, and Historical Background," 5.) But this unusual reading of Husserl, which foregrounds his metaphors in lieu of his systematic methods, is motivated by an attempt to understand Merleau-Ponty's interest in his work. The metaphoric texture of Merleau-Ponty's own prose indicates that Husserl's figures held particular interest for him.

[138] Husserl, *Ideas*, xix, my emphasis.

[139] Husserl, *Ideas,* xix.

[140] This field is associated with thinkers such as Roman Ingarden, Merleau-Ponty, Mikel Dufrenne, Michel Henry (whose work on Kandinsky is especially relevant to this point) and Edward Casey. Natalie Depraz remarks that a great number of Husserl's first generation students went on to develop a phenomenological aesthetics either because "they felt that Husserl was about to develop one, or [because] they were tempted enough by the phenomenology of imagination he invented to apply it to aesthetics." Depraz makes the point that "imaginative eidetic variation" of an object allows the different possibilities of the being of the object to appear and "helps us leave the sole level of effective factuality, which is *in principe* unique." Depraz, following Casey and others, points out a link between the *époché* and imagination, to which she attributes a "transformative dimension that involves a deep criticism of every grounding temptation." Depraz, "Imagitaion" *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, 156-157. See also Edward Casey, *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study,* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1976).

"science" have in common this invention of form—an activity akin to the creation of "language."[141] In phenomenology, this new language seems to be founded on the movements of the body; Husserl's recurring metaphor of phenomenology as a foreign land emphasizes the importance of *orientation* to the task of description. He rejects existing forms, insisting that there is "no 'royal road' into phenomenology and therefore none into philosophy. There is only *one* road prescribed by phenomenology's own essence."[142] To find the way prescribed by phenomenology we must avoid the heavily trafficked roads of science and metaphysics. Existing philosophical systems distract us from the things themselves, and are like so many Minervas "springing forth complete and full-panoplied from the head of some creative genius, only in later times to be kept along with other such Minervas in the silent museum of history."[143] Implicit in Husserl's directive to put aside existing systems is an imperative to found a new system in reaction to one's direct experience of the things themselves. This can't be just *any* system; Husserl is careful to distinguish phenomenology from *Weltanschauung* philosophy, according to which any number of perspectives have equal validity.[144] The creation of a descriptive language is checked by the *universality* of phenomenological *residua* (which remain after the *époché*). This, again, is why an investigation into radical *subjectivity* can yield objectivity.[145] Husserl describes phenomenology as both a journey and a process of description:

> Our procedure is that of an explorer journeying through an unknown part of the world, and carefully describing what is presented along his unbeaten paths […] Such an explorer can rightfully be filled with the sure confidence that he gives utterance to what, at the time and under the circumstances, *must* be said—something which, because it is the faithful expression of something seen, will always retain its value—even though new explorations will require new descriptions with manifold improvements. […W]e propose to be faithful describers of phenomenological structures and, moreover, to preserve the habit of inner freedom even with respect to our own descriptions.[146]

The contradictions of this extended metaphor exhibit tensions at the core of Husserl's project, for he insists upon absolute *fidelity* to "what is seen" while acknowledging the

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[141] Eoghan Walls emphasizes the manner in which both Husserl and Gerard Manley Hopkins must invent (or re-invent) novel terms for the newness of their ideas. He compares Husserl's appropriation of *eidos* and *époché* to Hopkins' invention of *instress* and *inscape*. "A Flaw in the Science of Transcendence: Hopkins and Husserl on 'Thisness,'" *Phenomenology, Modernism and Beyond,* 167-189.

[142] Husserl, *Ideas*, 235.

[143] The full quotation reads as follows: "And what meaning should be given to the 'system' for which we yearn, which is supposed to gleam as an ideal before us in the lowlands where we are doing our investigative work? Is it to be a philosophical 'system' in the traditional sense, like a Minerva springing forth complete and full-panoplied from the head of some creative genius, only in later times to be kept along with other such Minervas in the silent museum of history?" "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," 167.

[144] For Husserl's critique of *Weltanshauung* philosophy, which targets Dilthey, see "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," 185-196. He claims that *Weltanschauung* philosophy is incompatible with scientific philosophy and that any attempt to integrate the two can only "lead to a softening and weakening of the scientific impulse and to promoting a specious scientific literature destitute of intellectual honesty," 194.

[145] A concise version of this claim can be found in Husserl's article on phenomenology for the Encyclopedia Britannica (1927): "Subjectivism can only be overcome by the most all-embracing and consistent subjectivism (the transcendental). In this [latter] form it is at the same time objectivism [of a deeper sort]," Husserl, "Phenomenology," trans. Richard E. Palmer, *Husserl: Shorter Works*, eds. Frederick Elliston and Peter McCormick, (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1981), 21-35, 35.

[146] Husserl, *Ideas*, 235.

necessity of *forging* paths through virgin territory. To what extent is observation—entirely separate from creative invention—possible? In other words, to what extent does our movement within a landscape alter its appearance for us? Husserl insists on the mutability of phenomenological description, for the explorer says what *must* be said *at the time and under the circumstances*. When these change, new descriptions become necessary. The coupling of description with exploration undermines the idea that there can be *one* faithful account of what is seen. Husserl writes: "what we describe will have to be described otherwise *sub specie aeterni*."[147] Similarly, he insists that we must "preserve the habit of inner freedom even with respect to our own descriptions." But is it possible that the explorer (traveling on *unbeaten* paths) is in a sense *creating*—if only through delimitation and selection—what she sees rather than observing a landscape unchanged by her efforts at description? Were the explorer to forge a slightly different route in the terrain, different frames of the landscape would be "observed."

The exchange between forms of description (in particular, linguistic ones) and experience is masked by the possibility that, according to Husserl, there may exist a pre-linguistic domain of direct experience. Derrida's critique of Husserl consists largely of the charge that Husserl defers the question of language, taking "*l'être comme présence*" as his *telos*, and ignoring the extent to which language mediates and fashions not only experience, but the illusion of absolute presence.[148] By submitting language to the parenthetical suspension of the *époché*, Husserl ignores this linguistic saturation of experience. But at the same time, his figurative admixture of path-making and describing foreshadows Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the interrelation of language and experience. For Merleau-Ponty: "il n'y a pas de vie pure et absolument inexprimée chez l'homme, c'est que l'irréfléchi ne commence à exister pour nous qu'à travers la réflexion."[149] Husserl's own emphasis (above) on the necessity of continually adapting

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[147] Husserl, *Ideas,* 235.

[148] Jacques Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène: Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, (Paris: Presses universitaires de france, 1967). Derrida faults Husserl's *Logical Investigations* for neglecting to define the sign *in general* (since Husserl describes indexical and expressive signs). Derrida describes the manner in which certain of Husserl's works suggest the idea that language can *produce* truth rather than simply record it: "tout au long d'un itinéraire qui aboutit à l'*Origine de la géométrie,* Husserl accordera une attention croissante à ce qui, dans la signification, dans le langage et dans l'inscription consignant l'objectivité idéale, *produit* la vérité ou l'idéalité plutôt qu'il ne l'*enregistre*," 26. But Derrida also identifies opposing, and perhaps more dominant strains in Husserl's thinking: "Husserl, qui n'a jamais voulu assimiler expérience en général (empirique ou transcendantale) et langage, va sans cesse s'efforcer de contenir la signification hors de la présence à soi de la vie transcendantale […] Husserl croit à l'existence d'une couche pré-expressive et pré-linguistique du sens, que la réduction devra parfois dévoiler en excluant la couche du langage," 32-33. Finally, Derrida contends that "Husserl a dû différer, d'un bout à l'autre de son itinéraire, toute méditation explicite sur l'essence du langage *en général.* Il la met encore « hors circuit » dans *Logique formelle et transcendantale* […] Husserl n'a jamais posé la question du logos transcendantal, du langage hérité dans lequel la phénoménologie produit et exhibe les résultats de ses opérations de réduction. Entre le langage ordinaire (ou le langage de la métaphysique traditionnelle) et le langage de la phénoménologie, l'unité n'est jamais rompue malgré les précautions, des guillemets, des rénovations ou des innovations," 6-7. The charge that Husserl's phenomenological language never breaks with ordinary language is just and may apply, though to a lesser extent, to Merleau-Ponty's language, especially in comparison to that of Beckett.

[149] Merleau-Ponty, *Le Primat de la perception et ses conséquences philosophiques* (1946)*,* (Paris: Éditions Verdier, 1996), 77.

our descriptions hints ever so slightly at the impossibility of an absolute separation between description, which we can relate to indexical showing (*Anzeigen*), and expression (*Ausdruck*).[150] The explorer's descriptions must develop in contact with what she sees, which is determined by her manner of moving within and delimiting her surrounds. It is even possible that the explorer "finds" or "makes" her way in the process of "describing" what she observes. Giving utterance to what "must be said," trafficking with a content that dictates its form, wandering, and exploring "unbeaten paths," all suggest a form of creative exploration (not unconnected, perhaps, with bodily orientation) to be part of Husserl's phenomenological project. With the bracketing of existing systems comes a call to create not only a new and rigorous foundation for philosophy, but also a new "style of attitude" and descriptive forms tantamount to new "languages."

The project of language creation in a broad sense may be related to the activities of framing, orienting and organizing radically new experiences. This comparison in turn suggests a relation between language, understood as a way of forging *meaning* through delimitation, and space—in particular the manner in which the body explores and "maps" its surroundings. In *The Test Drive,* Avital Ronell asks why the *test*, related both to the constitution of the subject as well as to scientific methods of probing, exploring and experimenting, has "come to define our relation to questions of truth, knowledge and even reality."[151] Ronell's reading of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* locates points of intersection between artistic and scientific experimentation, and prepares her iconoclastic reading of Husserl as the founder of a science of creative testing. Ronell argues that Nietzsche "opens the channels of a scientificity that, without compromising the rigor of inquiry, would allow for the inventiveness of science fiction, experimental art, social innovation, and, above all, a highly stylized existence" through ceaseless and playful experimentation.[152] "The principle axioms of the gay science are related to dimensions of exploration and discovery," Ronell writes, "discovery is not seen simply in terms of 'invention' but, under certain conditions, as a way of discovering what was already there." That discovery yields more than "findings" and involves exploration of what pre-exists *under certain conditions* suggests that a change in one's position or point of view may lead to radically new experiences. Accordingly: "the experimenter must give up any secure anchoring in a homeland, allow herself to be directed by an accidental current rather than aiming for a preestablished goal. The accidental current becomes the groove for a voyage taken without helmsman."[153] Disorientation and dislocation (homelessness), which Ronell associates with experimentation, figure importantly in Husserl's more poetic descriptions of the *époché* as a mode of access to a strange world. Ronell points out that "[t]he relation of testing to the question of place is essential. The test site, as protoreal, marks out a primary atopos, producing a 'place' where the real awaits confirmation […] Linked to a kind of ghostless futurity, the site offers no present shelter. This explains perhaps why Nietzsche names the *gaya scienza* in the same breath that convokes '*We who are homeless.*'" If, as Nietzsche suggests, "the unhinging of home [is]

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[150] On Husserl's distinction between indexical signs (*Anzeigen*) and expressive signs (*Ausdruck*) in *Logical Investigations,* see Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène,* 2.
[151] Avital Ronell, *The Test Drive*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 17.
[152] Ronell, *The Test Drive,* 156.
[153] Ronell, *The Test Drive,* 191.

a preparation for another future,"[154] then "unhinging" is necessary to the process of experimentation, which holds open the possibility of previously un-thought experiences and modes of expression. But does Husserl's "transcendentally purified" world resemble the atopos or "ghostless futurity" that Ronell describes as an effective testing ground? It seems that the impossibility of *pure* discovery (unalloyed by the "creative" movements of the body altering its relation to space) haunts Husserl's pre-linguistic domain of direct experience. For notions of exploration and experimentation muddle clear distinctions between art and science. We might think instead of Beckettian *atopoi* (the dim void of *Worstward Ho*, the apocalyptic "refuge" of *Fin de Partie* or the white square of *Quad*) as more apt examples of Ronell's testing grounds. For the arts and sciences, exploration and experiment ally discovery with the creative invention of spaces in which experiences can be delimited, discovered, spoken or formed.

It is worth emphasizing that it is not Husserl's work alone but Merleau-Ponty's liberal interpretation of it that transforms phenomenology into a movement akin to creative praxis, understood less as the musings of a great "artistic spirit" than as a way of finding one's way, or of charting new terrain. If tensions in Husserl's account of philosophy as rigorous science reveal *two* Husserls, then it is surely the Husserl who describes vertiginous wandering as part of the phenomenological method rather than the Husserl who sought to extract pure "essences" that captured Merleau-Ponty's interest. In his preface to the *Phénoménologie*, Merleau-Ponty writes: "Les essences de Husserl doivent ramener avec elles tous les rapports vivants de l'expérience, comme le filet ramène du fond de la mer les poissons et les algues palpitants" (PP, 15). The idea that Husserl's seeking of pure, transcendental forms is tantamount to a voyage to the bottom of the ocean that would yield, upon return, living, palpitating, previously unseen specimens from the deep, affirms that a kind of rigorous *learning* may afford a fuller appreciation of the range and complexity of experience. The necessity of a return to the life-world after the reduction is emphasized in Husserl's later texts, which, in addition to his *Nachlass*, were most influential for Merleau-Ponty.[155] Most interesting in Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl is his sense that the *époché* offers the possibility of suspending a *language* that separates essences from experience. Such a suspension would allow "silence to speak," and suggest, perhaps, new forms or modes of communicating. He maintains:

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[154] Ronell, *The Test Drive,* 171.

[155] James Schmidt chronicles Merleau-Ponty's first encounter with Husserl during the latter's 1929 lectures at the Sorbonne (later published as *The Cartesian Meditations*). Merleau-Ponty's unfamiliarity with German limited his understanding of the lectures, and it was not until 1934 that Merleau-Ponty studied *Ideas,* which Sartre had brought back from his stay in Berlin. Schmidt argues that Merleau-Ponty was most influenced by *The Crisis,* including its unpublished third part and its appendices such as "The Origin of Geometry" and another late text, *Experience and Judgment,* published in 1939. Schmidt, 18-19. In 1939, Merleau-Ponty visited the Husserl archive in Louvain, where he accessed much of Husserl's *Nachlass.* On the subject of Husserl's unpublished writings, Dan Zahavi remarks that Husserl had the habit of "writing down his reflections each day, and when he died on April 27, 1938, these so-called research manuscripts (together with his lectures, manuscripts and still unpublished books) amounted to some 45,000 pages," Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology,* (Stanford: Stanford, UP, 2003)*,* 2. For further discussion of Merleau-Ponty's reading of the *Nachlass,* see H.L. Van Breda, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty et les Archives-Husserl à Louvain," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 67, no. 4 (1962): 410-430.

> C'est la fonction du langage de faire exister les essences dans une séparation qui, à vrai dire, n'est qu'apparente, puisque par lui elles reposent encore sur la vie antéprédicative de la conscience. Dans le silence de la conscience originaire, on voit apparaître non seulement ce que veulent dire les mots, mais encore ce que veulent dire les choses, le noyau de signification primaire autour duquel s'organisent les actes de dénomination et d'expression (PP, 15).

If we suspend ordinary language so as to hear what words and things themselves want to say (*veulent dire*), we can investigate the processes of meaning-production. The strategy of suspending ordinary language, then, holds open the possibility for the creation of new linguistic and expressive forms.

Husserl's aim was to create a *science* of essences, and the radical nature of his endeavor, in his own mind, would by no means render it "creative." His notion of subjectivity involved not a psychological ego but a transcendental one, and served to locate pure, objective, rational forms. But the paradoxical nature of subjective universality, betrayed, perhaps, by metaphors of wandering, journeying, exploring and describing (in the absence of pre-established systems, methods or languages), manifests a tension at the heart of Husserl's rigorous science. These metaphors, insofar as they involve space (terrain) and the movement of an explorer through it, resonate with our present forays into the relationship between bodily orientation and the creation of forms of expression that could alter or re-articulate the (literary) field. Though Husserl would balk at any suggestion of an affinity between phenomenology and literary creation, literary *experimentation* in the 20th century, as well as advancements in theoretical science,[156] have made the border between the domains of art and science much more difficult to locate with any certainty. We have only to think of the cracking of frames of ordinary narration, the re-creation of syntax, or the impersonality of a text such as Beckett's *L'innommable* to see that 20th-century literature pursues a path of experimentation; sensitivity to novel sensations, perhaps, generates the search for new forms to describe them.

In view of Merleau-Ponty's claim that phenomenology is a style, manner or movement before becoming conscious of itself as philosophy, we might think of his phenomenology as involving some stumbling in the dark—a formulation that Beckett uses to describe his artistic project. This sort of wandering is preparatory, I argue, for the emergence of new descriptive forms, the occurrence of which is tantamount to a new kind of language. A new language for philosophy is at the center of projects as different as those of Russell and Bergson: while Russell calls for a re-invention of language to eliminate error, Bergson seeks to create a language that appeals to the body so as to stimulate intuition. Husserl sees the necessity of de-familiarizing experience to access what subtends it, and the radical newness of a phenomenological terrain calls for new forms of description. A study of these three thinkers has led us to consider experimentation as a point of intersection between scientific method and creative praxis, and to appreciate how the activities of "testing" or "probing" can alter the limits of space

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[156] To take an early example, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle (1927), the idea that observation affects the "object" of one's observations, blurs the strict subject-object opposition necessary to a traditional scientific worldview. It would be an interesting endeavor to trace the ways in which contemporary science has closer affinities to art and vice versa, though already in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* we find the suggestion that a rigid opposition between art and science cannot hold.

to create possibilities for action and expression. Of importance is the common gesture of inventing or refiguring ways in which to delimit, frame, organize or orient what one experiences—a gesture that suggests a similarity between philosophy, which involves exploring and articulating experience, and the effort of creating a language.

  Differences in their presentation styles make Husserl and Bergson unlikely "parents" of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Husserl is infamous for his clotted prose and dense thickets of terminological obscurity, whereas the pleasure of reading Bergson's lyrical feats of style made him palatable to a wide audience with varying levels of philosophical sophistication. Despite these differences, Merleau-Ponty blends elements from both, and, following Nietzsche, imagines truth as malleable, open to change through the manner in which we discover and express it. Philosophy, for Merleau-Ponty as for Husserl, is radically destabilizing; foundations are in constant flux and the ground gives way. The unsettling and vertiginous character of philosophy is not dissimilar to that of certain works of modernist literature, in which the reader finds herself implicated, unsure of her footing, and aware of the tenuousness of her most reassuring assumptions. In his early and middle works, Beckett attempts to "get beyond" language, to overcome the habitual forms of experiencing and thinking that it entails. His frustration with the inability of language to speak about anything other than itself leads to experimentation that aims to drive language, I argue, to the point of paradox, so as to lead us—in the manner of Bergson's *romancier hardi*—to suspect something of the absurdity and contradiction that lies beneath. The eponymous narrator of *Molloy* remarks with playful frustration that he can only understand words that are free from signification: "Oui les mots que j'entendais, je les entendais très bien [...] comme des mots purs, libres de toute signification."[157] The next chapter explores the manner in which Beckett's frustration with language drives him to experiment, test, or probe so as to locate and expand its limits.

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[157] Beckett, *Molloy*, 66.

Chapter 2
To Say the Unsayable: Impasse, Paradox, Aporia

Do I contradict myself? Very well, then, I contradict myself. (I am large, I contain multitudes.)
                                                            Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*

The experience of my reader shall be between the phrases, in the silence, communicated by the intervals, not the terms, of the statement, between the flowers that cannot coexist, at the antithetical (nothing so simple as antithetical) seasons of words, his experience shall be the menace, the miracle, the memory of an unspeakable trajectory.   Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*

      According to Beckett's artistic credo of the 1930's (from the mouth of Belacqua Shuah), a certain kind of literary language communicates via intervals, becoming the trace of an unspeakable trajectory. If language is to communicate in excess of the merely sayable, it must work against itself, juxtaposing antitheses to overcome its tendency to deaden what it weaves into its system. "Language is best used where it is abused," Beckett writes in his oft-cited German Letter of 1937. In this letter, composed in German, Beckett describes his mother tongue as a "veil" that one must tear apart to get at the things (or nothingness) that lie behind it.[158] Frustration with language, especially English, and fantasies of tearing textual fabrics or boring holes in the word surface (another image from the German letter) motivate a strategic arrangement of antitheses in Beckett's fiction. Because Beckett's work tends to revel in contradiction, dispense with narrative, refuse resolution and offer no calming myth to explain away the horrors of the irrational,[159] it is most often associated with impasse, blockage and despair. The closing paradox of *L'innommable*, "je ne peux pas continuer, je vais continuer," has been read as signaling a dearth of creative energy, a numbing drive to persist despite the hopelessness of ever moving at all, let alone forward. Beckett's biographer James Knowlson characterizes the years after *L'innommable* (1950) as a period of "impasse and depression" in Beckett's work-life, while Alain Badiou attributes the creative blockage he reads in *L'innommable* to a solipsism that Beckett will not overcome until the writing of

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[158] The German text of Beckett's letter to Axel Kaun is as follows: "Und immer mehr wie ein Schleier kommt mir meine Sprache vor, den man zerreissen muss, um an die hinterliegenden Dinge (oder das hinterliegende Nichts) zu kommen [...] Hoffentlich kommt die Zeit, sie ist ja Gott sei Dank in gewissen Kreisen schon da, wo die Sprache da am besten gebraucht wird, wo sie am tüchtigsten missgebraucht wird [...] Ein Loch nach dem andern in ihr zu bohren, bis das Dahinterkauernde, sei es etwas oder nichts, durchzusickern anfängt-ich kann mir für den heutigen Schriftsteller kein höheres Ziel vorstellen." ["And more and more my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get at those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it [...] It is be hoped the time will come, thank God, in some circles it already has, when language is best used where it is most efficiently abused [...] To drill one hole after another into it until that which lurks behind, be it something or nothing, starts seeping through—I cannot imagine a higher goal for today's writer"], *The Letters of Samuel Beckett 1929-1940,* ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 513-518.
[159] "Le Calmant " (1946) mocks the idea that literature is reassuring mythmaking. Beckett's narrator seeks to calm and comfort himself from beyond the grave by telling himself disturbing stories, which he claims to tell in a mythological way. "Le Calmant," *Nouvelles et textes pour rien,* (Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1954).

Comment C'est (1960). These views are part of a narrative, popular among Beckett critics, according to which *L'innommable* constitutes an impasse or dead end that led to nearly a decade of creative impotence.[160] But Beckett's relatively quiet decade (1950-1960) can be viewed alternatively as a period of gestation, in which nascent images from the pages of *L'innommable* find the concrete forms they assume in Beckett's increasingly visual work (bodies embedded in sand-mounds, trash-bins and urns, mouths without faces, etc.). More generally, the technique of contradiction in Beckett's middle period is less a sign of permanent blockage or impasse, about which we should despair, and more a means of stimulating alternative usages of language and expanding possibilities for movement and experience, the development of which is stifled by habitual modes of understanding.[161]

The narrator of *L'innommable*, who is both impossible and existing, longs to be *between* words (and worlds).[162] His claim, "moi aussi j'ai le droit d'être reconnu impossible," complicates our recognition of him as impossible because of the very fact that he is speaking. A predicament such as this illustrates Beckett's interest in the creative power of paradox; it is also a realization, we might add, of Bergson's fantasy of the *romancier hardi.* But rather than the courageously absurd novelist imagined by Bergson, Beckett may have preferred to think of himself as the Cézanne of the printed page.[163] His antithetical "seasons of words," like Cézanne's fixed, frozen spaces and impossibly positioned objects, work toward exposing the artifice of representational language, just as apparent impossibility, impasse and aporia in Beckett's works open the way toward transformative movement. Contradiction in Beckett adumbrates new conditions for the generation of space and for passage, following the logic of paradox, or of *aporia* in the specialized sense of this term described by Jacques Derrida.[164]

Rather than signaling foreclosure, the contradictions that create situations of paradox and aporia in Beckett's work function as restrictions or limitations of space that reconfigure ideas about passage. Paradox, as something that appears contradictory or impossible but on closer inspection—or inspection from a different angle—reveals some

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[160] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett,* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 377-399, and Alain Badiou, *Beckett: L'increvable désir* (Paris: Hachette, 1995), 37-39.

[161] This phenomenon in Beckett's writing has led Raymond Federman to refer to Beckett's writing not as fiction but as "anti-fiction." Federman, "Beckettian Paradox: Who is Telling the Truth?," *Samuel Beckett Now,* ed. Melvin J. Friedman, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 102.

[162] The unnamable laments: "c'est au milieu qu'il faudrait être […] c'est là où il ferait bon être, là où on est." Samuel Becket, *L'innommable,* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1953), (hereafter cited in the text as I).

[163] In *Dream of Fair to Middling Women,* Belacqua imagines that he might become "the Cézanne […] of the printed page, very strong on architectonics." Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* as quoted in S.E. Gontarski, "Style and the Man: Samuel Beckett and the Art of Pastiche," *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui: Pastiches, Parodies Other Imitations. Pastiches, Parodies Autres Imitations*, ed. Matthijs Engelberts, Marius Buning, Sjef Houppermans, (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002), 13. Gontarski claims that this aesthetics is "no sooner uttered than regretted," but Beckett's way of constellating impossible perspectives *is* reminiscent of Cézanne, though not because of architectonics.

[164] For Derrida, aporia can stimulate ways of passing *around* a blockage according to untried manners of moving and thinking. He writes: "J'essayais alors de me mouvoir non pas contre ou à partir de l'impasse mais, d'une autre manière, *selon* une autre pensée, peut-être plus endurante, de l'*aporie*." Derrida, *Apories: Mourir—s'attendre aux "limites de la vérité,"* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996), 32.

validity or truth, already functions as a stimulus to movement.[165] The prefix *para* (beside or beyond) further underscores the necessity of a change of position, or of a movement that would expand the *space* in which a paradox appears contradictory. It is in this way that paradox may affect the physical body, appealing to its possibilities for movement and involving it in a way that is not dissimilar to the manner in which indirect language appeals to the body, as described by Merleau-Ponty.

The power of paradox to expand one's thinking has been recognized since antiquity, in the early dialectical method of Parmenides and his disciple Zeno, in the didactic paradoxes of the Stoics, and later in the Socratic elenchus, according to which Socrates forces his interlocutors to contradict themselves so as to see the inadequacy of their positions.[166] But, interestingly, paradox in Beckett does not merely incite the linear advancement of a dialectic, nor is it limited to the strategy of *via negativa*. Rather, paradox in Beckett's work is tantamount to the creation of a threshold or limit that pleats the veil of language—not so much to get at what lies behind it, but to make its silences speak.

Four moments in Beckett's mid-century *oeuvre* help elucidate the expansion of experiential and expressive possibilities that is encouraged by Beckettian paradox. The inter-war novel *Watt* rejects the binary alternatives of speech or silence by *meaning* in a way that is neither purely semantic nor reducible to what can be posited in signs. *Molloy* (1951) presents us with a narrator in search of his origins. But the speaker, who is "said" into being by the very story he is telling, locates his origin in a contradiction, and the fact that the story exists testifies to the generative power of an impossible origin. In *L'innommable,* we find a stated intention to proceed by aporia. Since procedure by aporia is itself a paradox (or oxymoron), we are led to reconsider our notions of passage, progress and possibility. Finally, Lucky's ebullient language in *En Attendant Godot* operates according to systems of association that are more sensuous (sonorous and rhythmic) than semantic. Though dominant interpretations of Lucky's soliloquy read it as signaling the *decline* of humanity and of language, this speech also presents possibilities for language that arise when the ascendancy of semantic meaning is toppled. Instead of dialectical advancement *beyond* the terms of a contradiction, Beckett's work creates a space *between* thesis and antithesis where the body may speak more than the merely sayable; his works suggest unexplored modes of linguistic meaning that draw upon the movement, spatiality and sensation of the physical body.

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[165] Rolf Breuer also adopts this definition of paradox in "Paradox in Beckett," *The Modern Language Review* 88, no. 3 (July 1993): 559-580.

[166] Anthony Uhlmann's scholarship provides a useful source of information about the relationship between Beckett and the Stoics, Plato and the Pre-Socratics (though not necessarily with an emphasis on paradox). See Uhlmann, *Beckett and Poststructuralism.* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), and *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), particularly the chapter "The Ancient Stoics and the ontological image," which draws upon Emile Bréhier's *Histoire de la philosophie* and Gilles Deleuze's *Logique du Sens.* The lineage that Bréhier traces from Parmenides to Zeno illustrates the Pre-socratic origins of the dialectic (often attributed to Parmenides). Bréhier, *Histoire de la philosophie* [1931], (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981).

I. *Watt*: Glitches in Logic and Murmurs in Gray

Instead of polarizing the said and the unsayable as irreconcilable, *Watt* provokes eruptions of irrational "unsayables" within the limits of excessively rational systems.[167] Written between 1942 and 1943 and published in 1953, *Watt* is by all accounts a bizarre novel: its sparse prose favors elliptical descriptions and its four sections disobey the conventions of chronology. Pages of text are broken by musical notation,[168] question marks (W, 102, 169), lists of objections and their solutions (W, 97-98), the croaking of frogs (W, 137), strange idioms (W, 168), tables (W, 171) and italicized poems or songs (W, 11, 57, 193). Obsessive cataloging, series and lists make up a large part of the novel, and the reader will notice pages of text marked by repetitive variations of certain words or phrases.[169] These oddities are part of a strategy to exhibit and exploit the insufficiencies of language—a strategy that favors speaking nonsense and in riddles over silence. Watt's patron, Mr. Knott, talks to himself "with great variety and vehemence of intonation and gesticulation," producing "wild dim chatter, meaningless to Watt's ailing ears." He sings a song whose words "were either without meaning, or derived from an idiom with which Watt, a very fair linguist, had no acquaintance." A sensory-phenomenological description of Mr. Knott's song—"The open a sound was predominant, and the explosives k and g" (W, 208)—shifts attention away from its semantic meaning and toward its qualities of sound. This is part of a more general strategy in *Watt* to reject the alternatives of meaning and nonsense, and to forge the way towards communication between the two that would expand the category of the "meaningful."

Because of what I call its "glitches in logic" (and what others have read as its critique of logical positivism), *Watt* is often understood to be a signpost of the limits of rationality[170] and a devastating depiction of "the cul-de-sac of modern Western rationalistic philosophy."[171] Such readings register Beckett's rejection of a binary logic of absolutes, but downplay his attempts to *change* the way language can mean (rather than insisting on its destruction).[172] Nevertheless, any creative undertaking in *Watt* develops

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[167] John Mood writes that *Watt* illustrates the manner in which excessive rationalism "leads unto its opposite: the eruption of the irrational in 'pathologic-demonic form' (as the horrors of the twentieth century have shown)." John J. Mood's "The Personal System—Samuel Beckett's *Watt*," *PMLA* 86 (1971), 259-62.

[168] Samuel Beckett, *Watt,* (New York: Grove Press, 1953), 34 (hereafter cited in the text as W).

[169] Examples are plentiful, but see especially W, 177 and W, 204.

[170] John Wall, "A Study of the Imagination in Samuel Beckett's *Watt*," *New Literary History* 33, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 533-558.

[171] Mood, "The Personal System," 225.

[172] There are at least two notable exceptions to this: Stephen Connor and John Wall have suggested an enlargement of the field of semantic, linguistic and sonorous possibilities in response to the dead ends and exhausted series in *Watt.* Stephen Connor's work on repetition in Beckett is particularly relevant here, as are John Wall's comments about rhythm and the body. Connor describes anxieties produced by increasing automation: "narrative becomes as automatic as Watt himself, a mechanism that runs on without supervision." He also comments that "the desire for closure is actually the principle which drives repetition onwards" and that "lists are unbearable because they suggest a language out of control," *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text,* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 28. Wall describes "the vibratory power of negativity [… that] flows through the body animating it with its currents and jolts, its pulses and rhythms," "A Study of the Imagination," 556. His further explanation of "negativity" comes close to what we have

from the text's critique of language, and *Watt's* paradox derives from the necessity of criticizing language by means of the written *word*. This problem or conundrum is familiar to the Vienna Circle, to Wittgenstein and to the Austrian philosopher, Fritz Mauthner, whose work is thought to have influenced Beckett.[173] Jacqueline Hoefer's influential article on *Watt*, published six years after the novel's publication, set a precedent for reading it as a pastiche of logical positivism.[174] Hoefer also describes *Watt* as an imitation of the early Wittgenstein's ambition to create an "ideal language" that would enable one to live according to an empirical and rational system.[175] Critics such as Linda Ben-Zvi and Jenny Skerl later argued that it was neither Wittgenstein nor the logical positivists who influenced Beckett,[176] but Fritz Mauthner, whose major work, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* (1901), Beckett is known to have studied.[177] Yet while Mauthner's critique ends by advocating a "destruction of language" and mystic silence, Beckett's critique in the pages of *Watt* becomes experimentation; different ways of meaning and new languages—which are related (sometimes strangely) to the movements of the body—are invented.

It is easy to see why Hoefer reads *Watt* as a pastiche of logical positivism, for the novel depicts the struggles of its eponymous hero to capture the vicissitudes of his world in language. The failure of his enterprise, coupled with his dogged insistence, contribute to the novel's tragicomic humor. As a "hyperrational man in the face of an irrational

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been identifying as paradox: "Implicit in Beckett is the notion that negativity is in fact a creative force, that is, the creative act is sustained, if not originated, by the perception that reality is deeply contradictory," 545.

[173] Much has been written on the relationship between Beckett and Mauthner; see especially Linda Ben-Zvi, "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language," PMLA 95 (1980): 183-200, and Jennie Skerl, "Fritz Mauthner's 'Critique of Language' in Samuel Beckett's Watt," *Contemporary Literature* 15, no. 4 (Autumn, 1974): 474-487.

[174] Jacqueline Hoefer, "Watt," *Perspective* 11 (1959): 166-82, reprinted in *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Martin Esslin, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 67. Hoefer describes Watt's approach as "scientific" and his mind as an "untiring logic machine." "Generally," she writes, "Watt's method as well as his assumptions are those of logical positivism."

[175] An obligation to speak coupled with the impossibility of saying what one wishes to say reminds readers a leitmotif in *L'innommable*. Beckett's translation of the following passage echoes Wittgenstein's "whereof one cannot speak" and adds a parodic jibe: "I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak, but also, which is even more interesting, but also that I, which is if possible even more interesting, that I shall have to, I forget, no matter. And at the same time I am obliged to speak. I shall never be silent. Never," Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable,* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 291. Beckett claims to have read the *Tractatus* in the late 1950's, and, given his notorious ear for a well-tuned phrase, Beckett might have retained and infused an echo of the early Wittgenstein in his translation of *The Unnamable,* which he worked on in 1958.

[176] Skerl faults Hoefer for conflating Wittgenstein with the logical positivists and distinguishes between Wittgenstein's critique of language and those of Mauthner, Russell, Feigl, Mach and others who participated in the Vienna circle.

[177] Both Skerl and Ben-Zvi argue, against Hoefer, that it was not Wittgenstein but Mauthner who influenced *Watt*. Ben-Zvi notes that Beckett claimed not to have read the *Tractatus* until *after* he had written *Watt,* but read Mauthner in 1928-9. More recently, John Pilling has dated Beckett's reading of Mauthner's *Beiträge* to 1938 and argued that critics have overrepresented Mauthner's influence, looking for the one "key" that would explain the enigmatic novel. Pilling, "Beckett and Mauthner Revisited," *Beckett after Beckett,* ed. S.E. Gontarski and Anthony Uhlmann, (Gainesville: University Press Florida, 2006). Knowlson, like Ben-Zvi, is of the opinion that Beckett read Mauthner at the request of James Joyce around 1930, *Damned to Fame,* 327-328.

world,"[178] Watt finds in language—specifically in the act of naming—a means to control the chaos that assails: "Watt's need of semantic succour was at times so great that he would set to trying names on things." He turns disturbances into words, longing to hear a voice "wrapping up safe in words the kitchen space" (W, 83), making "a pillow of old words, for a head" (W, 117) and attributing apotropaic powers to explanation: "to explain had always been to exorcise, for Watt" (W, 78). The lists, series and permutations in *Watt* suggest the *inability* of language (whether it be ordinary or logical) to order chaos, protect from danger, or even to express what is or can be known. What can be known, the text tells us, lies outside the purview of language: "what we know partakes in no small measure of the nature of what has so happily been called the unutterable or ineffable, so that any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail, doomed, doomed to fail" (W, 62). The gong of the double "doomed" seems to overwrite this insistence on the failure of language by showing that language can create (rather than represent) sensory and sonorous experiences for the reader. But on a semantic level the passage suggests that the *excess* of the real or of experience over what can be posited in words affords representational language the power to order but makes it incapable of rendering the full range of what we can experience.

According to Mauthner, the only way to move beyond language is to destroy it or shatter it. At times, Beckett's frustration with language expresses itself in similarly violent and somewhat defeatist terms.[179] His German letter would indicate that Beckett shares with Mauthner the hope that language might be used to indict itself.[180] In his *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Mauthner champions the critique of language as the most important business of "thinking mankind," writing:

> He who sets out to write a book with a hunger for words, with a love of words, and with the vanity of words, in the language of yesterday or of today or of tomorrow, in the congealed language of a certain and firm step, he cannot undertake the task of liberation from language. I must destroy language within me, in front of me, and behind me step for step if I want to ascend in the critique of language, which is the most pressing task for thinking man; I must shatter each rung of the ladder by stepping upon it.[181]

Mauthner and Beckett seem to share the conviction that language is the only means of knowing the world as well as the sense that this knowledge necessarily changes, freezes or obfuscates what it purports to know.[182] But Beckett finds a way of working *within*

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[178] This phrase is borrowed from Mood, "The Personal System," 259.

[179] For instance, in *Molloy* we find "mots glacés de sens" and the death of a world foully named: "le monde meurt aussi, lâchement, lourdement nommé." Beckett, *Molloy,* (Paris: Les Éditions de minuit, 1951), 41. Beckett's 1937 letter to Axel Kaun also expresses the desire to abuse language so as to move beyond it, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, 1929-1940*, 513-518.

[180] Ben-Zvi writes: "By placing language at the heart of the *Critique*, subsuming under it all knowledge, and then systematically denying its basic efficacy, Mauthner illustrates the possibility of using language to indict itself." "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language," 183.

[181] Fritz Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* [1901], trans. Ben-Zvi and Sabine Jordan, (Leibzig: Felix Meiner, 1923), as quoted in Ben-Zvi, "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language," 183.

[182] Mauthner claims: "With the word men stand at the beginning of their insight into the world, but if they stay with the word they'll stop there." Because experience exceeds linguistic representation, man must "redeem the world from the tyranny of language." And yet Mauthner is acutely aware of the difficulties involved in this task. Mauthner as quoted in Ben-Zvi, "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language," 187.

existing language (rather than destroying or shattering it) to make it mean in unexpected ways.[183] Despite his initial idea that language could lead to nothing nobler than its own destruction, Beckett turns to explore its sensory dimensions—sonority, consonance, repetition and rhythm—rather than remaining strictly in the mode of critique. Mauthner's valorization of both silence and the destruction of language is complicated by the actual appearance of his *Beitrage,* which numbers thousands of pages. Taking Mauthner at his word, Jennie Skerl characterizes the Austrian philosopher as a "supreme rational-empiricist [who becomes] a mystic by way of realizing the limitations of his philosophy."[184] In the spirit of Mauthner, *Watt* chronicles the "inevitable failure of one who attempts to know truth through language." But Skerl rightly identifies the difference between Mauthner (at his word) and Beckett's hero: "[Watt] revolts and fails again and again, clinging to logic and language." Watt cannot remain silent, and the novel chronicles his attempts (perhaps also those of the novel's author) to render a deeply contradictory, polyvalent experience in language. Beckett's innovations begin, I argue, with the erratic glitches and stammering permutations we find in *Watt*'s odd prose.

Plays on sound and rhythms distract from the text's semantic content and narrative line, frustrating an understanding that would try to discern these and mocking rationalism's fondness for series and formulae. Exhaustive listings of possibilities and indices of permutations create repetitive sound and rhythm patterns, establishing an "order" in the text that is other than semantic. The text's appeal to the reader's aesthetic sensibilities is advertised when the prose gives way to musical notation or to graphic representations of sound, as in the oft-cited passage composed of frog noises:

Krak!	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Krek!	--	--	--	--	Krek!	--	--
Keik!	--	--	Krik!	--	--	Krik!	-- [...] (W, 137)

Almost two pages of text are devoted to frog sounds followed by various beats of rest. In other passages, sonorities emerge through repetition to the point of senselessness: we have the sense that the text is breaking down as combinations and series repeat. For instance: "[Mary] remained there quietly eating onions and peppermints turn and turn about, I mean first an onion, then a peppermint, then another onion, then another peppermint, then another onion, then another peppermint, then another onion, then another peppermint, then another onion, then another peppermint [...]" (W, 51).[185] This alternation between onion and peppermint repeats until Mary, who is in the process of dusting, forgets "little by little the reason for her presence in that place" and the "duster, whose burden up till now she had so bravely born, fell from her fingers, to the dust,

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[183] Skerl argues that Mauthner's critique of language leads to mystic silence. Mauthner and Wittgenstein believed that philosophy should undertake a critique of language so as to understand the deficiencies in the human capacity for representation. But this critique involves limiting the scope of philosophical investigation to what can be said or posited, thus driving a wedge between what can be said and what is unsayable. This relegation of vast portions of experience to realms permanently inaccessible to the rational mind leads to skepticism or to a resigned valorization of silence. Skerl, "Fritz Mauthner's 'Critique of Language,'" 478. For a discussion of Wittgenstein's quietism see John McDowell, "Wittgensteinian 'Quietism,'" *Common Knowledge* 15, (2009); 365-372.

[184] Skerl, "Fritz Mauthner's 'Critique of Language,'" 478.

[185] This is one of many such instances; John Mood has done valuable work indexing the points at which series and formulae occur and has shown that several exercises that involve calculation contain an error, sometimes acknowledged, sometimes unacknowledged. Mood, "The Personal System."

where having at once assumed the colour (grey) of its surroundings it disappeared until the following spring" (W, 51). This humorous ricocheting between opposites (onion and peppermint have opposite effects on the mouth) leads to a condition of gray, where differentiation is difficult (the duster falls to the dust) and habitual tasks are forgotten. In such instances, Beckett creates the impression of a machine short-circuiting (here the use of the word "watt" to denote measurement of current may be at play). A system based on binary logic (onions and peppermints) visibly (we see it on the page) and audibly short-circuits, as if it were a computer program gone haywire that keeps performing its function even when that function has lost all meaning. This tripping and stuttering of language in *Watt* is reminiscent of Lucky's jerky speech when he begins to "think." As in Lucky's speech, words are associated not in the service of *meaning* in the conventional sense, but on the basis of similarities of sound (assonance and consonance). We might think of the following example from Arsene's monologue: "The Tuesday scowls, the Wednesday growls, the Thursday curses, the Friday howls, the Saturday snores, the Sunday yawns, the Monday morns, the Monday morns […]" (W, 46). Here, associations forged on the basis of sound suggest that language might be organized to provoke affective and sensual experiences rather than according to semantic logic.

Beckett's refusal of mystic silence notwithstanding, *Watt* engages a second mode of critique proposed by Mauthner: laughter.[186] The only human *articulation* of the mystical state, Mauthner says, is laughter: "Basically speaking, pure critique is merely articulated laughter. Each laughter is critique, the best critique […] and the danger of this book, the daring aspect of this attempt, lies in merely having put an articulated text to this laughter."[187] This idea surely resonated with Beckett, for we find in *Watt* searing humor and particular attention to laughter: "Haw! Haw! Haw! My laugh, […] My laugh, Mr. Watt […] Of all the laughs that strictly speaking are not laughs, but modes of ululation, only three I think need detain us, I mean the bitter, the hollow and the mirthless. They correspond to successive, how shall I say successive…suc…successive excoriations of the understanding" (W, 48). The laugh, a ululation or convulsion of the throat, creates eruptions of sounds that can, as the passage's stuttering "suc" and repeated "x" sounds (su*ccess* and e*xcor*) show, excoriate the understanding. The laugh creates staccato breaks in the prose, interrupting narrative progress. In his meditation on laughter, Beckett further emphasizes its destructive effects on the understanding: "the mirthless laugh is the dianoetic laugh, down the snout—Haw!—so. It is the laugh of laughs, the *risus purus*, the laugh laughing at the laugh […]" (W, 48). A dianoetic laugh, the highest form of the laugh, is the laugh of reason laughing at itself. Laughter is the symptom and expression, then, as well as the means, of the auto-critique of reason. *Watt* presents the splintering of the rational understanding, which laughs at its failure.

The overcoming of the understanding through laughter also indicates a theme of crucial importance in *Watt*: the relation between language and the body. Laughter is a convulsion of the speaking organs—it is felt in the stomach, in the face—and exemplifies the manner in which *qualities* of sound can short-circuit the understanding by an appeal to the body. Humor is an efficacious means of provoking bodily responses in one's

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[186] Mauther claims that silence and *laughter* are the best modes of critique, according to Ben-Zvi, "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language," 188.

[187] Mauthner as quoted in Ben-Zvi, "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language," 197.

readers, and *Watt* achieves this with particular mastery.[188] Humor in Watt serves the function of critique, but also uses language to affect the reader's body by inciting it to laughter.

A passage late in the novel illustrates how *Watt*'s unconventional prose may open the way for new structures to be created *between* the either-or logic of rational systems. In part III of the novel, Watt creates idioms that his interlocutor (Sam) begins, with some practice, to understand. Both Sam and Watt emerge from holes in their respective fences to meet in a no-man's land between their two gardens (W, 60). Sam observes the following regarding the idioms Watt invents to narrate his adventures in Mr. Knott's house: "that the inversion was imperfect;/that the ellipse was frequent;/that euphony was a preoccupation" (W, 164). Watt continues to invent his strange speech, first inverting the words in the sentence, then the letters in the word, then the sentences in the period. His strangest idiom reads as follows: "*Dis yb dis, nem owt. Yad la, tin fo trap. Skin, skin skin. Od su did ned taw? On. Taw ot klat tonk?* [...]"[189] Sam grows used to the variations in Watt's language, and comes to understand it in part: "These were sounds that at first, though we walked face to face, were devoid of significance for me [...] I grew used to these sounds, and then I understood as well as before" (W, 165). Watt's invention of language and Sam's effort to understand it are helped along by a correspondence of body parts: first, Watt and Sam walk face to face, then breast to breast, belly to belly, pubis to pubis, until finally they walk "glued together" (W, 168).[190] Watt's invented languages are clearly *between* meaning and nonsense, since Sam (and the reader) can decode them. But the fact that Sam comes to understand these languages by positioning himself relative to Watt's *body*—or that a *transition* to significance is aided by a common positioning of the body—is perhaps a suggestion or humorous hint that understanding may be predicated upon a positioning of the body.

The bizarre automation of language in *Watt*, its excessive repetitions and its strange glitches, conjure an image of a machine on the point of collapse. A situation of paradox is generated by the novel's parodies of rational systems that operate according to a binary logic of either-or. The spastic gait of Watt's body, which moves east by thrusting itself first north then south (it moves sideways by moving forward and backward in quick succession), is an apt illustration of how a binary system (limited to the alternatives, north or south) can be exploited to enable movement in *different* directions (east or sideways).[191] In *Watt,* the limitations of language are exploited so as to make language

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[188] J.M. Coetzee reports experiencing uncontrollable fits of laughter as he read *Watt*. His arguments about symmetry as a mental rhythm in *Watt* are also relevant for the present discussion. His approach is genetic: he looks at the manuscript revisions in an effort to determine how *Watt* was revised so as to create stylistic patterns that would produce certain formal effects in excess of conventional meaning structures: "The Manuscript Revisions of Beckett's Watt," *Journal of Modern Literature* 2, no. 4 (Nov., 1972); 473-480.

[189] We might hazard a translation: *Knot talk to Wat? No. Wat den did us do? Niks (Nichts), Niks, Niks. Part of nit(e), al day. Two men sid(e) by sid*. It is interesting that Watt's inversions act upon the phonetic (rather than orthographical) renderings of words. This stresses the importance of idiom (how we hear words) over convention (standard spelling), i.e. the German word "Nichts" is spelled the way it is pronounced, Niks, Watt becomes Wat, Knott becomes Knot, and then becomes den.

[190] Watt recounts eight different episodes in eight different "languages," and only five of these episodes are accompanied by "body correspondences" between Sam and Watt, W, 164-169.

[191] Watt's strategy for moving sideways is as follows: "Watt's way of advancing due east, for example, was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as

mean differently—in part through an appeal to the physical body. From the brittle fragments of a rational system stalled out in paradox, the possibility for a more vital manner of inhabiting language emerges. Beckett's work strives to create a language in which, as he writes, "the words dance" and reference the body's movements and organizations of space.[192]

II. Swamps, Mother Tongues, Rain in Other Worlds: Paradox in *Molloy*

With the transition from *Watt* to the post-war trilogy, Gilles Deleuze traces the invention of a new kind of language—a meta-language that is more fluid than the "atomic" *langage des noms* that exhausts itself in *Watt.* This *langue II,* as Deleuze calls it, is the language of a voice that flows without stopping.[193] If paradox in *Watt* exploits the inadequacy of language to represent the world, in *Molloy* language seems overly powerful, encumbered with enigmatic signifiers, and capable of conducting the influences and desires of others.[194] Thus paradox in *Molloy* serves to create a space of freedom outside the closed circuit of desire transmitted in language. I aim to show the manner in which the infinite regression built into the novel's structure offers, through paradox, an escape from the closure of language's self-reference.

Beckett's understanding of language as simultaneously excessive and impoverished ("quoi que je dise, ce n'était jamais ni assez ni assez peu"),[195] shows us, in relief, the notion of freedom toward which his structural paradox gestures. The sense that language is overdetermined, and that its over-richness impedes one's freedom, identity and capacity for movement, comes to the fore in *Molloy*—"Ne serait-on pas libre? C'est à examiner" (M, 47). The relation between language and freedom is dramatized with particular intensity by Molloy's involvement with Lousse, a Calypso or Circe figure who

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possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling his right leg as far as possible towards the north, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south […] and so on, over and over again, many many times, until he reached his destination," W, 30.

[192] Sense (in Joyce's language) is "forever rising to the surface of the form and becoming the form itself." Thus: "When the sense is dancing: the words dance." Beckett, "Dante…Bruno…Vico…Joyce," *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment,* ed. Ruby Cohn, (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 27.

[193] Gilles Deleuze, "l'Épuisé," *Quad et autres pièces pour la télévision,* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1992), 66. He writes: "Appelons *langue I,* chez Beckett, cette langue atomique, disjonctive, coupée hachée, où l'énumération remplace les propositions, et les relations combinatoires, les relations syntaxiques: une langage des noms [...] *langue II* [...] n'est plus celle des noms, mais celle des voix, qui ne procède plus avec des atomes combinables, mais avec des flux mélangeables. Les voix sont les ondes ou les flux qui pilotent et distribuent les corpuscules linguistiques," 66.

[194] In her work on the subject of Beckett and language, Ann Banfield speculates that the "tattered syntax" in Beckett's late prose is his attempt to frustrate the way in which language transmits, unbeknownst to its users, history, influence and desire—to the point that the identity of its speaker is threatened. Patterns of usage, style and thoughts are ingested like "mother's milk" as the mother tongue is passed down through familial interactions in the absence of an external, rational heuristic (the rules of grammar, for instance) that one uses for learning second languages. Ann Banfield. "Beckett's Tattered Syntax" *Representations* 84, (2004). She has expanded this argument substantially in her forthcoming, *Beckett's Tattered Syntax: Samuel Beckett, the Mother Tongue and the Revolution of the Syntax.*

[195] Beckett, *Molloy*, 44 (hereafter cited in the text as M).

holds Molloy comfortably captive in her home and garden,[196] and by Beckett's juxtaposition of the seaside, with its possibilities for clear and distinct vision, against a stinking swamp that has claimed countless lives. It is by means of language, compounded with certain potions ingested orally (mixed into Molloy's beer) that Lousse wields power over Molloy, creating in him "certaines idées ou points de vue ne pouvant m'être venues que d'elle." In addition to Lousse's need and loneliness, Molloy's own use of language holds him captive in a closed circuit of influence and desire (M, 63).[197] He muses: "mes excès de paroles s'avéraient pauvretés et inversement" (M, 44).[198] In Lousse's house Molloy awakes from a disorienting slumber to find himself newly bathed, perfumed, (smelling of lavender), shaved, and dressed in a woman's nightgown, "rose et transparente et garnie de rubans, de fronces et de dentelles" (M, 57). He tries to escape via the door, then the window: "J'allais à la porte. Fermée à clef. A la fenêtre. Grillagée" (M, 49). Aside from physical barriers, more sinister mechanisms of his entrapment are evoked by descriptions of the moon, with its magnetic pull and power to disorient, so that Molloy feels himself out of space and time. Molloy speculates on his progressive weakening: "sans doute avait-elle mis dans ma bière un produit quelconque destiné à m'amollir, à m'amollir Molloy, de sorte que je n'étais pour ainsi dire plus qu'une masse de cire en état de fusion." To Molloy in his softened state, Lousse slowly enunciates her propositions: "[elle] poursuivait son discours, revenant avec une patience infinie sur ce qu'elle venait de dire, puis lentement, doucement… *Jusqu'à ce que plus rien n'existât que cette voix monotone* dans la nuit s'épaississant et l'odeur de la terre humide et d'une fleur très parfumée […]" (M, 63). The hypnotic quality of Lousse's voice induces Molloy's progressive disorientation and his forgetting of space and time. He describes himself "comme dans une cage hors du temps […] et bien entendu hors de l'espace aussi" (M, 68). Language's persuasive power can cause one to lose one's bearings and limit one's range of activity or motion.

A geographical figure for the over-richness of language and its powers of entrapment is the swamp that Molloy must cross to travel from his solitude by the sea, to the town in which his mother ostensibly waits. At the seaside, Molloy sees better, is solitary, is sheltered in his cave from "des elements et des êtres," and enjoys invigorating powers connected to rational systemization that were not available to him during his stay

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[196] Thomas Cousineau, in *After the Final No: Samuel Beckett's Trilogy* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1999), points out the connection between Lousse and the Circe/Calypso figure in Homer's epic. He adds to this the observation that *molys*, connected both to the word mollify (to soften) and perhaps to Molloy's name, is a plant and narcotic drug referred to in the *Odyssey,* 83.

[197] The figure of Loy/Lousse (her name, like that of many of Beckett's protagonists, changes) communicates her need and desire as follows: "Libre enfin de partir, je me mis en posture de le faire. Mais la dame, une madame Loy, autant le dire tout de suite, ou Lousse, je ne sais plus, prénom dans le genre de Sophie, me retint, par mes basques, en disant, à supposer qu'à le dernière fois ce fût la même phrase qu'à la première, j'ai besoin de vous. Et voyant à mon expression sans doute, qui me trahit volontiers, que j'avais compris […]" M, 44.

[198] The idea that the use of inherited language betrays more than one intends is further developed in *L'innommable*, in which the narrator's language gives his aggressors ascendancy over him. The idea is also present in part II of *Molloy,* when Moran admits: "La colère me poussait quelquefois à des légers écarts de langage. Je ne pouvais les regretter. Il me semblait que tout langage est un écart de langage" M, 158.

with Lousse.[199] But Molloy's mother-quest leads him to journey inland, where he must cross "un marais puant et fumant, où s'engouffrait chaque année un nombre incalculable de vies humaines" (M, 102). The swamp's association with a town (where it leads) and Molloy's mother make it a figure for sociability, and point to the excessiveness and identity-eroding effects of language as a means of relating to others.

Beckett's sense that language *over-signifies,* impregnating its user with prejudices and histories, has often been associated with his mistrust of *style*, which manifests itself in the progressive minimalism of his prose and in his decision to compose in French.[200] Following Beckett's remarks on the subject, his linguistic expatriation is generally seen by critics as an attempt to stem the excess he associates with language, particularly his mother tongue. James Knowlson recounts Beckett's suggestion that English was "overloaded with associations and allusions," viewing Beckett's decision to write in French as an attempt to escape the influence of James Joyce.[201] It has also been suggested that Beckett's decision to write in French allowed him "separateness and freedom from his mother's 'savage loving'"—an interpretaton that makes much of the fraught relationship between Beckett and his own mother in relation to his mother tongue.[202] Whatever the case, style, for Beckett, seems to signify an accumulation of influences, excesses that are legible in one's way of using language, in the way one's prose thickens involuntarily with traces of one's personal and cultural history. The French language, according to S.E. Gontarski, "allowed [Beckett] to escape the habits inherent in the use of a native language" and to "father himself, as it were, by sloughing the heritage of an English style."[203] The fact that *Molloy* was composed in French situates it as part of Beckett's project to purge his fictional language of the excesses to which it is prone.

To suggest that paradox grows out of Beckett's critique of language as impoverished and excessive, we'll examine a specific instance of it in *Molloy.* The most

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[199] It is at the seaside that Molloy devises his excessively rational (and oft-commented) pebble sucking system. Molloy, feeling great anxiety at the prospect of continuously sucking the same pebbles instead of moving evenly through his collection of sixteen, devises a way of rotating the pebbles through his four pockets, M, 92-100.

[200] After completing *Watt* in English, Beckett wrote his first novel in French, *Mercier and Camier* (1946) and the *nouvelles*, "L'Expulsé," "Premier amour," "Le Calmant" and "La Fin" (Beckett's first work published in French). He had translated his novel *Murphy* into French in 1938-40, composed French poetry during the 1930's and wrote the play, *Eleutheria* (the Greek word means "freedom"), in French, though he did not wish to publish it. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame,* 327-328.

[201] Beckett famously remarked that it was easier to write in French "without style," and Knowlson interprets this to mean that, by adopting another language, Beckett gained "greater simplicity and objectivity." He further suggests that using French "enabled [Beckett] to 'cut away the excess, to strip away the color' […] and to concentrate more on the music of the language, its sounds and rhythms," Knowlson, *Damned to Fame,* 324.

[202] Patrick Casement, "Samuel Beckett and his Mother Tongue," *The International Review of Psycho-analysis* 9, Part I, (1982); 35-44, 35. The term "savage loving" is taken from Dierdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), 236. On the relationship between Beckett's mother and his mother tongue, see also Ann Banfield, "Beckett's Tattered Syntax."

[203] In *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: a reader's guide to his works, life and thought*, eds. Chris Ackerley, S.E. Gontarski, (New York: Grove Press, 2004), the entry for "French" describes Beckett's decision to write in a foreign tongue as follows: "Having come of age amid the excesses of Modernism, SB was lured to the prison house of style," and "He became adept at writing without or beyond style, in the style of stylelessness," 207. These ideas are developed in more detail in Gontarski, "Style and the Man."

famous paradox in Beckett's work, aside from the one that brings *L'innommable* to its stuttering conclusion, is the paradox that frames the second part of *Molloy*. In this instance, paradox enables the creation of worlds in which principles of non-contradiction do not hold. At the beginning of *Molloy* part II, we find Moran at his desk at midnight, thinking about his report: "Il est minuit. La pluie fouette les vitres." He muses: "Mon rapport sera long" (M, 92). The novel ends with the first person narrator, Moran, attempting to learn the language of the birds in his garden and to follow the imperatives of a voice that tells him to write the report:

> C'étaient des oiseux sauvages […] J'essayais de mieux comprendre leur langage. Sans avoir recours au mien. C'étaient les plus longues, les plus belles journées de l'année. Je vivais dans le jardin. J'ai parlé d'une voix qui me disait ceci et cela. Je commençais a m'accorder avec elle à cette époque, à comprendre ce qu'elle voulait. Elle ne se servait pas des mots qu'on avait appris au petit Moran, que lui à son tour avait appris à son petit. De sorte que je ne savais pas d'abord ce qu'elle voulait. Mais j'ai fini par comprendre ce langage. Je l'ai compris, je le comprends, de travers peut-être. La question n'est pas là. C'est elle qui m'a dit de faire le rapport. Est-ce à dire que je suis plus libre maintenant ? Je ne sais pas. J'apprendrai. Alors je rentrai dans la maison, et j'écrivis, Il est minuit. La pluie fouette les vitres. Il n'était pas minuit. Il ne pleuvait pas (M, 239).

This novella within a novel writes its beginning into its end: Moran narrates himself going back into the house and writing (in the literary *passé simple*) the words with which part II opens: *Il est minuit. La pluie fouette les vitres.* But the immediate negation of these temporal and weather conditions (*Il n'était pas minuit. Il ne pleuvait pas*) undermines the credibility of the preceding story. Thus Moran's narrative is destabilized; it ends by eating its own tail. By inscribing the story's beginning into its end, Beckett plunges his reader into an infinite regression; we find ourselves in a fictional world that gives birth to itself. Since the content of Moran's narration or report is his quest to find Molloy (part I is nested within part II), the self-cannibalization of part II calls the first section of the novel into question as well.[204] Turning to the text, we notice that the comma after *j'écrivis* allows us to assume that *Il est minuit* is part of the report. With this phrase, Moran opens a fictional world rather than continuing to describe, as he had been doing, the long beautiful days of the year, the birdsong and the curious voice in the garden. The existence of at least two worlds—narratives within narratives or layers of fictions—is given by the fact that the last two lines, written in the continuous past tense (*imparfait*), contradict the assertions of the report and undermine the world of the story rendered in present tense. The paradox generated by the contradiction, "Il est minuit […] Il n'était pas minuit," leads us to recognize the power of language to conjure worlds into existence.

The power of paradox to generate spaces (of fiction) is related to the manner in which contemporary literature tends to tell the story of its own telling. *Molloy,* according

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[204] I owe this insight to Raymond Federman's detailed commentary on the paradox that closes *Molloy*: "[…] what has happened in the course of his [Moran's] narration is that the affirmative statement about the night and the rain beating on the windows has passed from one level of fiction to another—from the level of pseudo-reality (remembered events) to the level of sub-fiction (invented events). Consequently, the negative part of the statement that closes the novel ("It was not midnight. It was not raining.") is not only in direct contradiction with what is being written by Moran, but also with the whole second part of the novel, and by extension, since the second part of the novel is postulated against the background of Molloy's own counterfeit fiction, the entire narrative becomes a paradox." Federman, "Beckettian Paradox: Who is Telling the Truth?", *Samuel Beckett Now,* Ed. Melvin J. Friedman, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 107.

to some critics, marks the advent of contemporary literature, defined as self-reflexive, as opposed to traditional literature. Raymond Federman argues that paradox in Beckett forces us to re-evaluate our position as readers in relation to Beckett's self-generating, self-cannibalizing worlds. He argues that the position of a reader who believes a stable narrative is no longer tenable, and extends this claim to chart how paradox in Beckett signals a move from traditional fiction to contemporary fiction, a passage "marked by a shift from language that tells a story to language that tells *its own* story." He supports his claim with a citation from Olga Bernal's article on Beckett published in *Le Monde*: "If the literature of the past described reality (or believed it did), that of today realizes that what it describes is not reality, but the very language of which it is captive as soon as it begins to speak. And no doubt, this is the first time in the history of literature that language no longer situates itself opposite the world but opposite itself." Contradiction becomes paradox, in other words, since it spurs the confrontation of fiction with itself and a self-reflexivity of language. Federman contends that "unless [readers] can deal with the 'anti-fictional' aspect of Beckett's fiction they will continue to deal with it as paradox," thus suggesting that an acceptance of fiction's world-creating, self-negating capacities is the realization toward which textual paradoxes lead.[205]

The formal structure of *Molloy*—two parts, one attempting to capture the other—illustrates how the existence of two worlds can prompt the creation of a third space—a space between in which both worlds are possible. Said differently, a system of resonances between the starkly different worlds of Molloy and Moran prompts the *reader* to generate a space in which the two can be negotiated.[206] To Molloy's poetic sensuality—his florid descriptions of sea, sky, lavender and the smell of earth—Moran plays an almost comic rational foil. His phrases are shorter, jerkier, his tone more conversational, filled with facts and inflected with bouts of irritation. The idea of a more rational figure, clinging to the mediation afforded by conventions of articulation (language) on a quest to capture the more sensual figure, presents a neat commentary on the representational dilemma of a narrative that attempts to describe the real. The resonances between the two texts—indeed the "mirror structure" of Molloy-Moran—is up to the reader to notice: there is the commonality of a quest narrative (Molloy for Molloy's mother and Moran for Molloy), both encounter a Shepard and flock as they set out on voyages, both suffer from progressive stiffening of their legs, both meet with violent encounters in the woods (Molloy with the charcoal burner, Moran with his curious double), and both narratives meditate on circularity, as Moran ends where he begins (writing the report), and Molloy begins at the end of his quest, namely in the room of his mother (producing pages). The

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[205] Federman, "Beckettian Paradox," 109; Olga Bernal as quoted in Federman, 115. On the power of contradiction to prompt us, in certain cases, to invent new worlds, Federman's following observation is of interest: "the more [Beckett's characters] find themselves sequestrated into fictional and verbal impasses, the more freedom they seem to gain to extricate themselves," 103.

[206] This point and the following observations are attributable to Thomas Cousineau. Though Cousineau's primary concern is to show how the novel trilogy reinvents the triangular, oedipal family structure (Molloy being pre-occupied with the mother figure, while Moran with the authoritative, paternal figure, Youdi), he argues that "echoes and parallels between the two texts (parts) initiate the reader into a relationship with Beckett the author (everywhere and nowhere—we read him in the rhymes and echoes we discern sensitively in the text)," *After the Final No*, 80. Cousineau suggests that the reader's active role is to bridge the two narratives.

formal mirroring of the two parts of *Molloy* evokes the power of juxtaposed worlds to create new levels and realms of space, though the structure of movement is more complicated in Beckett than the linear formula of affirmation, negation and resolution (by which a contradiction is revealed as merely apparent). Instead, the worlds of Molloy and Moran refract and reflect each other, and their alternating resonance and dissonance creates effects that are not directly expressed in either of the two narratives.[207] Put differently, the effect created by the curious doubling of the Molloy-Moran couple creates an experience *between* the narratives. Thus, an interval comes into existence—a space between the flowers that cannot coexist, between the antithetical seasons of words, where the reader's experience is "the menace, the miracle, the memory of an unspeakable trajectory."[208] Paradox in *Molloy* functions as a mechanism that spurs the creation of space—alternative arenas that accommodate what seem at first to be incompossible perspectives or worlds. The jarring of contradictions affords freedom from the language of others as well as a means of avoiding a system of direct communication predicated on (binary) alternatives: vacuous seacoast or perilous swamp.

III. Proceeding by Aporia: *L'innommable*

Bergson suggests that the role of the hardy or courageous novelist is not to fashion fiction as comfort or to tend, in Beckett's words, "vers les secours de la fable" (I, 36), but to constellate words impossibly, in contradictory fashion, so as to provoke readers to suspect the fundamental absurdity, the extraordinary, illogical nature of the reality which casts them (as its shadow). Bergson's ideas about the creative power of contradiction are echoed by Blanchot, who reads *L'innommable* as an incantation from the void—an attempt to explore the origins of language and literary creation, their power

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[207] David Watson, in his work on desire and paradox in Beckett, suggests that Beckett texts and their processes "culminate, not in a teleological resolution, but rather in a logical impasse of paradox and repetition." What Watson suggests, but what his psychoanalytic paradigm does not give him space to develop fully, is the *manner* in which, as he says, the late texts grow out of a paradox or logical impasse that culminates in *L'innommable.* (This is a familiar claim, as we will see in the next section: Badiou, for instance, describes *L'innommable* as an impasse that Beckett overcomes with the creation of *Comment C'est.*) Watson's attribution of "compulsive repetition" to the fatalism of a text "in thrall to an impossible and inevitable desire," brings an interesting perspective to the patterns of repetition and variation so evident in Beckett's corpus. Watson also alludes usefully to Julia Kristeva's account of the ways in which, in avant-garde writing, the thetic, syntactic order of the symbolic is disrupted and invested by a "semiotic" process of language that works outside the field of signification, thus connecting the subversion of traditional narrative to the creation of a space for a different type of linguistic utterance. Finally, Watson describes how a typical Beckett text reframes itself at a metafictional level by "miming its own mimesis (and anti-mimesis) within its verbal articulation and structuration." He calls the text a "haunted machine…that allows some input of control into the infinite generation of stories." Watson, *Paradox and Desire in Samuel Beckett's Fiction.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 81.

[208] For Cousineau, this "unspeakable" trajectory is the ambivalence of desire, and he argues that fiction creates a space in which ambivalent desires may be expressed and worked through (for instance, he reads *Molloy* as a space in which the ambivalent desire for the mother can be expressed and perhaps resolved). Fiction affords this opportunity because its ontological status is itself ambivalent (it *is* and is not). Cousineau, *After the Final No,* 46.

to bring selves and worlds into being.[209] Like *Molloy*, *L'innommable* ends with the narrator on the threshold of his story: "il faut dire des mots, tant qu'il y en a, il faut les dire, jusqu'à ce qu'ils me trouvent, jusqu'à ce qu'ils me disent, étrange peine, étrange faute, il faut continuer, c'est peut-être déjà fait, ils m'ont peut-être déjà dit, ils m'ont peut-être porté jusqu'au seuil de mon histoire, ça m'étonnerait, si elle s'ouvre, ça va être moi […]" (I, 213). As the narrator gropes for the words—perhaps already said—that will bring him into being, as readers we wonder about the ontological status of the preceding narrative: has it never happened? For *here* is where it ostensibly begins, and *here* hasn't happened yet. The recursive movement of the trilogy, expressed, more or less, by the activity of questing for origins, is profoundly unsettling; by destabilizing foundational assumptions it can impede progress. It is easy to imagine, then, why critics tend to read *L'innommable* as the threshold beyond which there is only impasse. Knowlson describes "the impasse in which [Beckett] had found himself since finishing *L'innommable*,"[210] and Badiou writes that "*l'Innommable* était en réalité une impasse, dont [Beckett] allait mettre presque dix ans à sortir."[211] But what these readings insufficiently emphasize is the extent to which *L'innommable* enables Beckett's discovery of a mechanism through which *contradiction* becomes invention and impasse inspires new forms of movement.[212] *L'innommable* begins with the expression of a paradoxical intent: to *proceed* by means of aporia. While the notion that *progress* can be achieved by way of contradiction has ancient roots in the Socratic elenchus (Socrates's interlocutors see the errors of their convictions as they are led to extend their line of argument to the point of contradiction), our reading aims to show that Beckett's procedure by aporia is not merely dialectical movement, but one that creates vibrations *between* opposing elements (the "yes" and the "no"). *L'innommable* provides a fertile illustration of how, like a Cezanne or Giacometti of literature, Beckett exploits paradox as the jarring of incompossibles to open space, to create "worlds" within the world that accommodate new ways of moving, meaning, and saying.

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[209] Maurice Blanchot also discusses the horrifying, destabilizing aspect of this exploration of origins. "Où maintenant? Qui maintenant?" *Nouvelle revue française* (1953), reprinted in *Le livre à venir*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

[210] Knowlson supports his assertion that the 1950's (especially 1956-1958) was a period of creative impasse for Beckett by citing Beckett's letters from this time (for example, in May of 1953 Beckett writes: "Since 1950 [I] have only succeeded in writing a dozen very short abortive texts in French [the "Textes pour rien"] and there is nothing whatever in sight"). But Knowlson himself makes the causal link between *L'innommable* and Beckett's creative "inertia." Knowlson, *Damned to Fame,* 358.

[211] Badiou, *L'incrévable désir,* 8.

[212] An exception is David Watson, who maintains that "the paradoxical impasse of the unnamable becomes the very basis of the continuance of Beckett's later fiction," 52. Bruno Clément also makes a more general association between immobility and creative production in his discussion of rhythm, which, he argues, incites the body to dance. Rhythm is a syncopation formed from breaks or rests in music; but the repetition of these breaks or interruptions can incite the body to move according to new patterns that are produced. Rhythm is the paradigmatic example of the kinship between rest (a beat) and movement; it is not irrelevant, given the necessity of *new* forms of movement, that Beckett questions whether notions of progress must always involve *forward* movement in *L'innommable:* "Aller de l'avant, appeler ça aller, appeler ça de l'avant." I, 7. Bruno Clément, "Le sens du rythme," *Samuel Beckett: L'écriture et la scène*, eds. Evelyne Grossman and Régis Salado, (Paris: Sedes, 1998), 141.

L'innommable suggests at its outset the possibility of proceeding by means of *aporia*—that is to say by impasse, which is the literal meaning of the term (from the Greek *poros*, which means passage).[213] Paradox as method is enacted from the novel's first line, as utterances are systematically shadowed by their negations. The novel's three opening questions, "Où maintenant? Quand maintenant? Qui maintenant?," are undercut by "Sans me le demander." The pattern of statements contradicting their predecessors continues in the following lines: "Dire je. Sans le penser" and "j'ai l'air de parler, ce n'est pas moi, de moi, ce n'est pas de moi" (I, 7). Negating echoes emerge after each positive statement to invalidate it as it is uttered.[214] Then, as if commenting upon this play of back and forth, this dance between positive and negative, a reduction of sorts (the idea of being *ephectic*) is announced along with the paradoxical intent to proceed by *aporia*:

> Comment faire, comment vais-je faire, que dois je faire, dans la situation où je suis, comment procéder? Par pure aporie ou bien par affirmations et négations infirmées au fur et à mesure, ou tôt ou tard. […] À remarquer, avant d'aller plus loin, de l'avant, que je dis aporie sans savoir ce que ça veut dire. Peut-on être éphectique autrement qu'à son insu ? Je ne sais pas. Les oui et non, c'est autre chose, ils me reviendront à mesure que je progresserai, et la façon de chier dessus, tôt ou tard, comme un oiseau, sans en oublier un seul (I, 7-8).

L'innommable, as is evident from this passage, savagely mocks certain philosophical movements (Pyrrhonian skepticism, Cartesian doubt, the binary logic upon which dialectical advancement depends, and Husserl's bracketing of empirical data) even as it playfully engages these positions in an attempt to investigate its own origins, those of language, and of artistic and literary creation. At times, the recursive "advancement" of the trilogy earnestly explores the paradoxical possibility of progressing by doubt, and Beckett betrays a fraught deference to Cartesian and (to a lesser extent) Husserlian methodologies. Badiou calls this Beckett's "methodological askesis" (*l'ascèse méthodique*),[215] and describes the manner in which Beckett, in order to explore any one function, "s'arrange pour bloquer les autres."[216] For instance, Beckett's creation of a

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[213] Derrida's distinction between impasse and aporia unravels the paradox that develops from their conflation: he establishes *impasse* as that which prevents movement, while *aporia* becomes the art of moving around an impasse according to another manner of thinking: "J'essayais alors de me mouvoir non pas contre ou à partir de l'impasse mais, d'une autre manière, *selon* une autre pensée, peut-être plus endurante, de l'*aporie*." *Apories*, 32.

[214] This is a point that Pascale Casanova makes in *Beckett l'abstracteur: Anatomie d'une révolution littéraire,* (Paris, Seuil, 1997). She writes: "L'aporie, la contradiction, le paradoxe seront donc les premiers outils (à la fois logiques et stylistiques) expérimentés. Le texte applique à la syntaxe le procédé énoncé de la contradiction (affirmations et négations infirmées au fur et à mesure), 139. She proposes exploring the work of paradox as a formal principle: "La place centrale du paradoxe chez Beckett à déjà été commentée par la critique […] mais sans que le principe formel en ait été dégagé et, du même coup, sans que sa fonction ait été explicitée." Specifically, she suggests that the "moyens littéraires" in *L'Innommable* are "le moteur et, dans une certaine mesure la fin de l'écriture elle-même," 140. Connecting the "motor" with the end or the goal of writing suggests an ambivalent interconnection between blockage, impasse and literary "progress" or innovation.

[215] For Badiou: "À sa manière, Beckett retrouve une inspiration de Descartes et de Husserl: si vous voulez mener une enquête sérieuse sur l'humanité pensante, il faut d'abord suspendre tout ce qui est inessentiel ou douteux, ramener l'humanité à ses fonctions indestructibles." He reads in Beckett a "protocole de l'expérience, qu'il faut comparer au doute par lequel Descartes ramène le sujet à la vacuité de sa pure énonciation, ou à l'*époché* de Husserl, qui réduit l'évidence du monde à celle des flux intentionnels de la conscience," *L'increvable désir,* 19.

[216] Badiou designates the three functions that Beckett investigates as movement, being and language.

speaking head in a jar blocks the function of movement (*soustrait à la mobilité*) so as to explore the function of language.[217]

While Badiou's observations signal an important strategy of Beckett's, the necessity of restricting or limiting certain functions so as to explore others, it is important not to underemphasize the extent to which Beckett mocks his philosophical forebears: the image of a head in a jar is a devastating parody of the cogito. Moreover, the very idea to proceed by doubt is doomed to the extent that it is radical (the unnamable admits: "je dis aporie sans savoir ce que ça veut dire"). For Descartes, the cogito, the subject who thinks, is a foundation or limit that guards against infinite regress. But *L'innommable* rattles the bedrock of the cogito: "Dire je. Sans le penser." The novel makes the repeated point that *words themselves* bring the speaker/subject (or multiple subjects) into being: "des mots me disant en vie" (I, 81), and "je suis en mots, je suis fait de mots, des mots des autres" (I, 166). The need to "radicalize" Descartes by troubling the cogito is recognized by Husserl, who recommends a bracketing of sense impressions so as to reveal the intentional structures of consciousness. But Husserl's *époché* requires a transcendental ego, a consciousness that remains after the reduction; he risks smuggling a stable subject position back into the quest for origins. Sensitive to the tautological pitfalls of such a quest, Beckett rejects the idea that there can be a "remainder" after the *époché,* capable of tabulating its results: "Peut-on être éphectique autrement qu'à son insu?" the unnamable asks, poking fun at the idea of a consciousness willingly suspending its own will. Similarly, the passage takes aim at the Stoic tradition, in which ephectic "suspension of judgment" figures importantly.[218] This decision to proceed by aporia illustrates the manner in which the novel works itself up to a pitch of hysterical paralysis (doubting, questing and questioning open an infinite regress) and constitutes the novel's most pivotal paradox: the necessity of moving forward (*aller de l'avant)* coupled with impossibility of moving forward implied by aporia.

At this stage a careful distinction between terms becomes especially important, for paradox, aporia, dialectic, and impasse may lead to different sorts of movement (or immobility). In the passage quoted above, the unnamable makes an almost taxonomic distinction between pure aporia and the dialectic movement between "yes" and "no." He can proceed: "[p]ar pure aporie *ou bien* par affirmations et négations infirmées au fur et à mesure" (*my emphasis*). There is a clear choice between proceeding by aporia and proceeding by dialectic (affirmations and negations, thesis and antithesis). Perhaps pure aporia would involve saying nothing, while affirming and negating would be to say everything. For, as a result of aporia, the unnamable arrogates to himself an omniscient, birds-eye view from which he can shit on top of all of the yeses and no's without exception. A possible way of thinking about the unnamable's preference for aporia over dialectic would be, following Blanchot, to read aporia as an "artistic" detachment. It is true that Beckett takes a jibe at the Stoics and at other philosophers who refuse a position, remaining *suspended* above the real. But such detachment resembles, in some ways, the predicament of the artist, who suspends her own perspective so as to inhabit

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[217] Badiou, *L'increvable désir*, 21.
[218] For a useful rendering of the Stoic strategy of suspending judgment and of proceeding through antitheses, see the entry on "Pyronnhian Scepticism" in Stephen M. Cahn's *Classics of Western Philosophy*, 7th edition, (Indiana: Hackett, 2007), 337.

imaginatively the experiences of others. The idea that detachment (or void) may be a necessary condition for *creation* complicates Beckett's dismissal of the Stoics, for the abstention they practice is not entirely foreign to the artistic process. But while there may be in Beckett a sincere attempt to reach a point of impasse or nothingness where artistic creation would be possible,[219] procedure by aporia leads us more directly to reconfigure our notions of passage, and, concurrently, our ideas about the creative possibilities of *language* to forge spaces within the given world.

Beckettian paradox (expressed in *L'innommable* as procedure by aporia) offers an alternative to dialectic advancement; it serves as a limit that by provoking an immanent reconfiguration becomes a site of creative undertaking. To understand how this works, it is necessary to take into account the distinctions Derrida draws between impasse and aporia. Derrida discriminates between ordinary (melancholic) paralysis, and the kind of blockage or restriction that gives way to new vistas, creations, characters, or manners of thinking. He mentions three types of aporia, which permeate and overlap: the first comes from a problem of closed borders (he uses the example of war-time), which make free passage impossible and, so, restricts movement in a conventional sense. The second kind of aporia (associated with peace-time) comes from a sense of limitlessness caused by two *few* lines of demarcation or differentiation (*il n'y a plus de chez-soi ni de chez-l'autre*). The final type of aporia, most interestingly, is the kind according to which possibilities for movement and for passage change. Radically changing spatial conditions make it so that passage, or the concept of "trans," no longer exists as such: "l'impossible, l'antinomie ou la contradiction est un non-passage parce que son milieu élémentaire ne donne plus lieu à quelque chose qu'on puisse appeler passage, pas, marche, démarche, déplacement ou remplacement, kinèse en général. Il n'y a plus de chemin […] plus de *trans*—(transport, transposition, transgression, traduction, transcendance même)." According to this third definition, aporia is also a receptivity to "un événement de venue ou d'avenir qui n'a plus la forme du mouvement consistant à passer, traverser, transiter."[220] Derrida's distinction between kinds of impasse that end in mere blockage and a version of *aporia* that conditions receptivity to events, makes it clear that the non-passage of aporia is a site of radical change, in which the very idea of passage is

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[219] For Blanchot's convincing version of this argument, and his description of the void in which artistic creation must happen, see "Où Maintenant? Qui Maintenant."

[220] Derrida, *Apories,* 44. "Dans un cas, le non-passage ressemble à une imperméabilité ; il tiendrait à l'existence opaque d'une frontière infranchissable : une porte qui ne s'ouvre pas ou qui ne s'ouvre qu'à telle ou telle condition introuvable, au secret inaccessible de quelque *schibboleth*. C'est le cas de toutes les frontières fermées (exemplairement pendant la guerre). Dans un autre cas, le non-passage, l'impasse ou l'aporie tient au fait qu'il n'y a pas de limite. Il n'y a pas encore ou il n'y a déjà plus de frontière à passer, plus d'opposition entre deux bords : la limite est trop poreuse, perméable, indéterminée, il n'y a plus de chez-soi ni de chez-l'autre, qu'il s'agisse du temps de paix […] Enfin, aporie du troisième type : l'impossible, l'antinomie ou la contradiction est un non-passage parce que son milieu élémentaire ne donne plus lieu à quelque chose qu'on puisse appeler passage, pas, marche, démarche, déplacement ou remplacement, kinèse en général. Il n'y a plus de chemin (odos, methodos, Weg ou Holzweg) […] Il y aurait dans ce cas aporie parce qu'il n'y même pas lieu pour une aporie déterminée comme expérience du pas ou du bord, franchissement ou non de quelque ligne, rapport à quelque figure spatiale de la limite. Plus de cheminement ou de trajectoire, plus de *trans*—(transport, transposition, transgression, traduction, transcendance même). Il n'y aurait même pas de place pour l'aporie, faute de condition topologique elle-même."

transformed. This leads Derrida to distinguish aporia from mere impasse by associating it with the possibility of moving differently: "J'essayais alors de me mouvoir non pas contre ou à partir de l'impasse mais, d'une autre manière, *selon* une autre pensée, peut-être plus endurante, de l'*aporie*."[221] Thus aporia, for Derrida, comes to signal the transformation to which an impasse may lead—the possibility of moving with or according to (*selon*) another manner of thinking. Aporia as a site of radical variation does not require a creative or willing agent, but supports immanent reconfigurations, as multiple paths are broken open by the blockage of an expected route. And instead of the movement of dialectic, according to which synthesis would necessitate the invention of an "elsewhere," the contradictions of aporia lead to reconfigurations of space *from within*, as it were: "sans céder à aucune dialectique," Derrida proposes an "endurance non passive de l'aporie comme condition de la responsabilité et de la décision." Thus *antinomy*, the contradiction between two equal imperatives, becomes *aporia* "dans la mesure où elle n'est ni une antinomie « apparente ou illusoire », ni une contradiction dialectisable au sens hegelien ou marxiste, ni même une « illusion transcendentale dans une dialectique de type kantien », mais l'expérience interminable."[222] This version of aporia as non-passive, as enduring, and, most importantly, as that which gives rise to an immanent reconfiguration of space, illuminates a strategy that seems to be at the heart of Beckett's use of paradox in *L'innommable*. In this text, contradictions work not to motor dialectic, but to reconfigure the limits of one's world.[223] Rather than dialectical advancement by means of affirmations and negations, it is the act of enduring—a ricocheting between *two* that lead us to invent the spaces in which a world's elements still vibrate with the energy of contingency. This energy of indeterminacy is, perhaps, what *L'innommable* seeks through its contradictions to achieve. And paradox and aporia are the means by which conditions of passage can be re-imagined, limits redrawn, and paths forged.

A concrete scene from *L'innommable* enables us to observe how paradox (as aporia) necessitates a reconfiguration of the notion of passage and unravels the opposition between presence and absence. Paradox, because of the contradiction it involves, gives way to a situation of not knowing—of decision or doubt—of being torn between two equally viable solutions. As such, paradox hints at an alliance between impasse—typified by the immobility and impotence that may arise when one's usual modes of understanding are challenged—and the possibility of altering one's previous thinking. A situation of doubt need not be debilitating, and might contain within it a certain creative power. Beckett describes a state of gray that has been created against a black background by lamps belonging to a mysterious "they" (*ils*) who have come to torture and aggress Worm: "ce gris, c'est eux qui le font, avec leurs lampes. Quand ils s'en iront, quand ils se tairont, il fera noir, pas un bruit, pas une lueur" (I, 130). But, the narrator laments, they

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[221] Derrida, *Apories,* 32.

[222] Derrida, *Apories,* 37.

[223] Derrida's mention of "la limitrophie paradoxale de *Tympan* et des marges, marches, ou marques, de l'indécidabilité," *Apories,* 35, evokes the unnamable's description of himself as the limit between inside and outside. Beckett's narrator famously describes itself as the tympan, the membrane without thickness that sustains vibrations, I, 160. The tympan as a bodily limit between inside and outside effectively illustrates a mode of passage *between* these oppositions (inside and outside).

will never go away—yes, they might, he interrupts himself, imagining a day when the they will depart, slowly, sadly, in Indian file, casting long shadows, making their way toward their master who will punish or pardon them, these being the only two solutions possible. This logic of either-or is then extended to pose a paradox: the narrator announces that the departing "they" have both filled in the holes they have made in the screen (to watch Worm) and have not filled in the holes. "Mais mis en demeure de dire oui ou non s'ils ont bouché les trous, ont-ils bouché les trous, oui ou non, ils diront oui et non […] les deux se défendent, les deux réponses" (I, 130). Beckett dallies in the throes of this paradox, explaining that, depending on the response one wants, one can describe the "they" as having filled in their holes or not having done so. The task becomes one of imagining a scenario in which these seemingly contradictory descriptions can both be true. The text helps us with the riddle in this instance, by explaining that the "they," in departing, plugged their holes with their lamps, thus preventing the holes from closing, while nevertheless not leaving them open and gaping: "Alors ils y ont fixé leurs lampes, dans les trous, leurs longues lampes, pour les empêcher de se fermer tout seules, c'est comme de la glaise, ils y ont introduit leurs puissantes lampes, allumées, braquées sur le dedans, pour qu'il [Worm] les croie toujours là, ou pour qu'il croie que le gris est vrai" (I, 131). The insertion of these lamps into holes in the screen sustains the simultaneous effect of presence and absence (of the "they"), as well as the simultaneous permeability and impermeability of the screen. The result is a state of gray, in which Worm must continue to suffer, not knowing whether the "they" are watching or not, since both possibilities co-exist. The example illustrates the manner in which worlds can develop under the pressure of contradictions; the "they" have filled in the holes and have not filled in the holes, so we must imagine a world of gray, where lamps plug the holes in the absence of the "they." That this new world is gray is appropriate, since grayness underscores the point that refusing a system of binary alternatives can lead to the creation of new spaces or solutions in which oppositions (such as light and dark) co-exist.

This understanding of Beckettian paradox according to the logic of aporia, as that which leads to an imaginative unraveling of dichotomies and to the emergence of new forms, leads us to consider *L'innommable* as the beginning of a period of gestation in the life of Beckett's work. *L'innommable,* considered as an impasse or dead end in the development of Beckett's aesthetic by Badiou and Knowlson, shoud instead be viewed as inaugurating a period of gestataion after which time certain images described in its pages will emerge, fully concretized, in the plays and in the pieces for television. The text's closing paradox, "je ne peux pas continuer, je vais continuer" (I, 213), which, despite its assertion that it will continue, serves to close the trilogy, tends to be read as a demonstration of the impossibility of movement, and, by extension, of writing.[224] Yet a closer look at Beckett's work produced after *L'innommable* shows that there is less a clean *break* (between *L'innommable* and *Textes pour rien* on the one hand and the work that comes after *Comment C'est*) than a move to actualize certain nascent imaginings. A passage of *L'innommable* vividly describes the piling up of time, which layers up and thickens all around you until there is sand in your mouth. This image becomes actualized,

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[224] The closing paradox of *L'innommable* is complemented by a more specific paradox pertaining to language: "Oui, dans ma vie, puisqu'il faut l'appeler ainsi, il y eut trois choses, l'impossibilité de parler, l'impossibilité de me taire, et la solitude, physique bien sûr, avec ça je me suis débrouillé," I, 183.

arguably, in the situation of Winnie in *Oh les beaux jours*, who finds herself buried to her neck in sand—embedded, perhaps, in the base of an hourglass.[225] The continuity of images such as these suggests that *L'innommable* already opens the way toward transformations of literary form, and to read it as a cul-de-sac overlooks the generative power of paradox to catalyze the emergence of possibilities for moving, thinking and writing.[226]

L'innommable, and especially its closing paradox, may be read instead as an aporia in Derrida's sense, at least insofar as it adumbrates conditions for the generation of space and for passage:

> […] il faut continuer, c'est peut-être déjà fait, ils m'ont peut-être déjà dit, ils m'ont peut-être porté jusqu'au seuil de mon histoire, devant la porte qui s'ouvre sur mon histoire, ça m'étonnerait, si elle s'ouvre, ça va être moi, ça va être le silence, là où je suis, je ne sais pas, je ne le saurai jamais, dans le silence on ne sait pas, il faut continuer, je ne peux pas continuer, je vais continuer (I, 213).

These lines constitute a reprise of the larger structural paradox that threads through the trilogy, which consists of a reversal of the expected grammatical hierarchy between a speaking subject and what is said (or written). Beckett presents a narrator in search of his origins—a speaker who is "said," or brought into being by the very story he is telling. Such a reversal, rather than ending in a situation of impossibility, is the means of self-reflection by which fiction reinvents its conventions, possibilities, and powers.

In *Molloy,* a quest for origins is concretely represented as the title character's endeavor to find his mother, but in *L'innommable* the emphasis shifts to language. The fact that *L'innommable* calls attention to its own conditions of possibility (its origin in language) creates a situation of paradox, for the narrating voice is revealed to be both constitut*ing* and constitut*ed by* the words he utters:

> je suis en mots, je suis fait de mots, des mots des autres, quels autres, l'endroit aussi, l'air aussi, les murs, le sol, le plafond, des mots, tout l'univers est ici, avec moi, je suis l'air, les murs, l'emmuré, tout cède, s'ouvre, dérive, reflue, des flocons, je suis tous ces flocons, se croisant, s'unissant, se séparant […] je suis tous ces mots, tous ces étrangers, cette poussière de verbe, sans fond où se poser, sans ciel où se dissiper, se rencontrant pour dire, se fuyant pour dire, que je les suis tous (I, 166).

There is no differentiation between the unnamable and the universe, the air and the walls, because he, like the rest of his world, is a product of language. Language becomes, in *L'innommable,* the arena, stage or space in which everything comes into being. By insisting on language as the material condition of his existence, the unnamable admits to

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[225] The piling of sand passage that foreshadows Winnie's predicament is as follows: "pourquoi le temps ne passe pas, ne vous laisse pas, pourquoi il vient s'entasser autour de vous, instant par instant, de tous les côtés, de plus en plus haut, de plus en plus épais, […] enseveli sous les secondes, racontant n'importe quoi, la bouche pleine de sable," I, 171. Another passage in *L'innommable*, in which the narrator longs to be in the middle (between words, perhaps), evokes the endless circulation of bodies around the center point, in the wordless *Quad:* "c'est au milieu qu'il faudrait être, là où on souffre, là où on ne sent rien, n'entend rien, ne sait rien, ne dit rien, n'est rien, c'est là où il ferait bon être, là où on est," I, 145.

[226] This assertion does not do full justice to Badiou's reading, which attributes the impasse of *L'innommable* to solipsism. He argues that with *Comment C'est* Beckett overcomes an obsession with self-investigation and learns (as a writer of fiction) to encounter the other—an encounter that means imaginative projection into a life and experience different from one's own. This reading is convincing, and yet the necessity of otherness and of exploring other worlds is adumbrated already in the pages of *L'innommable*: "il doit y avoir d'autres dans d'autres ailleurs, chacun dans son petit ailleurs," I, 193, and "il veut que je monte dans lui, ou dans un autre," I, 194-195. Badiou, *L'increvable désir*, 47-54.

being trapped (*emmuré)* in language, and this raises a situational paradox common to both language and space: their generative possibilities are simultaneously their limitations and vise versa. Beckett expresses this fact thematically and stylistically, describing the narrator:

> dans un endroit dur, vide, clos, sec, net, noir, où rien ne bouge, rien ne parle, et que j'écoute, et que j'entends, et que je cherche, comme une bête née en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées et mortes en cage nées et mortes en cage de bêtes nées en cage mortes en cage nées et mortes nés et mortes en cage en cage nées et puis mortes […] (I, 166-167).

The text's repetition, reminiscent of passages in *Watt,* reminds of a stalled out motor, turning over on itself, unable to spark, and move—a blown fuse or a machine on overdrive. The short-circuiting of language here mirrors the description of a closed space (cage) in which humanity is reduced to a binary cycle of births and deaths. Language reduced to quasi-senseless repetition also underscores the fact that it cannot successfully do what it sets out to do: speak of anything *other* than itself. Language can only ever describe that which, by the time it is uttered, is "elsewhere": "Ces choses que je dis, que je vais dire, si je peux, ne sont plus, ou pas encore, ou ne furent jamais, ou ne seront jamais, ou si elles furent, ou si elles sont, ou si elles seront, ne furent pas ici, ne sont pas ici, ne seront pas ici, mais ailleurs" (I, 24). This eternal slippage between language and what it wants to say is exploited in Beckett's *oeuvre*, which pushes this constitutive limit of language to reveal a paradox. The desire to write despite the limitations of language, like movement in the face of an impasse, promises to fray unexpected directions of motion and indirect means of expression.[227]

    L'innommable evokes this creative power of the *limit* through its descriptions of restrictions and expansions of *space.* It is in this way that Beckett circumvents the brittle tacking of the dialectic, with its yearning for an "elsewhere" in which contradictions would be resolved. Restricted space in *L'innommable* generates reconfigurations, innovative spatial geometries and patterns of movement immanent to the present time and place. "Ici c'est mon seul ailleurs" (I, 193), says the unnamable, refusing the lure of an elsewhere and restricting the space of the narrative to a "here" that becomes, under Beckett's pen, various. An obsession with location and place betrays itself from the first word of *L'innommable* (*où*) to the first word of its last sentence (*endroit*). Throughout the work, the narrator describes vistas, thresholds, arenas and trajectories (spiral patterns) made across what seems at times like a limitless surface. The first pages of the novel set out to describe the *place*—an abstract space—in which the narrator finds himself: "L'endroit est sans doute vaste. De faibles lumières semblent marquer par moments une manière de lointain." But the following speculations belie this characterization of the space as vast: "Y a-t-il autres fonds, plus bas? Auxquels on accède par celui-ci? Stupide hantise de la profondeur. Y a-t-il pour nous d'autres lieux prévus, dont celui où je suis, avec Malone, n'est que le narthex? [...] Non, non, je nous sais tous ici pour toujours, depuis toujours" (I, 10). The idea that the space might be a narthex, a term that describes

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[227] David Watson's work on desire is relevant in this context. After pointing out that desire is paradoxical, since attaining its objective would nullify it, Watson describes a "circuit of paradox of the very moment of narrative itself, as an illegal desire which ultimately restages the law," *Paradox and Desire in Samuel Beckett's Fiction,* 57. That desire is transgressive, that it might "restage the law," is a further indication of the capacity for transformation inhering in paradox.

the entrance to a church, hints that the novel's setting is a luminal space from which vantage point the narrator looks out onto an impossible beyond (comparable, perhaps, to a religious afterlife). But the fact that this space is also a world in which all of Beckett's characters appear suggests this mysterious, mutable place as a site of literary and imaginative creation. The conditions of the space change under Beckett's pen pages later: "Mais l'endroit, je l'ai déjà signalé, est peut-être vaste, comme il peut n'avoir que douze pieds de diamètre. Pour ce qui est d'en pouvoir reconnaître les confins, les deux cas se valent" (I, 13). The space is simultaneously vast *and* limited to 12 feet in diameter; moreover, both of these descriptions are valid. In what way might this paradox incite us to change our notions about the mutability of space under differing conditions of perception and imagination? It seems that this passage underscores the manner in which certain limitations are necessary for imaginative liberty, which is a persistent theme in Beckett's work.[228] Just as the narrowing of space—a threshold for instance—invites passage, so can restrictions of passage spur strategies of circumnavigation. Instead of ricocheting with the back-and-forth of dialectic progress toward an "elsewhere," restricted spaces in *L'innommable* suggest the possibility of immanent reconfiguration of existing conditions.

Beckett warns against a relapse into the picaresque, urging us to rethink our notion of spatial advancement as *forward* progress and frustrating attempts to read *L'innommable* as depicting a voyage in any conventional sense (journeying toward a destination). The dominant spatial trajectory throughout the novel is that of a spiral: the unnamable wanders the earth, only to reach its outer limits and turn back—the world being finite, circumscribed—to the rotunda from which he set out, his family watching his limping progress from within its circular walls. The unnamable describes how he reaches the center of the spiral, marching over the corpses of his family, who have succumbed, by this time, to food poisoning, only to turn out again and begin the journey over. The spiral is an important figure insofar as it remains undecided between the closed cycle of a circle and the progress signified by a straight line: it combines elements of repetition and novelty.

Reassuring conventions of forward progress and recognizable spatial limits that we might associate with the familiarity of a "home" are missing in *L'innommable*, and this lack causes the narrator no shortage of distress. He imagines:

> si je pouvais m'enfermer, ce serait une mine, il pourrait faire noir, je pourrais être fixe, je me débrouillerais, pour l'explorer, j'écouterais l'écho, je la connaîtrais, je m'en souviendrais, je me l'imaginerais, je serais chez moi, je dirais comment c'est, chez moi, au lieu de n'importe quoi […] je ne sens pas d'endroit, pas d'endroit autour de moi, je n'arrête pas […] (I, 187).

The narrator feels himself extending in all directions, and unable to stop (wandering, speaking) because he lacks a *place*. He imagines that if he could only "shut himself up" (*s'enfermer*)[229] he might be able stop speaking: "je ne me sens pas d'endroit, ça viendra

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[228] In *Murphy,* we find a chapter devoted to the title character's attempts to restrict the body so as to free the mind: he ties himself to his rocking chair. The rocking chair as an image comes up again and again (in *Film* for instance) as a figure for simultaneous movement and stasis. Samuel Beckett, *Murphy,* (New York: Grove Press, 1957).

[229] Here the double entendre in the English version, the narrator's desire to "shut up" (stop speaking) and to be "shut up" (to find an enclosure, a home perhaps) relates spatial confinement to speech in a way that is more marked than in the French.

peut-être, […] je saurai où je suis, je pourrai peut-être me taire" (I, 189-90). The destruction of conventional, familiar places—which may be understood as figures for the limits that ordinarily govern our movement and speech—open a terrifying space of creation that threatens the integrity of the unnamable's body, which seems to blend into its world: "je n'arrête pas" could mean, "I bleed into things," as well as "I cannot stop" (speaking, moving). But is this loss of control or agency, due to rapidly changing conditions of space, ever recuperated? Complex spatial geometries such as the spiral, as well as playful variations of existing language to create non-semantic meanings, gesture towards the possibility of forming new patterns for motion and for expression.

The limitations of existing language, like those of spaces, are exacerbated in the pages of *L'innommable*. Vocabulary, conventions of grammar and syntactical norms come to constitute a repertoire from which the text draws as wella an accepted regularity that forms the standard for the prose's variations. Toward the end of *L'innommable* the rhythms of the prose vary as the pace of the language accelarates; there are also points at which the text stutters, pauses, and flows again.[230] Repetition (of words, of phrases and of sounds) creates a visual pattern on the page and well as auditory constellations for the inner ear; the reader also notices the increasingly swollen lengths of sentences and lack of punctuation as the novel draws to its impossible close. The lack of proper differentiation between sentences is responsible for the increasing speed of the text that becomes asymptotically approaches hysteria. The closed and generative space of the womb, the etymological root of "hysteria," is appropriate given that the excessiveness of the text is composed from a "palette" of existing words and linguistic conditions (no need to glean its content from elsewhere): "ce sont des mots blancs, mais je m'en sers […] la palette y serait, je les mélangerais, je les varierais, la gamme y serait, je les mélangerais, je les varierais, la gamme y serait" (I, 202). The art of using an existing range (*gamme*), scale or palette to create variations is exemplified by the invented words based on noises emitted by the body that appear with increasing frequency in the closing pages of *L'innommable*: "glouglou, aïe, ha, pah, je vais m'exercer, nyam, hou, plof, pss, rien que de l'émotion, pan, paf, les coups, na, toc, quoi encore, aah, ooh, c'est l'amour, assez, c'est fatiguant, hi, hi […]." This assemblage of words that describes bodily experiences (sometimes onomatopoetically) privileges affect over semantic meaning (*rien que de l'émotion*). This gesturing toward alternatives to semantic meaning—alternatives that present themselves to the mind as nonsense but cause patterns of sensation and affect when received by the eye and ear—are continued and extended in such a way as to appeal even more explicitly to the body in Lucky's speech in *En Attendant Godot*.

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[230] Or, as Bruno Clément comments: "Les phrases (étymologiquement) immenses, dé-mesurées de *L'innommable* disent, sans relief, l'absence de tout relief." He argues for the lack of rhythm in *L'innommable*, which is what makes it so difficult to read. For Clément, rhythm is regularity, a break, a marker of orientation. Clément further describes "*l'arythmie beckettienne*," arguing that rhythm becomes important for the *first* time in *Comment C'est*. Clément, "Le sens du rythme," 141.

IV. Lucky's Dance Amidst the Ruins of the Rational

The monologue delivered by Lucky in Act I of *En Attendant Godot* is a highly concentrated section of experimental prose, in which situations of paradox excite various expressive powers of language, latent in our daily speech. While interpretations of Lucky's speech tend to characterize it as signifying the decline of man, we will pursue the more narrow aim of discerning how paradox operates in Lucky's speech to spur reinventions of language. Lucky's speech privileges homophony, sonority, rhyme, rhythm, allusion and repetition, as Beckett develops a poetic speech that works against the established meanings of words and stock phrases, especially those of academic discourse, there by calling into question the tyranny of the semantic in linguistic practice. The speech also works to reveal a relationship between language and the physical world by calling attention to the concrete, physical basis of abstract language, which suggests the origin of language in the body that moves, orients, gestures (perhaps dances?) before it speaks or thinks. It may be possible, then, to link innovations in language with the possibilities of bodily movement, as the comparison between thinking and dancing in *En Attendant Godot* suggests.

Beckett creates situations of paradox in Lucky's speech, as he does in other texts, by carefully calibrating parts of his text to the expectations his reader is likely to have. At several points in Lucky's monologue, Beckett avails himself of a familiar discursive convention only to undermine the abstract sense of a word with its more concrete meaning—a meaning that is disclosed, for example, through the addition of a further adjective. Beckett's prose carefully plays to our expectations—even provokes them— only to challenge them by exploiting the polysemy of certain abstract, discursive terms. In this sense, Lucky's speech works against and is thus *beyond* the *doxa* of conventional language usage. Amidst the parodied ruins of discursive rationality and its preferred modes of expression, Lucky's logorrhea forges new trajectories within language, as pathways between words multiply possibilities for linguistic expression. Lucky's speech also reminds us, provocatively, that language is an extension of the concrete activity of the body.

The first sense in which Lucky's discourse constitutes a paradox is that the activity of *thinking,* with all of its serious, scholarly associations as an attempt to know the truth, is reconceived as a performance art—a way to pass the time on par with circus acts, recitations and public singing or dance performances. The reduction of thinking to *mere* show or performance reminds us of charges made against the Sophists by Plato and his followers: orators and rhetoricians were faulted for using the arts of language to manipulate or bewitch their audiences, arguing for one position or its opposite without appropriate regard for truth. The emptiness of mere "thought" or rhetoric is suggested by a savage parody of scholarly discourse in the form of fragmented repetitions and distortions of stereotypical words used in academic discussions (*D'autre part, Etant donné, attendu d'autre part, quaquaquaqua, qu'en vue des labeurs, à l'opinion contraire, en même temps et parallèlement, je reprends, considérant d'autre part, au suivant,* etc.)[231] The reduction of the activity of thinking to casual entertainment is clear from the

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[231] In his article, "La 'Mise en question du langage' dans la literature actuelle," Georges Mounin usefully

manner in which Pozzo introduces Lucky's routine: "Que puis-je faire […] pour que le temps leur semble moins long?"[232] Pulling the cord attached to Lucky's neck, Pozzo asks Vladimir and Estragon: "Que préférez vous ? Qu'il danse, qu'il chante, qu'il récite, qu'il pense, qu'il… […] Alors, vous voulez qu'il nous pense quelque chose?" (G, 55). This odd description of "thinking" as a routine to be performed goes against the expectation that intellectual activity is an earnest quest for the truth rather than a mere spectacle or show.

The unexpected relegation of *thinking* to the status of a spectators' sport (for ourselves as for Vladimir and Estragon) hints at a major theme of Lucky's speech: the notion of man-as-[thinking]-actor before the eyes of a divine spectator. Lucky begins his speech with the description of a "Dieu personnel […] qui du haut de sa divine apathie sa divine athambie sa divine aphasie nous aime bien à quelques exceptions près" (G, 59). The image of Lucky as an actor before an all-powerful spectator-god has been linked by some Beckett critics to the Baroque concept of *theatrum mundi*, the idea of the world as a stage.[233] Several aspects of the speech and its surrounding dialogue reinforce this idea: First, there is Lucky's sense, described by Pozzo, of being caught in a net: Pozzo explains that Lucky calls his dance, "La danse du Filet. Il se croit empêtré dans un filet" (G,56). We might readily associate a net with entrapment, but the theater critic, Toby Silverman Zinman, links the experience of "dancing in a net" to a proverb that describes a state of being watched while thinking oneself unobserved.[234] This links the *content* of Lucky's speech, a description of mankind dwindling or wasting away under the gaze of an apathetic deity, with Lucky's own aphasic decline as witnessed by Pozzo, Estragon, Vladimir and ourselves. Second, the rope attached to Lucky's neck indicates his subservience to Pozzo and alludes, perhaps, to puppetry, to the marionette theater and to the circus, undermining views of man as an agent capable of acting on his own volition. It is Pozzo, a circus ringleader of sorts,[235] who controls Lucky's movements and commands him to perform: "Pense, porc!" (G, 59). Lastly, the increasing speed of Lucky's delivery reinforces the sense that he is out of control with regard to the spectacle he produces.

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numbers the occurrences of academic jargon. He cites the frequency of such stereotypes as: "attendu que, étant donné, à quelques exceptions près, mais ça viendra, les faits sont là, etc." He argues that Beckett creates his stereotype of an academic discourse through the repetition of certain key terms: "hélas (deux fois), au suivant (trois fois), assavoir (trois fois), il apparaît que (quatre fois), mais n'anticipons pas (quatre fois), je reprends (sept fois), bref (huit fois), on ne sait pas pourquoi (onze fois), etc." Georges Mounin, "La 'Mise en question du langage' dans la littérature actuelle" *La Linguistique* 4, Fasc. 1 (1968); 21-29.

[232] Samuel Beckett, *En Attendant Godot*, (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1952), 54, (hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as G).

[233] See, for instance, Ruby Cohn, "Plays and Player in the Plays of Samuel Beckett," *Yale French Studies* 29 (1962); 43-48.

[234] Toby Silverman Zinman, "Lucky's dance in Waiting for Godot," *Modern drama* 38 (1995), 311-312.

[235] John Fletcher, in his study of *Waiting for Godot,* reminds us that Jean Anouilh likened the play to Pascal's *Pensées* performed as a comedy sketch by clowns, and notes that "Pozzo's cracking of his ringmaster's whip [… is] lifted straight from the repertoire of the big top." John Fletcher, *Samuel Beckett: Waiting for Godot, Endgame, Krapp's Last Tape,* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2000), 66. The following section of the play also makes explicit reference to the circus and to the spectacle:

Vladimir: On se croirait au spectacle.
Estragon: Au cirque.
Vladimir: Au music-hall.
Estragon: Au cirque, G, 47.

Though the speed of the text is not mentioned in the stage directions,[236] in many productions Lucky's speech is delivered at a breathless pace that accelerates as the monologue progresses. The text itself, a single sentence spliced with aberrant interjections, non sequiturs, loops and repetitions, creates an impression of movement toward entropy and loss of control on the part of the speaker that jars usual associations between "thinking," rationality and order.

In her article, "Fast-Forward: Lucky's *pnigos,*" Rosette Lamont uses the monologue's speed to compare it to the ancient Greek dramatic convention of *pnigos.*[237] *Pnigos*, also called the "choker," and frequently used by Aristophanes, is a section of the *parabasis*. Because *parabasis* constitutes a break in the dramatic action of the play (the chorus directly addresses the audience), Lucky's inability to control or direct his own thought is that much more jarring: even moments of direct address are not subject to human volition. The breathless speed of the speech also refers us to its source in the body of the actor—a body that tends, in keeping with a main refrain of the speech, to "waste and pine," to dwindle toward entropy and exhaustion. Metrical changes ensure the rapid delivery of the *pnigos*, which is often uttered in a single breath. Lucky's speech is almost certainly an allusion to *parabasis,* given that stage directions in both the French and English versions direct Lucky to turn toward the audience before speaking.[238] That Lucky does not seem to have control over his "thinking"—that language flows on in loops and glitches without his volition is reinforced by the image of Lucky as a mere player on the world's stage—an "actor" who is subject to the constraints of a script and to a flow toward entropy against which he can do little to resist.

Entropy, disarray, chaos, absurdity and apocalypse are themes that Beckett critics have most often used to describe Lucky's speech, and most agree that, in terms of content, it portrays man's decline: his shrinking, dwindling, wasting or pining under the gaze of an indifferent god. Such readings draw support from the following lines of text: "[l'homme] malgré les progrès de l'alimentation et de l'élimination des déchets est en train de maigrir […] malgré l'essor de la culture physique […] de rapetisser […] de maigrir rétrécir" (G, 60). Beckett translates this passage as follows: "[man] in spite of the strides of alimentation and defecation wastes and pines wastes and pines and […] in spite of the strides of physical culture […] fades away."[239] This description of wasting and pining may have inspired John Fletcher's comment: "Lucky's monologue of Act One, despite its repetitions and garbled jargon, made a point: that humankind, notwithstanding the existence of a caring God of sorts and progress of various kinds, is in full decline.[240]

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[236] The only directive is "débit monotone," which is elided in the English version, G, 59.

[237] Rosette C. Lamont, "Fast-Forward: Lucky's *Pnigos,*" *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui: Samuel Beckett: Endlessness in the year 2000/Fin sans fin en l'an 2000,* ed. Angela Moorjani and Carola Veit, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 132-139.

[238] "*Lucky se tourne vers le public,*" G, 59.

[239] Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 29.

[240] Fletcher, *Samuel Becket,* 70. Similarly, Jane Goodall calls attention to "shrinking, dwindling, wasting and pining," noting that the speech represents a sort of "[e]volution in reverse, as the cycle of being heads back toward stasis in an abode of stones," 190. Her version of the speech's plot event emphasizes the skull mentioned towards the monologue's close: "Lucky is trying to recount the story of the skull in Connemara, as documented by the Academy of Anthropometry, but his memory of it has disintegrated so that he succeeds only in acting out an entropic drama whose script has worn away in his mind," 189. Jane R.

That Lucky's soliloquy represents the decline of man is further reinforced by the deterioration of its language, which becomes encumbered with more and more a-syntactic loops, interjections, and senseless repetitions. Jean Claude-Lieber calls it "un discours exterminateur et terroriste," while Anselm Atkins calls Lucky a "man babbling his way to silence." But despite its elements of chaos, both critics agree that the speech has been carefully structured into three parts.[241] Atkins argues that the first two parts of Lucky's speech are fragmented parodies of rationality in the manner of Descartes and Spinoza, respectively. The third section is a breakdown of rationality, evidenced by the fact that it "lacks syntax, has many more aphasic interjections than the first two parts, and is richer in poetic imagery connotative of death, decline and pathos."[242] Lieber divides the French version at the same joints, but organizes the three sections around the themes of god (*Dieu*), man (*l'Homme*) and stones (*Les pierres*). This coupling of organization and dissolution in the speech hints that neat divisions between order and chaos, structure and entropy, measure and decadence/decline no longer hold. Eruptions of physicality during the process of "thinking" (attention to the materiality of language achieved through the repetition of certain sounds, the shaking of the actor's body, or involuntary stuttering over certain words) also trouble a strict separation between mind and body—a point that is underscored by the emergence of the skull (*la tête*) as a material, bodily site of thought. Such ruptures contribute to dominant interpretations of Lucky's speech as signaling the breakdown of reason and the decline of humankind.

We might ask whether Lucky's decline (or, given the element of *theatrum mundi,* the decline of man), precipitates or coincides with the breakdown of language. The fact that Lucky becomes mute in the second act suggests that the erratic flows of his speech mark a crisis of language, or at least a reassessment of the manner in which it "makes sense." In particular, certain terms in the monologue become changed as a result of their context. Focusing on a few such polysemic terms, I'll show how, at certain moments in the speech, they effect transitions from abstract, academic discourse to descriptions of concrete, physical, even bodily realities. In this way, the play on words has the effect of rooting or grounding a certain kind of abstract language in the physical world and in the body. Whether this qualifies as a radicalization, renewal, dissolution or poeticization of language, such a strategy suggests new ways of expressing in language that emphasize its

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Goodall, "Lucky's Energy" *Beckett After Beckett*, eds. S.E. Gontarski and Anthony Uhlmann, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 187-196. Also emphasizing decline, Jean-Claude Lieber writes: "compte tenu de l'impuissance divine et de l'état actuel de l'homme et de la terre, l'humanité est inéluctablement vouée à la disparition. La version anglaise vient butter sur l'image du crâne, *the skull,* la tête de mort, dernière trace de la présence de l'homme dans un univers désertique et pétrifié," Jean-Claude Lieber, "Pensée de la mort, mort de la pensée," *Lire Beckett: En attendant Godot, Fin de partie,* eds. Didier Alexandre et Jean-Yves Debreuille, (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1998).

[241] Goodall agrees that the monologue contains a structure, but divides it into five sections, each with "its distinct thematic marker," and each of which "stylizes the reactions of the other players," Goodall "Lucky's Energy," 189.

[242] Anselm Atkins, "Lucky's Speech in Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot': A Punctuated Sense-Line Arrangement," *Educational Theatre Journal* 19, No. 4 (Dec, 1967); 426-432. The breakdown of rationality in the first two sections is mirrored, according to Atkins, by their syntactic incompletion. He notes that the first section is a protasis without an apodosis (following "given the existence of god") while the second is an apodosis without a protasis (or beginning), 427.

bodily dimension, either by referencing physical activities or by suggesting the primacy of the body relative to abstract ideas.

The first term to undergo the change as I have described is the verb *jaillir,* closely followed by *travaux*.[243] Both terms appear in the opening lines of Lucky's speech: "Etant donné l'existence telle qu'elle jaillit des récents travaux publics de Poinçon et Wattmann d'un Dieu personnel quaquaquaqua à barbe blanche quaqua […]" (G, 59). Conditioned as we are by Lucky's rhetorical-sounding false start ("D'autre part, pour ce qui est…"), and our knowledge that Lucky has been instructed to *think*, we could read this line as follows: Given the existence of God such as it has emerged from the recent work of two eminent scholars. But the modification of *travaux* by *publics* disrupts this scholarly reading, for while *travaux* in French is ambiguous (it can refer to intellectual or physical work), *travaux publics* conjures the image of public works projects, which can only be physical labor. The addition of the term *publics* also modifies the meaning of the verb *jaillir*, which appears earlier in the sentence. Whereas we might initially read *jaillir* in its figurative sense (the existence of God is an idea that had emerged or sprung forth), the mention of public works forces the more physical connotations of *jaillir* to surface: to gush out or spurt suddenly (as liquid), to flow (as tears), to shoot up (as flames).[244] Beckett's invented names, Poinçon and Wattmann, are also suited to the theme of public works, since they mean ticket puncher and tram driver, respectively. From its first lines, Lucky's speech promises to take us on a breakneck, terrifying ride into a zone in which rational thinking and usual linguistic conventions are radically destabilized. An allusion to *Watt* (what? man?), a work that engages a similar project vis-à-vis language, is underscored by the repetitions, loops and glitches we find in the speech, as well as by the emergence of *quaquaquaqua,* a play on *quoi?* (what?) that achieves a denaturing of the academic jargon word "qua." It repeats it to the point of senselessness, until it resembles the quacking of a duck.

A pattern according to which academic jargon is modified to connote something more concrete or is reduced to a play of nonsense sounds or sounds that refer to bodily emissions or functions (a sort of potty humor) recurs throughout the speech. The "recherches inachevées" of Testu et Conard (names that are variations on words for the male and female genitalia) as well as those of Fartov and Belcher (gaseous emissions of the body) link academic research to procreative acts performed by the body and to physical excretions. And the oft-cited "l'Acacacacadémie d'Anthropopopométrie de Berne-en-Bresse" illustrates the manner in which abstract terms become phonetically connected to activities of the body (caca and popo designate children's words for feces and chamber pot respectively). Anthropometry, the science of measurement, has been relegated to the fictive locale of Berne-en-Bresse, the first word of which resembles the French verb *berner* (which means to fool or to deceive). Part of Lucky's convoluted sentence reads as follows: "qu'à la suite des recherches inachevées n'anticipons pas des

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[243] This analysis focuses on the French version of the text, following a convention I have adopted of citing a text in the language in which it was first written. But the fact that Beckett translated *Waiting for Godot* himself makes the English version an additional original text. Insofar as it opens interpretive possibilities with respect to the earlier French version, I refer to the English text as well.

[244] Definitions consulted for *jaillir* include those on the website of the Centre Nationale des Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales, www.cnrtl.fr/definition/jaillir, Acessed 11 July, 2011.

recherches inachevées mais néanmoins couronnées par l'Acacacacadémie d'Anthropopopométrie de Berne-en-Bresse de Testu et Conard il est établi sans autre possibilité d'erreur que celle afférente aux calculs humains qu'à la suite des recherches inachevées inachevées de Testu et Conard il est établi tabli tabli ce qui suit qui suit qui suit […]" (G, 59-60). Once we bracket the syntactical nesting of clauses and repetitions, the major line of the sentence emerges as follows: "qu'à la suite des recherches inachevées […] de Testu et Conard il est établi […] que l'homme […] est en train de maigrir […]" (G, 59-60). While supporting the views of critics who read the speech as a symbol of decline, this simplification elides the spasmodic eruptions in the monologue's language that serve to confuse, double with doubt, and thicken its prose with richness of sound. What are we to make of the recurring loops that emerge to interrupt the linearity of Lucky's thinking, either with back-tracking (repetitions of earlier parts of the speech), repetitions that create eruptions of sound (*inachevés inachevés*), stuttering (*cacacaca, quaquaquaqua, tabli, tabli, tels, tels, tels le tennis*) or obsessively looping clauses (*ce qui suit qui suit qui suit*)?

Progress, development and culture (*progrès*, *l'essor*, *culture*) are the next targets of the monologue's word game. These terms, which we associate with forward movement and a flowering of the arts, become the designators of bodily rhythms: cycles of digestion and sports practices. *La culture (physique)* is modified in the same way as *travaux (publics)*. It is usual to associate progress with linear advancement, yet in the course of Lucky's tirade, *progrès* is used to describe a cyclical process of eating and excretion that contributes to man's diminishing: "[l'homme] malgré les *progrès* de l'alimentation et de l'élimination des déchets est en train de maigrir [my emphasis]." Similarly: "malgré *l'essor* de la *culture* physique de la pratique des sports tels tels tels le tennis." While the development (*l'essor*) of culture might make one think of a Golden Age of Athens or artistic and intellectual flowering more generally, here, culture is *physical*, and pertains to the practice of sports.[245] The inclusion of *conation* ("conating" in the English version) in the list of sports that require physical exertion (cycling, tennis, skating, etc.) is a manner of physicalizing the exercise of thought, while poking fun, perhaps, at the energetic impotence of the human will.[246] The English version of the speech contains a further move to connect abstract concepts, in this case, that of number, to the body. Approximating a number to the nearest decimal generates "round *figures* stark naked in the stockinged feet in Connemara" [my emphasis]. The polysemy of the word "figure," which can refer to both numbers and bodies, is exploited here to forge further connections between abstractions (culture, progress, mathematics) and the form, functions and exertions of physical bodies.

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[245] Lieber notes the elision of spring in the list of seasons (in both the English and French versions), and argues that this signifies the impossibility of renewal, thus juxtaposing the notion of progress with that of cyclicality. For Lucky, a cycle is a spastic repetition of the same, with no promise of forward motion or novelty. Lieber, "Pensée de la mort, mort de la pensée," 75.

[246] John Calder reads this second section of the monologue as alluding to Nietzsche's concept of the superman and to George Bernard Shaw's play, *Man and Superman* (1903). He argues that it is a description of how humankind can become stronger, more intelligent and healthier because of a better diet, body development through sport, medicine and science. Calder, *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett,* (London: Calder, 2002).

The final group of examples has to do with mutations of words based on qualities of sound. In these examples, phonic resemblances gain ascendancy over semantic connections, and words are related and ordered based on consonance (*recherches inachevées,* for example) or internal rhyme. The idea that thinking, especially towards the end of the speech, becomes an *irrational* poetics—sense-as-sound and sense-as-meaning run together, rubbing away the dichotomy between the two—coincides nicely with the climax of the speech in terms of its content: the appearance or unburying (*ressort*) of the skull (*la tête*), the material and bodily substrate of thought. This "logic" of sound and the placement of *thought* in *la tête* (the skull) work to reveal intellection as a bodily process. Near the beginning of his speech, Lucky plays on the homophonic relation between *dans* and *dont*, *peu* and *peut* (from *pouvoir*): "on a le temps *dans* le tourment *dans* les feux *dont* les feux les flammes pour *peu* que ça dure un *peu* et qui **peut** en douter […]" In this passage, the *dans* changes surreptitiously to *dont* and *peu* changes to *peut*. In both cases the sound repeats, but the new meaning it carries constitutes its difference. Because the re-significations of words based on their sensuous sound-qualities is associated with the work of poetry, it is fitting that the next line alludes to a canonical work in the French poetic canon (by Verlaine): "si bleues [...] et calmes si calmes."[247] If Lucky's speech situates itself within a poetic tradition, we might associate it, like poetics, with a re-birth or remaking of language. The shifts between words, based on phonic similarities, tend move in the direction of meanings that relate to nature or to the physical world. For instance, the *en cours* (process) of Steinweg and Peterman's experiments becomes the *cours* (currents or flows) of water and of fire. Towards the end of the speech, Lucky sputters: "ce qui est encore plus grave qu'il ressort ce qui est encore plus grave qu'à la lumière la lumière des expériences en cours de Steinweg et Petermann il ressort ce qui est encore plus grave qu'il ressort ce qui est encore plus grave à la lumière des expériences abandonnées de Steinweg et Petermann qu'à la compagne à la montagne et au bord de la mer et des *cours* et d'eau et de feu en l'air […]" A sound loop repeats four times, each loop set off by the phrase "ce qui est encore plus grave," and each moving away from discussion of abandoned scientific experiments in favor of references to nature (*compagne, montagne*) and to the physical elements (*eau, feu, air*). Looping, staccato interjections of jargon words and glitches (*est établi tabli tabli ce qui suit qui suit qui suit*) segue into the assonant lines: "l'air et la terre faits pour les pierres par les grands froids hélas au septième de leur ère l'éther la terre la mer pour les pierres par les grands fonds les grands froids sur mer sur terre et dans les airs peuchère" (G, 60). The internal rhyme of *air-terre-pierres-ère-éther-mer,* like the sound loops, stuttering over consonants and repetitions, calls attention to he materiality of the word surface and to the sensuous qualities of language. Attention to word-sounds breaks down the opposition between bodily sensation and intellection and stimulates us to think of language as material and sensuous as well as merely functional and semantic. It is fitting, in relation to the re-birth of language, that Lucky's monologue, in addition to developing its own poetic lexicon

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[247] Fletcher, *Samuel Beckett,* 90. Verlaine's poem, "Le ciel est par-dessus le toit," is part of the third part of the larger work, *Sagesse*. The poem begins: "Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit,/Si bleu, si calme!" The allusion is retained in Beckett's English translation: "heaven so blue still and calm so calm."

(keywords recur, as do phrase-refrains), draws on French, German and English poetic traditions (Lieber mentions allusions to Shakespeare, Verlaine, and Hölderlin).[248]

Throughout Lucky's speech, reminders of the relation between language, nature, and the body surge with sudden violence through the stuttering fault lines of a system that tends to repress its bodily beginnings. But what does it mean to say that language is rooted in the body? While the preceding discussion has focused on wordplay that favored sonority over semantics, it is also possible to tease out a relation between language, gesture and dance. The relation between Lucky's monologue and the dance with which it begins has not escaped Beckett's critics, one of whom suggests that Beckett exploits the phonic similarity between the French *pense* and *danse*.[249] A relation between thinking and dance is also suggested by the following exchange:

> Pozzo: Alors, vous voulez qu'il nous pense quelque chose?
> Estragon: J'aimerais mieux qu'il danse, ce serait plus gai.
> Estragon: Il pourrait peut-être danser d'abord et penser ensuite?
> Vladimir: C'est possible?
> Pozzo: […] rien de plus facile. C'est d'ailleurs l'ordre naturel (*Rire bref*). *(To Lucky)* Danse, pouacre! (*He dances then he stops.*) […] Autrefois il dansait la farandole, l'almée, le branle, la gigue, le fandango et même le hornpipe. Il bondissait. Maintenant il ne fait plus que ça. Savez-vous comment il l'appelle?
> Estragon: La mort du lampiste?
> Vladimir: Le cancer des vieillards.[250]

That dancing first and thinking next is the natural order of things reinforces the idea that the bodily activity of orienting oneself may be the foundation upon which the possibility of abstract language and thinking is based. Vladimir and Estragon's guesses about the title of the dance ("La mort du lampiste" and "Le cancer des vieillards") indicate that it is slow and labored (unlike the torrential flows of Lucky's thought). Lucky's inability to self-orient, because of his subservience to Pozzo, may be related to his muteness, for Lucky is silent except for this monologue.[251] Despite the parodic tenor of the scene,

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[248] Lieber notes that the repetition of "labors lost" (in the English version) evokes the title of Shakespeare's "Love's Labour's Lost" and that "wastes and pines" alludes to Holderlin's poem "Hyperions Schicksalslied," especially the lines: "Doch uns ist gegeben, / Auf keiner Stätte zu ruhn,/ Es schwinden, es fallen/ Die leidenden Menschen." Lieber compares "es schwinden, es fallen" not only to the English version's "wastes and pines" but also to the French version's "maigrir rétrécir." Lieber adds that references to this Hölderlin poem may also be found in *Watt.* Lieber, "Pensée de la mort, mort de la pensée," 79.

[249] Katerina Kanelli, "'Fall and Recovery' de Lucky; ou, Les premiers pas de danse dans le théâtre de Samuel Beckett," *Limit(e) Beckett* n° 0, (spring 2010); 27-38. She writes: "Beckett joue manifestement sur la paronomase « pense / danse »."

[250] In the English translation, these become "The Scapegoat's Agony" and "The Hard Stool," respectively. For a review of how the Lucky's dance has been interpreted in various performances, see Zinman, "Lucky's dance in Waiting for Godot." Zinman notes that in all versions, Lucky's dance begins with the same gesture (the lifting of the foot, the bending of the knee at a right angle in relation to the other leg, lifting the arms).

[251] Kanelli argues that the power of self-orientation, along with an originality, is necessary to dance: "Afin de mieux saisir la parenté entre la proposition chorégraphique de Lucky et le milieu de la danse, il convient de rappeler les valeurs de la danse contemporaine, d'après [Laurence Louppe, théoricienne de la danse]: l'individualisation d'un corps et d'un geste sans modèle, la non anticipation sur la forme, la « production » (et non la reproduction) d'un geste, l'importance de la gravité comme ressort du mouvement. Lucky semble suivre un parcours similaire au parcours de la danse : muni jadis de diverses techniques de danse, il évolue vers un dépouillement de la forme, développe son propre mouvement, son « idiolecte corporel », se laissant aller vers le sol." Kanelli, "'Fall and Recovery' de Lucky," 31.

Lucky's dance, which precedes his thought and his speech, poignantly suggests that new possibilities for expression might be forged by referring back to the body—its emissions, gestures and movements—as a site of language production.

The invocation of the dance—especially in relation to thinking—suggests that Lucky's creative power of resistance vis-à-vis Pozzo depends upon his ability to self-orient and to organize space through the motion of his body.[252] Like some *deus ex machina*, Lucky must be ritually prepared to perform: Pozzo instructs Vladimir to set Lucky's hat on his head, and Vladimir, having done so, jumps back in expectation: "*[il] lui met le chapeau sur la tête et recule vivement.*" Pozzo then pulls the rope attached to Lucky's neck and issues the incantatory command, "*Pense, porc!*" Pozzo's sobriquets for Lucky (*porc, charogne*) designate the latter as unthinking, or even inanimate (dead) flesh—a mere vessel that must receive its spirit or vital energy from some external source. Given Pozzo's attempts to divest Lucky of his power for self-orientation, the self-generated vitality of Lucky's tirade increasingly disturbs Pozzo, as indicated by stage directions that describe Pozzo moving from disgust, to suffering, to audible agitation, to a forceful attempt to curb Lucky's free expression by pulling the rope. Lucky responds to this by taking control of the rope and howling (*hurler*) his text: "*Pozzo se lève d'un bond, tire sur la corde. Tous crient. Lucky tire sur la corde, trébuche, hurle. Tous se jettent sur Lucky qui se débat, hurle son texte.*" The capacity for self-orientation is here bound up with the act of thinking as it is performed in language. And this is manifested concretely by the battle for control of Lucky's rope, which Lucky wrenches from Pozzo before Pozzo regains the cord and destroys the magical hat. Stomping on the hat, Pozzo comments: "Comme ça il ne pensera plus." To Vladimir's question, "Mais va-t-il pouvoir s'orienter?", Pozzo responds: "C'est moi qui l'orienterai." Through the dance, speaking and thinking become linked to Lucky's ability to orient his body in space, an ability that he loses insofar as he is subject to Pozzo's tyranny.

Is Lucky's speech, then, a boiling over of repressed energy, expressed frustration at restricted bodily and linguistic freedom, delivered as a prophecy of the decline of man? Certainly it is symptomatic of verbal excess, and perhaps delirium, but its fragmenting and stuttering over rational, academic language constitute a means by which language can become other. The erratic verbiage of Lucky's speech, resembles, in this way, the literary activity of language-creation described by Deleuze: "[la littérature] y trace précisément une sorte de langue étrangère […] un devenir-autre de la langue, une minoration de cette langue majeure, un délire qui l'emporte, une ligne de sorcière qui s'échappe du système du dominant."[253] In part, Lucky's speech constitutes physical and linguistic resistance against the dominance of Pozzo, a subversive fraying of new ways of linguistic meaning. These new ways of meaning forge connections based on the power of

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[252] There is something sad about Lucky, the subhuman, being pulled onto the stage by a leash of sorts and made to perform. Orientation words, or spatial directives, are issued by Pozzo: "Arrière" "Arrêt" "Là," G, 40. And Lucky is repeatedly compared to an animal: "Il souffle comme un phoque" G, 42, "il porte comme un porc," G, 43, les vieux chiens ont plus de dignité, G, 44. Lucky is also compared to a buffoon and to a slave: "Autrefois on avait des bouffons. Maintenant on a des knouks" G, 47.

[253] Gilles Deleuze, *Critique et Clinique*, (Paris : Éditions de Minuit, 1999), 15-16. Deleuze describes a similar means of innovation through variation when he writes: "Création syntaxique, style, tel est ce devenir de la langue: il n'y a pas création des mots, il n'y a pas de néologismes qui vaillent en dehors des effets de syntaxe dans lesquelles ils se développent."

movement and sensation of the body (its power of orientation and its sensitivity to sound, pattern and repetition), unsettling the dominance of a language based purely on semantic meaning and reference.

Lucky's speech insists on the location of language in the body, relating modes of meaning to its emissions, gestures and possibilities for movement. A paradox persists as long as we insist that the speaking mind is divorced from the body: we have only to think of the nonsensical ridiculousness of "Pense, porc!" and "Debout! Charogne!" and the comedy derived from sense that Lucky's power to think is conferred by his hat. This confusion between the mental and material, the image of language emerging as if by magic from deadened flesh, is resolved as soon as we attend to the speech's effort to establish language, and its possibilities for its poetic renewal, as extensions of the body. The fact that the speech is delivered by an actor already emphasizes the origin of language in the body as *voice*, but the text of the speech, through its sonorous wordplay, allusions to physical culture, and through the fact that it is compared to a dance, also emphasizes the link between the possibility for linguistic innovation and the relationship between language and orientation. The paradox in Lucky's speech, or the impossibility of speaking, thinking flesh, leads us to recognize a deep affinity not only between the body and mind but between the body and language—an affinity that suggests alternatives to rational discourse in the form of more "bodily," experimental and poetic language.

A close study of paradox in Beckett's middle period (1940-1950) reveals a strategy in certain works of exploiting limits and contradictions in such a way that linguistic alternatives to semantic meaning are encouraged to emerge. This strategy of exacerbating the paradoxes of rational order and language occurs with particular frequency in *Watt* (at the level of the word and the sentence) and in *Molloy* (at the level of chronology and narration). The second part of this strategy involves following alternative pathways, or unexpected ways of moving that transform situations of impasse into an aporia in Derrida's specialized use of the term—as that which can stimulate new ways of moving, speaking and thinking. *L'innommable* illustrates the manner in which apparent impossibilities can stretch imagination to expand the range of what is possible (thinkable).

In the four works considered in this chapter, we find bizarre, excessive limitations imposed on the human body: Watt and Sam's belly-to-belly walk, stiff legs in *Molloy*, Lucky's leash, and the jar that houses the unnamable. But such spatial constraints or restrictions of bodily movement do not necessarily signal the decline of the human body and its capacity for self-orientation. Rather, such limitations serve to stimulate reconfigurations of space and renegotiations of the relation between the body and its surroundings. Most surprisingly, they affect the workings of language. Impasse, contradiction and paradox in Beckett relate innovation in bodily movement to new ways of relating to and through language, rendering a version of "meaning"—if we can even call it that— that becomes a more bodily and spatial issue than an intellectual one. Lucky's speech, for example, exploits cracks in a rational order to expose the roots of language (and thought) in the body. "Speak the speech of Lucky trippingly on the tongue," one critic instructs, "clutching through all the eschatological gibberish at the

loose ends of Western philosophy."[254] A sonorous bricolage of fragmented terms dear to philosophical and scholarly traditions, Lucky's speech involves less a premonition of the decline of man than a "corporeal idiolect,"[255] which suggests bodily modes of "meaning" (these include the text's formalist branchings on the basis of sound, which we have discussed above). Syntactical deviation, deconstruction of habitual speech patterns, and attention to physical aspects of language such as rhythm and sonority appear with greater frequency in Beckett's late work (especially *Mal vu, mal dit, Company* and *Worstward Ho*). These late texts, I will argue, should not be read as meditations on nihilism or as testimonies of the exhaustion of language, but as but as responses to the generative paradoxes posed and explored in Beckett's earlier texts. Rather than leading to blockage or despair, Beckettian paradox involves a jarring of incompossibles that breeds the creation of new perspectives. We could say that paradox opens a dimension, a virtual gray zone of expanded possibilities where language is renewed on the basis of bodily sensations and movements. In order to discover *how* Beckett's later linguistic experimentation makes use of the body, it is necessary to turn to Merleau-Ponty, who locates the site of the production of "sense" in the relation between the physical body and its surrounding space.

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[254] Herbert Blau, "Notes From the Underground: 'Waiting for Godot' and 'Endgame,'" *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism,* ed. S.E. Gontarski, 258, (New York: Grove Press, 1986).
[255] "Idiolecte corporel" is Kanelli's term, "'Fall and Recovery' de Lucky," 31.

Chapter 3
Corp-Orientations: The Body-Subject, Landscape, Meaning

But the awakened one, the knowing one, says: "Body am I entirely, and nothing more" […] The creative body created the mind as a hand for its will.

<div align="right">

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

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[L]e corps est un moi naturel et comme le sujet de la perception

<div align="right">

Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*

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Impasse, paradox and aporia appear in Beckett's texts from the 1940's as techniques for "saying" the unsayable. These devices achieve contradictory feats of expression insofar as they reconfigure relations between the position of a body and its surrounding space. But even after charting Beckett's frustration with representational language, its poverty and its excess,[256] and recognizing the importance of the physical body in varying everyday language use (sound associations were privileged over semantic ones, for instance), the precise manner in which the body serves as a foundation for meaning is, perhaps, not yet clear. The body is necessary to speech (and to writing), and speech certainly appeals to the sensory organs of the hearer, but the role of the body in the production of meaning is more complex. To probe this complexity, it is useful to turn to the writings of Merleau-Ponty, which propose a homology between the field(s) of language and space.

Beckett's experimental literature can be said to draw, indirectly, from Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the physical body in space as the basis of signification. In *Phénoménologie de la perception,* the body "means" by inducing direction (*sens*) in its surrounding space; its "*schéma corporel*," the body's intuition and representation of its spatial position, sketches its possible actions in response to its situation. Vectors of meaning that arise from this congress between body and world[257] prompt us to revise usual notions of *agency* as the activity of a willing subject. *Meaning*, the production of which is traditionally assigned to the subject, becomes the result of an exploration and fashioning of surrounding space. I show in later chapters how this point resonates with Beckett's experimental aesthetics of the 1980's.

Michel Collot has identified in Merleau-Ponty's thought a strong relationship between geographical landscape (*paysage*) and the creation of meaning (*sens*). Collot argues that "la fonction du corps dans l'organisation du paysage […] participe à

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[256] Beckett's description of language as simultaneously impoverished and excessive ["quoi que je dise, ce n'était jamais ni assez ni assez peu," Beckett, *Molloy,* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1951), 44] forges relations between language and desire, insofar as desire is the mythical offspring of *poros* (plenty) and *penia* (poverty). This union of extremes confers upon language the pulsive, unfulfilled nature of desire.

[257] Michel Foucault, in a review of Deleuze's *Logique du Sens*, distinguishes this work from Merleau-Ponty's *Phénoménologie*, which, he writes, presents a "corps-organisme […] lié au monde par un réseau de significations originaires que la perception des choses mêmes faisait lever," "Theatrum Philosophicum" *Critique,* no. 282 (1970): 885-908, 889.

l'émergence d'un sens" because the point of view of an observer organizes the landscape into an ensemble that makes sense. Collot then finds a similarity between "l'organisation du champ visuel et celle du texte," since both bodily perspective and literary signification are a "*mise en forme.*"[258] A persistent, if inexplicit, homology in Merleau-Ponty's work between the fields of space and language promises to yield an understanding of *how* the body's movement in space can fashion linguistic and textual meaning. But we must ask what *kind* of a body "means" in language (a physical body? a prosthetic, language body?), and explore the implications for literary language of a body-subject grafted into the domain of words.[259] A collapsing analogy between space and language in Merleau-Ponty's thought founds linguistic meaning on the body's framing of space through its perspectives.

I. The Body-Subject

For Merleau-Ponty, perception is not the work of a constituting consciousness, a position he criticizes as *intellectualism,* but co-existence between body and world. His earlier works, *La structure du comportement* (1942)[260] and *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945), are devoted to the formulation of a theory of perception involving the body schema (*schéma corporel*), a concept he adapts from experimental psychology.[261] Far from distracting from a pure intellection of forms (*eidos*), the body for Merleau-Ponty is the means by which experience is possible and the condition for both linguistic expression and abstract thought.

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[258] "Le sens perceptif comme la signification littéraire est lié à la mise en forme." Michel Collot, "L'œuvre comme paysage d'une expérience," *Merleau-Ponty et le littéraire,* eds. Anne Simon et Nicolas Castin, (Paris: Presses de l'École normale supérieure, 1997), 23-39, 32.

[259] The question of the relation between Merleau-Ponty and literature will be treated at greater length in Chapter 4 in the context of a discussion of Merleau-Ponty's notion of style.

[260] In his preface to *La Structure du comportement,* Alphonse de Waelhens describes the work as treating the same subject as the *Phénoménologie* but from a different point of view—one that relies heavily on scientific paradigms within the framework of Gestalt psychology. The *Phénoménologie*, on the other hand, situates itself within the plane of lived experience, what Husserl would call the "Lebenswelt." Because *La Structure du comportement* takes a more "scientific" or "thetic" approach in contrast to the philosophical approach of the *Phénoménologie*, the present study focuses primarily on the *Phénoménologie,* while acknowledging the importance of *La Structure du comportement* to Merleau-Ponty's development of the body-subject. Waelhens "Une philosophie de l'ambiguïté," *La structure du comportement,* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1942), x-xv.

[261] "La théorie du schéma corporel est implicitement une théorie de la perception," PP, 249. In his translation of the *Phénoménologie,* Colin Smith favors the term "body *image*" over "body schema" (although he does use "body schema" occasionally). Efforts have been made to distinguish between body image and body schema, most notably in the work of Shaun Gallagher, who argues that body *image* designates the manner in which a body is perceived "from without," and *schema* refers to a postural intuition of the location of the body relative to its surroundings. Although one could make the argument that Merleau-Ponty strives to underscore the interrelation between these two facets of bodily experience, I render *schéma corporel* as "body schema," first because it is closer to Merleau-Ponty's term, and second, because it emphasizes lived experience of the body. Shaun Gallagher, "Body Image and Body Schema: A conceptual clarification," *The Journal of Mind and Behavior* 7, no. 4, (1986): 541-554.

The primacy that Merleau-Ponty attributes to embodied perception leads him to his most concise and oft-quoted formulation of the body-subject: "le corps est un moi naturel et comme le sujet de la perception" (PP, 249). Merleau-Ponty's retention of the language of subjectivity and self-hood (*le moi, le sujet*) may be problematic given his attempt to distance himself from notions of transcendental subjectivity,[262] but the body-subject is more than an *ersatz* for the transcendental subject of Kant and Husserl, as some critics suggest.[263] Merleau-Ponty's conservation of intellectualist vocabulary, his use of the term "subject," greatly alters our understanding of this term. M.C. Dillon, a scholar of Merleau-Ponty's ontology, observes that there is a "half-truth, become commonplace, that Merleau-Ponty replaced the transcendental subject with the lived body."[264] But Dillon maintains that even though the body-subject retains a transcendental *function* (it becomes the "ground" of the constitution of the world) its "thing-like" attributes (the body is half-object) means that it differs significantly from the transcendental subject of Husserl and Kant.[265] A body-subject situated in the world, in some ways object-like, but nevertheless capable of founding meaning (a role traditionally assigned to the subject) contests notions of subjectivity as a transcendent, constituting consciousness. Because the body-subject transforms rather than replaces the transcendental subject, it also calls for a rethinking of subjective agency, which now involves the body's fashioning of physical space.

A version of transcendental idealism, supported by Merleau-Ponty's teacher, Leon Brunschvicg, among others, held that the world exists as the work of a constituting

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[262] Renaud Barbaras criticizes the *Phénoménologie* for re-installing the subject-object divide (despite Merleau-Ponty's insistence that the *body* spans these domains). For his critique, Barbaras relies on a working note in the manuscript papers of *Le visible et l'invisible,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), in which Merleau-Ponty criticizes his earlier work: "Les problèmes posés dans *Phénoménologie de la Perception* sont insoluble parce que j'y pars de la distinction « conscience » - « objet »," 252. Perhaps Merleau-Ponty (fifteen years later) thought his early work did not go far enough in revealing the "object" qualities of consciousness; the body-subject certainly *begins* this endeavor and revises prevailing notions of subjectivity. Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène: sur l'ontologie de Merleau-Ponty*, (Grenoble: Jérôme Million, 1991)*,* 30.

[263] At the end the lecture, "Le primat de la perception," in which Merleau-Ponty summarizes his argument in the *Phénoménologie*, Jean Beaufret suggests that Merleau-Ponty did not go far enough in his rejection of intellectualism, precisely because he conserves its terminology: "Mais tout le problème est précisément de savoir si la phénoménologie poussé à fond n'exige pas que l'on sorte de la subjectivité et du vocabulaire de l'idéalisme subjectif comme, partant de Husserl, l'a fait Heidegger," Merleau-Ponty, *Le primat de la perception et ses conséquences philosophiques* [1947], (Grenoble: Cynara, 1989), 151. Françoise Dastur, on the other hand, claims that Merleau-Ponty's thinking about subjectivity is closer to that of Derrida than to that of Sartre *despite* his intellectualist vocabulary. She writes that the *Phénoménologie* "demeurerait attentive à ce qui est description phénoménologique authentique alors même qu'est conservé le vocabulaire intellectualiste." Dastur, *Chair et langage: essais sur Merleau-Ponty,* (La Versanne: Encre marine, 2001), 30.

[264] M.C. Dillon, "Preface: Merleau-Ponty and Postmodernity," *Merleau-Ponty Vivant,* ed. M.C. Dillon, (Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 1991), ix-xxxv*,* xiv.

[265] Consider also: "The most important difference between the transcendental subject and the body subject is that the former was conceived as sheer immanence and the latter was acknowledged as transcendent as well as immanent: the body is also an object, a worldly object, and its thingly character was seen by Merleau-Ponty as a condition for its subjectivity," M.C. Dillon "Merleau-Ponty and Postmodernity," xiv-xv.

consciousness, before which it appears with complete transparency.[266] This view resonates not only with Kant and Husserl's views of the subject, but also with the Cartesian account of a thinking subject that exists independently of its sensations. For Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, subjectivity is located at the interface between body and world, and a "self" emerges only through our involvement with the world.[267] In a particularly vivid passage of the *Phénoménologie,* novelistic in its descriptive detail, Merleau-Ponty reverses the Cartesian *cogito* by emphasizing (rather than reducing) sensory detail. He describes his sense of the coolness of the paper under his hands (the manuscript of the *Phénoménologie* on which he is working) and the view from his window of trees on the boulevard. In addition to describing physical sensations, he notes his "location" relative to the Cartesian *cogito*, which he describes as "un être culturel vers lequel ma pensée se tend plutôt qu'elle ne l'embrasse, comme mon corps dans un milieu familier s'oriente et chemine parmi les objets" (PP, 428). This scene, titled "Le cogito," is at once a repetition and variation on the opening scene of the meditations. Merleau-Ponty's gazing out of the window towards rustling trees contrasts sharply with the dark room and flickering firelight described by Descartes. Merleau-Ponty also descriptively situates himself within the philosophical-cultural tradition he seeks to alter; he compares the Cartesian *cogito* to the objects in a familiar setting around which his body orients itself. This expresses Merleau-Ponty's view of meaning as difference or as variation of a given situation (often described in spatial terms) and likens cultural ideas to the objects by which one structures one's space. As for subjectivity, Merleau-Ponty's work refashions the intellectual *cogito* and the transcendental subject by insisting on the subject's embodied being in the world.

The body-subject involves the inherence of object-like qualities in the subject that frustrate its omniscience and self-transparency and, in this way, may perhaps allow for its growth. The legacy of Cartesian dualism encourages us to disengage from the object-part of our being, creating a self-transparent subject on the one hand and an opaque, thing-like object on the other.[268] But embodied experience "nous révèle un mode d'existence ambigu" (PP, 240),[269] since it exceeds the knowledge it has of itself and contains pockets of opacity that allow for its transformation: "[le corps] est toujours autre chose que ce qu'il est […] enraciné dans la nature au moment même où il se transforme par la culture, jamais fermé sur lui-même et jamais dépassé." Here the body is presented as both "natural" and "cultural," both determined (biologically) and capable of active self-transformation. If the body is, or is *like* a "natural" subject—"mon corps est comme un

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[266] For a useful discussion of Leon Brunschvicg's version of idealism and Merleau-Ponty's criticism of it, see Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the 20th Century,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 40-49. Gutting also points out, rightly, that Merleau-Ponty takes the (Husserlian) reduction in a *non*-idealist sense (the reduction in an idealist sense would be "a return to a pre-personal transcendental subject before which the entire world appears with complete transparency"). Instead, Merleau-Ponty sees the reduction as revealing intentionality, our body's being-directed toward things and its inherence in the world, 187.

[267] He writes: "en reprenant ainsi contact avec le corps et avec le monde, c'est aussi nous-même que nous allons retrouver," PP, 249.

[268] The subject is "comme un être tout présent à lui-même sans distance" and "qui n'est rien que ce qu'il pense être," PP, 240.

[269] "Ainsi l'expérience du corps propre s'oppose au mouvement réflexif qui dégage l'objet du sujet et le sujet de l'objet," PP, 241.

sujet naturel, comme une esquisse provisoire de mon être total" (PP, 240)—the subject cannot be independent of its being-as-object. That the body is a *sketch* of one's total being and not a finished canvas relates the passive elements of subjectivity to the possibility of variation and of novelty. A self-transparent subject could not accept in itself what is other and would be thus unable to evolve or to develop. Embodied experience frustrates an unequivocal separation between subject and object, revealing, with their interdependence, the possibility of change.

A chain of similes and metaphors in the *Phénoménologie* illustrates subjectivity as dependent on its object-nature and as involving a measure of passivity. It is important that Merleau-Ponty never collapses the distinction between subject and object, but argues for their interdependence. In *Le visible et l'invisible*, this interdependence is described as a *reversibility* that is always imminent and never realized in fact. The necessity of difference—of maintaining an *écart* between the two[270]—results in the literal metaphor of intertwining (*entrelacs*) and the visually compelling figure of the chiasm. In the *Phénoménologie,* the *passivity* of the subject and its object-qualities are manifest in the following analogies: subjectivity is figured as a *shipwreck*, a *flaw* (in a great diamond) and as a *fold* in being. "[Le monde] vient sans cesse assaillir et investir la subjectivité comme les vagues entourent une épave sur la plage" (PP, 251). This simile of subject-as-shipwreck softens boundaries between the subject and the world, since we are asked to imagine the world as waves seeping through cracks in the hull of a battered vessel. By exaggerating the extent to which the subject is *acted upon*, this image contests a view of the subject as actively investing the world with meaning from a position outside of it.[271] A figuration of perception as a flaw in great diamond further emphasizes the inherence of the body-subject in the world: "nous ne pouvons jamais effacer dans le tableau du monde cette lacune que nous sommes et par où il vient à exister pour quelqu'un, puisque la perception est le « défaut » dans ce « grand diamant »" (PP, 252). That the subject (*nous*) is figured as a gap (*lacune*) and perception as a flaw (*défaut*) illustrates the impossibility of the *total* vision we might associate with the clarity, perfection and transparency of a diamond. Quotation marks in the passage above suggest Paul Valéry's "*Le cimetière marin*" as the source of Merleau-Ponty's image: "Midi là-haut, Midi sans mouvement/ En soi se pense et convient à soi-même/ Tête complète et parfait diadème,/ Je suis en toi le secret changement./ Tu n'as que moi pour contenir tes craintes!/ Mes repentirs, mes doutes, mes contraintes/ Sont le défaut de ton grand diamant!"[272] The poem renders a version of the subject (*Je*) as that which interrupts perfect self-transparency or absolute knowledge, figured by the sun at its zenith. The *Je* introduces the possibility of change (*Je suis en toi le secret changement*) as well as the psychological faults, constraints or limitations that undermine the idea of a self-transparent, constituting consciousness.

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[270] For an illuminating discussion of Merleau-Ponty's notion of *écart* (and its relation to Derrida's concept of *différance*) see M.C. Dillon, "Preface: Merleau-Ponty and Postmodernism," xviii-xxii.

[271] This analogy is followed by a short polemic against the transcendental ego. Merleau-Ponty describes "ce lieu hors du monde que le philosophe empiriste sous-entendait et où il se plaçait tacitement pour décrire l'événement de la perception, il reçoit maintenant un nom […] C'est l'Ego transcendantal," PP, 252.

[272] Colin Smith also notes Merleau-Ponty's allusion to Valéry in his translation of the *Phénoménologie*.

Finally Merleau-Ponty varies an image he attributes to Hegel, that of the subject as a hole in being,[273] by figuring it as a fold (*creux*, *pli*): "Et quant au sujet de la sensation, il n'a pas besoin d'être un pur néant sans aucun poids terrestre […] Je ne suis donc pas, selon le mot de Hegel, un « trou dans l'être », mais un creux, un pli qui s'est fait et qui peut se défaire" (PP, 259). The idea that the Merleau-Pontian subject, which has "terrestrial weight," can be made and unmade suggests the ephemeral and vulnerable nature of the body-subject. The subject as a fold in being lasts only as long, we assume, as a human life. That the subject is mortal—that it will one day become entirely object—further distinguishes the body-subject from ideas about subjectivity as intellectual or transcendental.

Merleau-Ponty's work from 1945 changes the relationship between subjectivity and meaning (*sens*), since meaning can no longer be construed as the work of a constituting consciousness or willing agent.[274] Merleau-Ponty contends that his analysis of movement and the body leads to the discovery of "un nouveau sens du mot « sens »" (PP, 182), and we know that this "new meaning of meaning" involves the body: "L'expérience du corps nous fait reconnaître une imposition du sens qui n'est pas celle d'une conscience constituante universelle, un sens qui est adhérent à certains contenus" (PP, 182). Instead of willfully *creating* meaning (or passively receiving it), as bodies we *participate* in meaning, which emerges as an interfacing between the body and space. This is why Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that we are not *in* space, as objects, but *of* space. Because we *inhabit* space, as bodies, we may alter its significance by our exploratory movements.[275] The role of the body in the production of meaning is, for Merleau-Ponty, indispensable. He calls the body a "noyau significatif" and describes it as "cet étrange objet qui utilise ses propres parties comme symbolique générale du monde et par lequel en conséquence nous pouvons « fréquenter » ce monde, le « comprendre » et lui trouver une signification" (PP, 284). The body is indeed strange in that it is neither a thing among things nor a completely transparent consciousness. And yet its movements organize space so as to enable the emergence meaning, first conceived as orientation.

This relation between the body and signification prompts Merleau-Ponty's suggestion that creative, expressive language (*parole parlant*) derives from the body's way of organizing space. In the version of this argument presented in the *Phénoménologie*, Merleau-Ponty draws on psychology experiments that suggest a causal relation between language disorders (*aphasia*) and *motor* disturbances. Such evidence of a relation between the body's movement and the capacity for language supports his claim

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[273] The notion of the subject as a "nothingness" opposed to being is further developed by Sartre. Jean-Paul Sartre, *La transcendance de l'ego* [1936], (Paris: Vrin, 1992).

[274] James Schmidt characterizes Merleau-Ponty's lifelong project as the attempt to revise the idea of subjective agency—a project that begins with the body-subject. Merleau-Ponty's awareness that "the problem of agency could not be resolved simply by assuming that the Cartesian *cogito*, with suitable modifications, could be resurrected as that 'body-subject'" leads him to refine his ideas about agency by turning to structuralism and to ontology. James Schmidt, *Between Phenomenology and Structuralism,* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 163.

[275] The idea of being *of* space rather than *in* space recurs like a refrain throughout the *Phénoménologie*: "Il ne faut donc pas dire que notre corps est *dans* l'espace ni d'ailleurs qu'il est *dans* le temps. Il *habite* l'espace et le temps," PP, 174. Consider also: "notre corps n'est pas d'abord dans l'espace : il est à l'espace," PP, 184.

that meaning creation is primarily bodily and spatial.[276] But before we can investigate the role of the body in language, it is necessary to understand how the interaction between the body and space works to effect meaning in the first instance, or in what Merleau-Ponty calls the "natural" as opposed to the cultural-linguistic world. Because the body is coextensive with space (*of* space rather than *in* space), it can *polarize* sections of its surroundings and induce directions. This process is concretized in the "body schema," to which we devote the next section.

II. The Body Schema

As early as *La structure du comportement*, we find the claim that the *position* of the body, its perspective and possibilities for action, condition sense data.[277] Then, in the *Phénoménologie,* meaning is characterized as a "*direction* de notre existence" (PP, 337, my emphasis). But how does the body's position in space induce meaning? We derive a clue from Merleau-Ponty's characterization of "un autre sujet au-dessous de moi, pour qui un monde existe avant que je sois là et qui y marquait ma place." This "autre sujet," as we have discussed above, is the body.[278] The body's changing positions in space are recorded by the body schema, which is responsible, more generally, for managing and mediating the body's relation to space. For Merleau-Ponty, the body schema *translates* impressions into a motor language intelligible to the body and organizes space and objects relative to the body's actual or possible projects. Merleau-Ponty claims that abstract movements such as *pointing* or naming (as opposed to the concrete, task-oriented *grasping*),[279] are predicated on the body's possibilities for action in the world, thus extending the body schema's function into the domain of language. In order to understand the emergence of meaning as a spatial and bodily phenomenon, the mechanics of how the body organizes space and language must be clear. Merleau-Ponty's description of a dynamic body schema accounts for how the body modifies space by its movements and interests, investing it with meaning as direction.

The "body schema"[280] or "postural schema" was first introduced by the English neurologist Henry Head, who characterized it as an internal representation of our body

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[276] Merleau-Ponty cites an experimental psychology text on "motor aphasia" in the section, "Le corps comme expression et la parole," of the *Phénoménologie*: "Grünbaum, par exemple (*Aphasie und Motorik*), montre à la fois que les troubles aphasiques sont *généraux* et qu'ils sont *moteurs,* il fait en d'autres termes de la motricité un mode original d'intentionnalité ou de signification," PP, 232n.

[277] Merleau-Ponty cites a psychology experiment designed to show that a dog on a leash does not perceive in the same way as a dog that is free. *La Structure du Comportement*, 41.

[278] "Cet esprit captif ou naturel, c'est mon corps […] le système de « fonctions » anonymes qui enveloppent toute fixation particulière dans un projet général," PP, 302.

[279] The discussion of *greifen* and *zeigen* comes in the context of a discussion of the patient, Schneider, for whom cortical damage (a shell splinter wound to the back of the head) has impaired the ability to perform the action of pointing. Merleau-Ponty draws on the work of the German psychologist, Kurt Goldstein ("Über Zeigen und Greifen," *Nervenartzt* 4 [1931]), to make the point that abstract, "hypothetical" actions (pointing, but also naming) derive from the body's ability to perform concrete motor tasks, PP 130-155.

[280] The term "body schema" is often used interchangeably with "body image," for instance by Paul Schilder (*Image and Appearance of the Human Body*, 11). Shaun Gallagher's distinction between body *image* (our conscious representations of our bodies) and body *schema* (postural intuition that is not necessarily

that allows us to situate ourselves in space. Psychologists such as Paul Schilder and Jean L'Hermitte later modified this conception in ways that were important to Merleau-Ponty's thinking.[281] In the *Phénoménologie* Merleau-Ponty moves through three definitions to arrive at a description of the body schema as a *dynamic* experience of one's body in relation to its possible tasks. Dynamism is the most important aspect of the body schema for Merleau-Ponty, because it implies a relation of mutual modification between body and world. If our interest is to discover how the body schema supports the fashioning of significant space, it is necessary to examine how Merleau-Ponty alters the version of the body schema he inherits from neuroscience and psychology, for this will illuminate the aspects most important to his thinking.

Merleau-Ponty begins his discussion of the body schema by pointing out that our body is not an object like other objects. We would never think of our arm as *next to* the ashtray in the way that the ashtray is next to the telephone (PP, 127). Rather, the body is a system of parts that envelop each other; a change in one affects all the others as well as the form as a whole. Of the body, Merleau-Ponty writes: "Je le tiens dans une possession indivise et je connais la position de chacun de mes membres par un *schéma corporel* où ils sont tous enveloppés" (PP, 127). The ability of the body schema to record and react to changes in any part of the body is an important feature of Head's definition, which renders the body schema as a kind of physical memory. Merleau-Ponty characterizes Head's initial concept as follows: "On entendait d'abord par « schéma corporel » un *résumé* de notre expérience corporelle, capable de donner un commentaire et une signification à l'interoceptivité et à la proprioceptivité du moment" (PP, 128). The body schema lends significance to sensory stimuli, those coming from inside the body as well as those resulting from the body's position, insofar as it is a summary (*résumé*) of bodily experience; the commentary it gives is "charged" with what has come before (the previous positions of the body).[282] Paraphrasing Head, Schilder describes "schemata" that modify present sensory impressions,[283] while Head describes the body schema as a "combined standard against which all subsequent changes of posture are measured before they enter consciousness."[284] As a ghostly record or trace of the body's history, the body schema is both temporal and spatial; it allows past sensations to order present ones and measures meaning as a difference of position. But the body schema is not the record of a *personal* past, nor is it merely an association of experiences. Head's metaphor of a taximeter, which Merleau-Ponty borrows, renders the body schema as an impersonal

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conscious) discourages the idea of the body schema as mere representation and emphasizes its dynamism. Gallagher, "Dynamic models of bodily schematic processes," *Body Image and body schema: interdisciplinary perspectives on the body,* eds. Helena De Preester and Veronik Knockaert, (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 2005), 233-250.

[281] Paul Schilder, *Das Körperschema,* (Berlin: Springer, 1923); Jean L'Hermitte, *L'Image de notre corps*, (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1939); "Le Rôle de la pensée spatiale dans l'apraxie*,"* *Revue Neurologique* 9 (1928): 895-903; Henry Head, "On disturbances of sensation with especial reference to the pain of visceral disease*," Brain,* 19, (1896): 153-276, "Sensory disturbances from cerebral lesion," *Brain* 34 (1911-1912): 102-254.

[282] Head as quoted in Gallagher, "Dynamic models of bodily schematic processes," 241.

[283] Schilder also describes the "body image" or "body schema" as a "store room of past impressions." Paul Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body: Studies in the Constructive Energies of the Psyche,* (London: Routledge, 1950), 11.

[284] Head as quoted in Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body,* 11.

standard that "translates" impressions into potential *movements* (the way a taximeter translates distance into monetary value) (PP, 174). What is important to retain from this initial definition, which Merleau-Ponty refines rather than rejects, is the idea that significance may develop through changes in the spatial position of the body, measured and recorded by the body schema.

In order to distance himself from interpretations of the body schema as a mere *association* of experiences after the fact,[285] Merleau-Ponty formulates a second definition of the body schema that draws on Gestalt psychology's understanding of *form*: "[le schéma corporel] ne sera plus le simple résultat des associations établies au cours de l'expérience, mais une prise de conscience globale de ma posture dans le monde intersensoriel, une « forme » au sens de la Gestaltpsychologie" (PP, 114). Merleau-Ponty qualifies his understanding of *form* in the Gestalt sense as "un phénomène dans lequel le tout est antérieur aux parties" (PP, 129). The body schema is not a constellation of associated experiences, but an organic whole, which, sensitive to each of its parts, can fashion itself into "un type d'existence nouveau."

But the body schema, understood as a form in the Gestalt sense, fails to account for one of its most studied effects: the experience of a phantom limb. An amputee's lingering sensation of pain in her lost limb, or her sense that she might still use a part of her body that is missing, remains mysterious if the body schema is defined as a global consciousness of its parts. This problem leads Merleau-Ponty to think of the body schema less as a Gestalt form and more as a spatiality of *situation*, or an organization of space relative to the body's tasks and desires. Merleau-Ponty writes: "mon corps m'apparaît comme posture en vue d'une certaine tâche actuelle ou possible" (PP, 129). The fact that the body schema derives its structure from the body's possibilities for acting in the world (rather than from an internal sense of its parts), leads to a final definition: "En dernière analyse, si mon corps peut être une « forme » […] c'est en tant qu'il est polarisé par ses tâches, qu'il existe *vers* elles […] le « schéma corporel » est finalement une manière d'exprimer que mon corps est au monde" (PP, 130). The body schema is formed and reformed by its tasks, just as its tasks and possibilities structure its spatial environment. To define the body schema as dynamic and as an expression of the body's being *of* the world (*au monde*) rather than merely *in* the world is to suggest a relation of mutual mutability between the body and its surrounding space.

A metaphoric discourse about magnetism in Merleau-Ponty's writing reinforces the idea that the body and space mutually affect each other, inducing meaning as direction. Words such as "polarization" appear often in Merleau-Ponty's descriptions, as do terms such as "*pôles d'action,*" and "*attraction à distance* (PP, 136). He writes, for instance: "les intentions du sujet se reflètent immédiatement dans le champ perceptif, le polarisent, ou le marquent de leur monogramme, ou enfin y font naître une onde significative" (PP, 165). Here, the "intentions of the subject" refer less to the subject's design or will than to what Merleau-Ponty calls "intentional threads" (*fils intentionnels*) that extend from the body to perceived objects. These threads can be evoked by familiar tasks (for instance, for a wallet maker, pieces of leather, scissors and a needle create a

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[285] According to Merleau-Ponty, Schilder too is guilty of an associationist interpretation of the body schema, though he admits that "un tel complexe n'est pas la somme de ses parties mais un tout nouveau par rapport à elles," PP, 128n.

situation that calls for certain responses from his body).[286] This analogy between intentionality and magnetism, as well as the more general figuration of the space surrounding the body as a magnetic field, provides a physical model for how space may be structured and made meaningful by the body's possible tasks as well as by its position and perspective.

An unexpected simile in the *Phénoménologie* exploits the ambiguity of "signs," which are both geographical markers and semantic signifiers, to transition between the body's polarization of space and signification in language. Merleau-Ponty describes a power to trace

> des frontières, des directions, d'établir des lignes de force, de ménager des perspectives, en un mot d'organiser le monde donné selon les projets du moment, de construire sur l'entourage géographique un milieu de comportement, un système de significations qui exprime au-dehors l'activité interne du sujet […] les projets polarisent le monde, et y font paraître comme par magie mille signes qui conduisent l'action, *comme les écriteaux dans un musée conduisent le visiteur* (PP, 143, my emphasis).

The first part of this passage describes a process of articulation by which space is cleaved into settings *(milieu)* for behaviors. By polarizing geographical space, the body's projects give rise to a system of significations: a thousand signs appear, which, as *écriteaux*, are lasting, and indicate a course of action for the body the way that signs in a museum tell the visitor where to go. It is interesting that the ambiguity between spatial direction and semiotics (signs might also give titles or explain the meaning of an exhibition) occurs in a *museum*, which is a site of both cultural conservation and aesthetic perception, and which Merleau-Ponty associates with the creation of new possibilities for meaning (aesthetics can "open" dimensions and create space).[287] The museum as the site of convergence between spatial, semantic and aesthetic meaning illustrates, perhaps, Merleau-Ponty's sense that new meaning occurs as a carrying forward of past meanings, renewed through variation.[288] More importantly, if signification is in its inception a spatial and bodily phenomenon, as this simile suggests, it follows that expressive or creative language might warp or polarize the field of existing language just as the body alters existing space.[289]

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[286] Schneider, the patient to whom much attention is devoted in the *Phénoménologie*, was employed as a wallet maker before his injury, PP, 136.

[287] Merleau-Ponty uses the example of the dance to illustrate how aesthetic experience may "create" space. It is significant for our discussion of the body schema that the priority and function of the body parts are significantly altered by dance: "On pourrait bien montrer, par exemple, que la perception esthétique ouvre à son tour une nouvelle spatialité, que le tableau comme œuvre d'art n'est pas dans l'espace où il habite comme chose physique et comme toile colorié,—que la danse se déroule dans un espace sans buts et sans directions, qu'elle est une suspension de notre histoire, que le sujet et son monde dans la danse ne s'opposent plus, ne se détachent plus l'un de l'autre, qu'en conséquence les parties du corps n'y sont plus accentués comme dans l'expérience naturelle: le tronc n'est plus le fond d'où s'élèvent les mouvements et où ils sombrent une fois achevés ; c'est lui qui dirige la danse et les mouvements des membres sont à son service," PP, 340n.

[288] This concept is developed in Merleau-Ponty's lectures on institution and passivity, *L'institution, La passivité: Notes de cours au Collège de France 1954-1955,* ed. Claude Lefort, (Paris: Benin, 2002).

[289] This theme is explored further in Chapter 4 in the context of Merleau-Ponty's notion of indirect language in relation to literature. He cites the example of Stendhal, among others.

Merleau-Ponty explicitly describes how the dynamism and mutability of the body schema allow it to accommodate new significations through its acquisition of habits.[290] Habits, or "comportments," serve to create, expand or "dilate" space, just as they renew and reanimate the body schema:[291] "L'habitude exprime le pouvoir que nous ayons de dilater notre être au monde, ou de changer d'existence en nous annexant de nouveaux instruments" (PP, 179). The *new instruments* that the body annexes to itself include language, which enables the body to exceed the domain of the biological: "Tantôt enfin la signification visée ne peut être rejointe par les moyens naturels du corps; il faut alors qu'il se construises un instrument, et il projette autour de lui un monde culturel" (PP, 182). Merleau-Ponty continues: "tantôt jouant sur ces premiers gestes et passant de leur sens propre à un sens figuré, il manifeste à travers eux un noyau de signification nouveau." These new significations, arising from a game of *figuration* played by the body, belong to a linguistic or cultural space whose relation to the biological or "natural" world is not yet clear. But generating new ways and modes of meaning (which include language) is comparable to habit-learning, which involves the body's ability to accommodate new "nodes" of meaning: "On dit que le corps a compris et l'habitude est acquise lorsqu'il [le corps] s'est laissé pénétrer par une signification nouvelle, lorsqu'il s'est assimilé un nouveau noyau significatif (PP, 182)." That the body schema is dynamic and mutable, that it can be transformed by the habits it acquires, suggests that it supports the emergence of new forms of signification. (Athletes, for example, develop a particular physical skill through repetitive motion.) If language is founded on bodily gestures, then the field of language, too, is mutable through an assimilation of novel significations.

In a series of preparatory notes for his candidature to the *Collège de France,* Merleau-Ponty summarizes the manner in which the global and practical knowledge that the body schema affords serves to structure its surrounding space:

> Un faisceau de mouvements possibles ou de « projets moteurs » rayonne de nous sur l'entourage. Notre corps n'est pas dans l'espace comme des choses : il l'habite ou le hante, il s'y applique comme la main à l'instrument […] par lui, nous avons directement l'accès à l'espace"[292]

According to Merleau-Ponty, a mutual "haunting" of space and the body is the nexus by which signification and meaning develop: the body's movements both create and color its space, just as spatial projects and possibilities model the body schema. The body inhabits, or applies itself to space (*il s'installe*), just as a hand applies itself to an instrument so as to produce sound.[293]

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[290] In her analysis of the body in Merleau-Ponty Ulrike Maude picks up on Merleau-Ponty's use of the term "habit body," which he uses interchangeably with "body image." She understands the habit body to co-exist with the present body, informing it of its abilities (or past abilities, as the case may be). *Beckett, Technology and the Body,* 12-13.

[291] Merleau-Ponty describes the acquisition of a habit as the "remaniement et renouvellement du schéma corporel," PP, 177.

[292] "Un inédit de Maurice Merleau-Ponty," *Parcours deux 1951-1961*, (Paris: Verdier, 2000), 36-48. Merleau-Ponty was elected to the *Collège de France* in 1952.

[293] It is likely that this simile refers to Merleau-Ponty's example of an organist in the *Phénoménologie.* The organist develops habits that relate his body to the instrument he usually plays, so that if he plays another organ in a different concert hall, he must rehearse so as to transfer the vectors radiating from his body to the new organ. Merleau-Ponty describes such rehearsals as a "consecratory gestures" that enable the organist to *create* space the way the gestures of an augur delimit a templum, PP, 181.

III. The Body in Language

The Merleau-Pontian body schema might be said to mark a transition from the Cartesian *cogito*, which exists outside of space and time, to what critics have called a Claudelian *cogito*,[294] which exists by virtue of its location in a certain place at a certain time. Instead of blocking the senses, stopping one's ears and shutting one's eyes, Merleau-Ponty's body-subject emerges from its situation in the world, like the man in the street in Paul Claudel's *Ars Poetica* who looks at his watch and wonders *where* he is. Such emphasis on the spatial and temporal situation of the body clearly resonated with Merleau-Ponty, and this passage from *Ars Poetica* appears in *Le visible et l'invisible*.[295] Merleau-Ponty's reprise of a Cartesian meditation also attaches importance to the physical location of the body, for he describes the paper under his hands and the trees lining the boulevard. André Vachon and Georges Poulet have attributed to Claudel a *spatial cogito*, observing: "Pour aboutir à son *Ergo sum*, Claudel est parti de la question *Où suis-je*?"[296] Merleau-Ponty's transition from an intellectual subject to body-subject follows the spirit of this idea, and emphasizes that both subjectivity and the production of meaning are fundamentally *spatial*.[297] Not only does a body's location condition perception (perspective), but the body's co-existence with space "fait surgir une direction."[298] The spatial cogito, or body-subject, shows the importance of the body's spatial orientation to the possibility of meaning.

The idea that signification develops from "direction" justifies the double meaning of the word "*sens*," and, more importantly, it characterizes meaning in language as bodily and spatial.[299] Here we are concerned with what Merleau-Ponty calls expressive

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[294] I take this formulation from Emmanuel de Saint Aubert's article, "La 'co-naissance': Merleau-Ponty et Claudel," *Merleau-Ponty aux frontières de l'invisible,* eds. Marie Cariou, Renaud Barbaras, and Etienne Bimbenet, (Milan: Associazione Culturale Mimesis, 2003), 249-281. De Saint Aubert emphasizes the "équilibre actif-passif recherché par les deux écrivains," and explains Merleau-Ponty's choice of passage from *Ars Poetica*: "Il en retient un passage célèbre, dans lequel des commentateurs avisés comme Georges Poulet ou André Vachon ont lu le *Cogito* du poète, un passage qui gravite autour d'une interrogation élémentaire sur notre inscription spatio-temporelle « où suis-je? » et « quelle heure est il? »," 259.

[295] For instance, Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, 159-160.

[296] André Vachon, *Le temps et l'espace dans l'œuvre de Paul Claudel,* (Paris : Seuil, 1965), 244, as cited in de Saint Aubert, "La 'co-naissance,'" 259n.

[297] The present discussion focuses on space in the process of meaning-production, but it is important to emphasize that for Merleau-Ponty the subject is also *temporal*. For his discussion of subjectivity and time, see PP, 286-289 ("cette subjectivité est le temps lui-même") and PP, 471-497.

[298] Merleau-Ponty also writes, "l'être est orienté," "l'existence est spatiale," and claims that *being* is a synonym for being *situated,* PP, 300-301. The importance of space and orientation in Merleau-Ponty's thought is traceable to the influence of the psychologist Jean L'Hermitte, who argues not only that space is fundamental to perception, but that our sense of space is concretized in the body schema: "À l'origine de notre activité, à la source de toutes nos sensations et de nos perceptions, nous retrouvons toujours la notion de l'espace […] ce sens de l'espace se concrétise en un schéma de notre corps." L'Hermitte, "De l'image corporelle," *Revue Neurologique* 74 (1942); 20-38. L'hermitte's idea is similar to Merleau-Ponty's claim that everything "nous renvoie aux relations organiques du sujet et de l'espace, à cette prise du sujet sur son monde qui est l'origine de l'espace," PP, 299.

[299] James Schmidt observes that "[b]oth connotations of the French *sens*—'meaning' and 'direction'—are crucial; throughout the *Phenomenology of Perception*, meaning is understood *as* orientation," *Between Phenomenology and Structuralism,* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 113.

language, *parole parlante,* where meanings are produced for the first time. (He contrasts this with *parole parlée,* in which established meanings are merely exchanged.) Meaning in language, like the body's structuring of space, arises via a process of articulation and selection among available significations.[300] But if the body and space organize each other in what Merleau-Ponty calls the "natural"[301] world, *who* or *what* is responsible for meaning in language?

At times in Merleau-Ponty's thinking, a *parallel* emerges between the domain of language and that of physical space, which leads us to suppose that meaning in language emerges analogously to the way meaning develops from a body's way of organizing its surroundings. If this is the case, does speech (*la parole)* polarize existing language as the body polarizes its space? This analogy, neat as it is, falters when Merleau-Ponty collapses the distinction between the natural and cultural worlds: "Tout est fabriqué et tout est naturel chez l'homme […] il n'est pas un mot, pas une conduite qui ne doive quelque chose à l'être simplement biologique" (PP, 230). If language is founded in the biological, then does the body itself *mean* in language? Merleau-Ponty follows this line of thinking by emphasizing the necessity of the material body for speech, by describing words as gestures, by arguing for a "physiognomy" of words (tracing their effects on the bodies of readers), and through an uncharacteristically literal description of the body *secreting* its meaning. Competing strains in Merleau-Ponty's work raise the question of whether an *ersatz* body of words reorganizes existing significations or whether the physical body itself enters the field of language to re-organize its topography into novel significations.

A section of the *Phénoménologie* devoted to the relation between the body and language, "Le corps comme expression et la parole," oscillates between the idea that the word (*la parole*) polarizes the field of language *as* the physical body structures space and the notion that the physical body expresses itself directly in language. Descriptions of the "agent" or "subject" of language are erratic: sometimes it is an *"intention significative"* that comes to know itself by causing existing significations to contract according to an unknown law.[302] Other times, the *"sens informulé"* finds its way in to the subject position as that which must "trouve le moyen de se traduire au-dehors." At other times

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[300] Communicative language, made meaningful by selection and reconfiguration of givens, I argue, is exemplified both by Beckett's unusual syntax, but also by Merleau-Ponty's description of an indirect language suitable for literary and philosophical expression. This discussion is the focus of Chapter 4.

[301] In the *Phénoménologie,* Merleau-Ponty tends to distinguish a "natural" or physical world from a cultural, verbal world, though there are moments in the text when this distinction is troubled. This an important theme to which we will return below, but the following lines indicate briefly the relation Merleau-Ponty imagines between the natural and cultural worlds: "Le mouvement abstrait creuse à l'intérieur du monde plein dans lequel se déroulait le mouvement concret une zone de réflexion et de subjectivité, il superpose à l'espace physique un espace virtuel ou humain. Le mouvement concret est donc centripète, tandis que le mouvement abstrait est centrifuge, le premier a lieu dans l'être ou dans l'actuel, le second dans le possible ou dans le non-être, le premier adhère à un fond donné, le second déploie lui-même son fond," PP, 142. But Merleau-Ponty also questions the possibility of division between the given, "natural" world and a cultural, invented world: "Il est impossible de superposer chez l'homme une première couche de comportements que l'on appellerait « naturels » et un monde culturel ou spirituel fabriqué," PP, 230.

[302] "L'intention significative nouvelle ne se connaît elle-même qu'en se recouvrant de significations déjà disponibles, résultat d'actes d'expression antérieurs. Les significations disponibles s'entrelacent soudain selon une loi inconnue et une fois pour toutes un nouvel être culturel a commencé d'exister," PP, 223.

"existence" itself introduces new meanings insofar as it polarizes "dans un certain « sens »" (PP, 238). Merleau-Ponty describes an "organe du langage qui épouse la configuration linguistique qui lui est présenté *comme* nos organes de sens s'orientent sur le stimulus et se synchronisent avec lui" (PP, 283 n.). Moving between metaphor (*organe de langage*) and simile (*comme nos organes de sens*), this passage re-installs the analogy just as a more intimate relation seems to emerge between the body and language (the word *comme* appears at the very moment *language* is endowed with sense organs). The idea of an organ of language seems to literalize the relation between our bodies and language by equating linguistic understanding with the experience of bodily sensation. Though Merleau-Ponty continually revises his ideas about the relation between the body and language, the *Phénoménologie* is a crucible in which a tension between the body as literal force of signification and the body as figurative device develops. The problem of the body's relation to language is dramatized, but, importantly, never resolved, in the *Phénoménologie.*

At first it seems relations between the body and language are *analogical*: a world of words responds to the movements of *la parole* just as physical terrain is mapped and ordered by the movements of a body. The *Phénoménologie* claims that cultural and linguistic worlds are "founded" on or derive from a more primary relation between the body and its space. First, the body projects around itself a biological world, limiting itself to the gestures that are necessary for the conservation of life. Language is then described as an "instrument" the body constructs for itself to supplement its "natural" abilities: "Tantôt enfin la signification visée ne peut être rejointe par les moyens naturels du corps; il faut alors qu'il se construise un instrument, et il projette autour de lui un monde culturel" (PP, 183). Unlike the biological world, the cultural world is a setting that is not given to everyone in the same way (there are different languages and different cultures.) Thus the verbal gesture aims at a "paysage mentale" (PP, 227), the contents of which must be acquired or inherited: "les actes d'expression antérieurs établissent entre les sujets parlants un monde commun auquel la parole actuelle et neuve se réfère comme le geste au monde sensible. Et le sens de la parole n'est rien d'autre que la façon dont elle manie ce monde linguistique ou dont elle module sur ce clavier de significations acquises" (PP, 227). *Both* the body *and* the word fashion *sens* by reconfiguring and restructuring the worlds in which they inhere. The word, like the body, seems to assume the role of the "subject" in the field of language (as the body does in space):

> [Le langage] présent ou plutôt il *est* la prise de position du sujet dans le monde de significations. Le terme de « monde » n'est pas ici une manière de parler : il veut dire que *la vie « mentale » ou culturelle emprunte à la vie naturelle ses structures* et que le sujet pensant doit être fondé sur le sujet incarné. Le geste phonétique réalise, pour le sujet parlant et pour ceux qui écoutent, une certain *structuration de l'expérience*, une certaine *modulation de l'existence*, exactement *comme un comportement de mon corps investit pour moi et pour autrui les objets qui m'entourent d'une certaine signification* (PP, 235, my emphasis).

Here it seems clear that the "sujet dans le monde de significations" cannot be the physical body, for the subject takes the form of the "*geste phonétique.*" This linguistic subject creates meaning by modifying its surroundings (existing significations) *just as* the body's behaviors invest and structure its physical space. Although linguistic signification *derives* from the movement of the body, it seems from this passage that the body *as such* does not participate in language, except, perhaps, insofar as it physically supports speech.

But the *Phénoménologie* also implies leakages between the cultural and physical worlds. Although Merleau-Ponty often uses the word "natural" to distinguish the biological or physical world from the linguistic one, he also undermines his distinction at times ["[t]out est fabriqué et tout est naturel chez l'homme" (PP, 230)], and there are moments in the *Phénoménologie* when the body "transgresses" into the domain of language, and when, inversely, the word enters the space of the sensible. A successful operation of expression, for instance, "fait exister la signification comme *une chose* […] elle la fait vivre dans *un organisme de mots*, elle s'installe dans l'écrivain ou dans le lecteur *comme un nouvel organe des sens*, elle ouvre un nouveau champ ou une nouvelle dimension à notre expérience" (PP, 222-223; my emphasis). Such a description suggests that there is less of a separation between the cultural-linguistic and the physical world than his language of analogy implies: These worlds cannot be entirely distinct if words and bodies move between them.

Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the corporeal nature of the word may stem from his conviction that language, which includes the power of naming, is a way of reconfiguring, articulating and re-creating the world. In this way, the word has much in common with the subject, which was traditionally assigned the role of meaning creation. Merleau-Ponty cites the beliefs of "pre-scientific" peoples for whom naming meant conjuring into existence: "Pour la pensée préscientifique, nommer l'objet c'est le faire exister ou le modifier: Dieu crée les êtres en les nommant et la magie agit sur eux en parlant d'eux" (PP, 217). If the signifier were completely detached from its signified, language would be powerless to alter our experience of the world by framing its parts, articulating it, and bringing into being through re-organization of form. This ostensibly primitive belief in the conjuring, quasi-magical power of language involves the idea that the *subject* might transform itself into the word (*la parole*) and inhabit the things it signifies: "le sujet puisse s'ignorer comme pensée universelle et se saisir comme parole, et que le mot, loin d'être le simple signe des objets et des significations, habite les choses et véhicule les significations" (PP, 217). Subject becoming *word* suggests that linguistic signification, like the body's orientation of space, results from the reorganization of a field around one of its parts.[303]

The topographical character of the analogy between language and space makes it unstable, for an insistence on language as a landscape or world inscribes the subject-as-body in to the domain of significations. We find descriptions of the *word,* accordingly, as one of the body's possible activities: "Il suffit que j'en possède l'essence articulaire et sonore [du mot] comme l'une des modulations, l'un des usages possibles de mon corps. Je me reporte au mot comme ma main se porte vers le lieu de mon corps que l'on pique, le mot est en un certain lieu de mon monde linguistique […]" (PP, 220). Here the separation between the worlds of space and language collapses, for if the word exists as *one of the possible usages of my body,* the physical *body* (rather than *la parole*) actually

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[303] The reorganization of form or framing is also the primary gesture of art according to Elizabeth Grosz, who writes: "The first gesture of art is not, as Nietzsche believed, the exteriorization of one's own bodily forces and energies […] The first gesture of art, its metaphysical condition and universal expression, is the construction or fabrication of the frame," Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 10.

means in language. It is in this way that the domains of space and language bleed into each other, their span bridged by the girth of the body.

But Merleau-Ponty's attempts to elucidate the role of the physical body in language are inconclusive, and his insistence on *la parole* as bodily *gesture* seems somewhat forced. Merleau-Ponty writes that language develops as a fortuitous mutation of the body's activities: "une contraction de la gorge, une émission d'air sifflante entre la langue et les dents, une certain manière de jouer de notre corps se laisse soudain investir d'un *sens figuré* et le signifient hors de nous" (PP, 236). There is "*gesticulation phonétique*" and "*geste verbal*" because of the fact that language, like physical gestures, transforms a given space or world:[304] "l'homme se transcende […] à travers son corps et sa parole" (PP, 236). If the idea that the word is a bodily gesture insofar as it is involves whistling air through teeth is unsatisfying, Merleau-Ponty's idea that the word is a gesture insofar as it contains or embodies its meaning is more convincing: "La parole est un véritable geste, et elle contient son sens comme le geste contient le sien" (PP, 223). Renaud Barbaras criticizes Merleau-Ponty's discussion of *la parole* as gesture on the grounds that Merleau-Ponty never makes clear just *how* a gesture acquires an ability to speak.[305] He also observes that "un *parallèle* entre le geste corporel et la parole, entre le monde perçu et le paysage culturel qu'elle dépose" implies that Merleau-Ponty "ne pense pas véritablement ce corps *comme* expression."[306] Barbaras is right in pointing out that it is Merleau-Ponty's idea that the linguistic world and the physical world are parallel (and therefore separate) that complicates his efforts to think of the word as gesture, for this would involve the transgression of the physical body into the domain of language.

Merleau-Ponty has been criticized for neglecting the visceral reality of the lived body, even as he celebrates the body's role in expression,[307] which makes his insistence that the body *"secretes"* its meaning all the more strange. Merleau-Ponty writes: "nous le

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[304] For instance: "Il faut que *la gesticulation phonétique* utilise un alphabet de significations déjà acquises, que *le geste verbal* s'exécute dans un certain panorama commun aux interlocuteurs, comme la compréhension des autres gestes suppose un monde perçu commun à tous où il se déroule et déploie son sens," PP, 236, my emphasis.

[305] Barbaras writes: "On peut certes qualifier la parole de « geste », mais il reste à comprendre comment elle peut être effectivement un geste, c'est-à-dire comment un geste peut devenir parlant. On peut certes parler du « paysage » mental ou culturel, mais il reste à comprendre comment l'idéalité peut exister comme un monde, c'est-à-dire comment le monde perçu peut donner naissance à des significations. Il est clair que, par-delà les métaphores, le phénomène de la parole n'est pas véritablement pensé: en tant qu'elle est un geste, elle est rabattue sur le corps comme vecteur de comportements naturels et cesse alors d'être signifiante; en tant qu'elle est parlante, elle surgit au sein d'un monde culturel autonome et on ne comprend plus alors comment elle peut demeurer une puissance du corps et s'inscrire encore dans le monde perçu," Barbaras, *L'être du phénomène*, 61-62. Barbaras is right to identify a problem in Merleau-Ponty's description of language as gesture, but this problem does not inhere in the fact that the gesture does not signify (certainly gestures can "mean," communicate and signify in physical space, and the acquisition of new gestures introduces novel possibilities for the body's comportment and relation to space). But Barbaras also mentions the fact that the analogy Merleau-Ponty has set up between language and space complicates his equation between language and gesture.

[306] Barbaras, *L'être du phénomène*, 61-62; my emphasis.

[307] Richard Shusterman, "The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy" *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, eds. Taylor Carman and Mark Hansen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151-180. Shusterman attributes to Merleau-Ponty a "somatic silence" in light of his failure to discuss in any detail the lived experiences of the body.

voyons [le corps] sécréter en lui-même un « sens » qui ne lui vient de nulle part, le projeter sur son entourage matériel et le communiquer aux autres sujets incarnés." The fact that no bodily fluids are mentioned (bleeding, spitting, urinating, ejaculating) tempts us to relegate "secretion" to a figurative plane, where it serves as a convenient descriptor for the body's manner of projecting around itself halos of meanings. But Merleau-Ponty continues by insisting that, in the process of expression, the body *becomes* what it expresses: "pour pouvoir exprimer, le corps doit en dernière analyse devenir la pensée ou l'intention qu'il nous signifie. C'est lui qui montre, lui qui parle" (PP, 239). This passage describes the body both "secreting" its meaning and projecting it, while at the same time *fashioning itself* into its significance. That the body secretes meaning and *becomes* what it signifies (despite the contradictory notions of expression that these images entail) implies that the body signifies *directly* in language and allows us to accept the word as gesture. In his 1951 lecture, "*L'homme et l'adversité*," Merleau-Ponty explores further what it might mean for the body to "speak" in language. Meditating at some length on the manner in which psychoanalysis attributes expressive powers to the body, Merleau-Ponty observes the following about writers and language: "Le langage cessait donc d'être pour l'écrivain (s'il l'a jamais été) simple instrument ou moyen pour communiquer des intentions données par ailleurs. À présent, il fait corps avec l'écrivain, il est lui-même."[308] The idea that language inhabits or becomes the body of the writer—that it *is* itself the writer—further illustrates the slippage we find in Merleau-Ponty's account between the agency of the body and agency in language. (Here language acquires "agency" by becoming the body of the writer.)

Because Merleau-Ponty's metaphors hover tantalizingly at the threshold between figural and literal, his assertion that the body "speaks" could be either an economical way of stating that the genesis of signification is the body's organization of its space (and that language exists on the same model) or a claim that the physical body itself has signifying agency in the linguistic realm. Merleau-Ponty's discussion of a physiognomy of words attempts to work out the relation between the physical, flesh-and-blood-body and the operation of language. Drawing on psychology experiments in which subjects reported sensations of warmth in the body when the word "*chaud*" flashed across a screen (disappearing before becoming legible), Merleau-Ponty argues that words are understood insofar as they induce behaviors in the body: "Les mots ont une physionomie parce que nous avons à leur égard de chaque personne une certaine conduite qui apparaît d'un seul coup dès qu'ils sont donnés" (PP, 282). The reception of words by the body, which either prepares itself to reproduce them or adopts a certain behavior, is shown as necessary for linguistic understanding.[309] Merleau-Ponty intensifies this idea by claiming that the word forges a pathway through the body: "le mot se fraie un passage dans mon corps" (PP, 282). We find further descriptions, in the *Phénoménologie,* of the body as that which furnishes words with their complex significations by the manner in which it receives them. The body "résonne pour tous les sons, vibre pour toutes les couleurs, et […] fournit aux mots leur signification complexe primordiale par la manière dont il les accueille" (PP, 283). The word appeals, then, to the projects and possibilities of the body. (The

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[308] Merleau-Ponty, "L'homme et l'adversité," *Signes,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 379.
[309] This notion that understanding a language depends on the body's capacity for reception (and response) is a theme Merleau-Ponty takes up in his later work on literary language.

recognized word induces a certain formation of the mouth.)[310] But this description strikes us as an exaggeration of ordinary experience, for surely it is not necessary to sense the shape of a word in one's mouth to understand its sense, and the attribution of a physiognomy to words seems hyperbolic. Such awkward discussions betray Merleau-Ponty's uncertainty about the relation between the physical body and language.

Further confusion in his distinction between the physical body and signification occurs in Merleau-Ponty's use of sexuality as a figure for intentionality, the body's directedness toward the world.[311] The section of the *Phénoménologie,* "Le corps comme être sexué," attributes to the "sexual function" a power of signification (PP, 127). But are we to understand sexuality as purely figurative? For Merleau-Ponty, "sexuality" designates a *general* interest in and directedness toward the world, of which sexual desire is an illustrative case. "Sexuality" is what endows the world with a primary significance for incarnate subjects: it motivates the body's orientation towards the world and enables signification as a continual surpassing of one's oneself towards others, or as transcendence.[312] In the pages of the *Phénoménologie* it never becomes clear what kind of body (a physical or verbal one, for instance) takes on the role of the "subject" in the linguistic world.[313]

The strange, quasi-literalism of Merleau-Ponty's metaphoric discourse around the body betrays his analogy between space and language as highly unstable. Understanding this confusion as related to the problem of agency, James Schmidt characterizes the main impetus driving *La prose du monde* as well as *Le visible et l'invisible* as the attempt to discover just *what* or *who,* across the community of speaking subjects, *wishes, speaks*, and finally *thinks.*[314] Merleau-Ponty's later works develop his idea of the body-subject to discover, perhaps, *how* the body can mean in the domain of language. His concept of the flesh (*la chair*), which emphasizes (quasi-literally) the body's belonging to the world, signals a further collapse between the fields of language and physical space. Curiously, it

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[310] "C'est le sentiment—difficile à décrire—d'une sorte de plénitude assourdie qui envahit mon corps et qui en même temps donne à ma cavité buccale une forme sphérique," PP, 182.

[311] Monica Langer's discussion of sexuality as a figure for what "attracts" the body towards the world is particularly apt. She argues: "The investigation of human sexuality will therefore bring to light the body as neither passivity nor activity but a third sort of being, by and for whom a third sort of significance comes to exist," Monica Langer, *Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception: A Guide and Commentary* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989)**,** 51.

[312] Monika Langer suggests that Merleau-Ponty alters the term *transcendence* to mean a "continual transformation of the given," which implies an understanding of existence as transcendence, Langer, *Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception,* 55. She also explains: "Sexuality is not reducible to existence, nor existence reducible to sexuality. Existence is a more general current which structures itself in various ways, and 'the sexual life is a sector of our life bearing a special relation to the existence of sex'. As we have seen, there can be no question of reducing sexuality to the genital or relegating it to a psyche understood as pure consciousness or spirit. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological description of the body has shown us the need to replace such conceptions as the 'purely bodily' and 'purely psychic' with the notion of an incarnate subjectivity in whom all sectors of experience 'interfuse' in such a way that each remains distinctive while none is entirely isolable," 53.

[313] This discussion of sexuality and its applicability to language supports Merleau-Ponty's claim that the body forms the basis of all of our expressive and cultural operations: "Notre corps […] en tant qu'il est inséparable d'une vue du monde et qu'il est cette vue même réalisée, est la condition de possibilité […] de toutes les opérations expressives et de toutes les acquisitions qui constituent le monde culturel," PP, 448.

[314] James Schmidt, *Between Phenomenology and Structuralism,* 163. He cites *The Visible and the Invisible.*

is this collapse that we find dramatized in Beckett's work, most notably in the pages of *L'innommable*, when the narrator laments that words have "said" him into being, along with the universe in which he finds himself: "je suis en mots, je suis fait de mots, des mots des autres, quels autres, l'endroit aussi, l'air aussi, les murs, le sol, le plafond, des mots, tout l'univers est ici […] je suis tous ces mots, tous ces étrangers, cette poussière de verbe, sans fond où se poser, sans ciel où se dissiper."[315] The unnamable's despair over the hermeticism of his world of words has something to do with his status as a fictional character, confined within the pages of a novel, and this passage also provides us a vivid image of a subject produced by discourse. The power of words to bring characters and spaces into being signals a relation of exchange—a leakage—between the physical and linguistic worlds.

The Merleau-Ponty scholar, Yves Thierry, identifies precisely this collision of worlds in the vexed account, quasi-figural and quasi-literal, that Merleau-Ponty gives of the body's power to signify in language. Thierry's account of a speaking body (*corps parlant*) in Merleau-Ponty derives from his sense that the sensible world and the linguistic world are reversible, since the sensible constitutes itself via relations of difference and cohesion in the same way that words signify. Moreover, *la parole*, by instituting itself in the life of the body can mediate between thoughts and sensory experiences.[316] If this is the case, it is difficult to maintain a clean line of separation between the domains of language and sensible space.

We've traced Merleau-Ponty's replacement of the intellectual *cogito* with a body subject, spatially and temporally located, on the model of Claudel's man in the street, eager to know his coordinates in space-time. As M.C. Dillon suggests, the body-subject is both immanent (worldly) and transcendent, since it *modulates* or *polarizes* the space in which it inheres to shape meaning as direction. It is in this sense also that the *dynamic* body schema can be said to *found* the process of signification through its acquisition of habits. Such habits might "dilate" its world (PP, 179) and "renew" and "reanimate" the body schema in turn (PP, 177). Such an idea is consonant with theories in linguistic structuralism that imagine the body—as well as subjectivity—as products of discourse.[317] Adapting such structuralist views, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the extent to which the

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[315] Beckett, *L'innommable*, (Paris: les éditions de minuit, 1953), 166.
[316] Yves Thierry, *Du Corps Parlant: Le Langage chez Merleau-Ponty*, (Brussels: Ousia, 1987). The passage in question is as follows: "Le textes de Merleau-Ponty, jusqu'en ses derniers fragments, éclairent ainsi ce que réserve la notion d'un corps parlant. Telle qu'elle est déjà conduite dans la *Phénoménologie*, la description de la parole comme phénomène s'instituant dans la vie du corps suppose de mettre au jour une essentielle unité entre ce qui accède à la forme d'un sens pensé et ce qui se manifeste dans un champ de vision. Depuis *La prose du monde*, cette recherche montre que le sensible lui-même se constitue à travers des relations, impliquant à la fois écart et cohésion, qui caractérisent aussi bien la manière qu'ont les paroles de signifier. Sans se confondre, le perçu pré-réflexif et l'idéalité sont donc les pôles d'une même vie qui fait naître la perception par la réversibilité du voyant et du visible, et l'idée par la réversibilité de la parole et de ce qu'elle signifie. Procédant d'un retour des significations verbales sur elles-mêmes, leurs moyens et leurs démarches, la pensée théorique est à son tour prise dans le sensible et le visible où certains « voyants », caractérisés aussi comme « êtres sonores », sont disposés de telle sorte qu'ils inclinent au langage,"159-160.
[317] For the idea that the subject is produced through discourse see Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes de Linguistique Générale,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

body can alter and produce language from *within* its domain (by speaking it) as much as its own being is shaped by language.

Merleau-Ponty's body-subject makes it impossible to view signification as the intended work of a willing subject or agent, and this view of signification is similarly troubled throughout Beckett's *oeuvre*. The body's manner of polarizing space relative to its projects, interests and desires, as presented in the discussion of the body schema, suggests that the emergence of meaning as spatial. But the question of whether it is the physical body or whether it is *la parole* (a language body) that drives linguistic reconfiguration is never answered in the pages of the *Phénoménologie*. And it seems that in his later work, Merleau-Ponty is still struggling to elucidate and to define the body-subject that emerges in the pages of the *Phénoménologie*. At times, in this work, it seems to be the *parole* that styles language, and a prosthetic or surrogate body emerges as a linguistic "subject." But there are also passages of the *Phénoménologie* that emphasize, if clumsily, the necessity of the physical body for speech. As Shusterman, criticizing a "somatic silence" in Merleau-Ponty, observes well, the body is often used merely figuratively, rather than as the literal, physical and visceral seat of meanings.

The next chapter turns to Merleau-Ponty's middle and late periods to consider how he understands the relation between language and space to affect language in literary practices. In Merleau-Ponty's writings from the early 1950's, most notably the abandoned book, *La prose du monde,* and the published essay, "Le langage indirecte et les voix du silence," we find a great deal of attention devoted to style. *Style* is perhaps what Merleau-Ponty must invent to discover—or perhaps to gloss over—the precise work of the body in language. Style, which is present as much in bodily comportment as in the process of speaking or writing, comes to affect the meaning-varying function of "agent" (in a modified sense of this term).

Chapter 4
Philosophy as Radical Style: Fashioning a Language of Space

C'est comme si la visibilité qui anime le monde sensible émigrait, non pas hors de tout corps, mais dans un autre corps moins lourd, plus transparent, comme si elle changeait de chair, abandonnant celle du corps pour celle du langage, et affranchie par là, mais non délivrée, de toute condition.

Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*

"En philosophie, le chemin peut être difficile," Merleau-Ponty writes at the opening of his 1960 preface to *Signes,* "on est sûr que chaque pas en rend possibles d'autres."[318] This image of a path created in the act of walking it illustrates the point that philosophy's explorations alter its field of possibilities.[319] The idea that philosophy, and phenomenology in particular, might reconfigure its surrounding landscape, or that its practice or performance determines the directions and meanings (*sens*) it seeks, motivates Merleau-Ponty's conception of indirect language.

Indirect language involves techniques similar to those we've observed in Beckett's writing, for instance negative theology as a way of "saying" by not saying. But indirect language also depends on what Beckett sought to escape: namely, *style*.[320] Beckett associates style with the excesses of modernist writing and the involuntary transmission of influence through language. If style is what corrupts independent agency for (the early) Beckett, it is, for Merleau-Ponty, the manifestation of a deeper, more passive kind of "agency" and the engine of creative variation.[321] Style, for Merleau-Ponty, is the particular position of a body, which yields a *perspective* and enables

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[318] Merleau-Ponty, *Signes,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 9. (Hereafter cited in the text as S).

[319] The importance of path-making to Merleau-Ponty, evidenced by his frequent use of the noun, *chemin*, and the verb, *cheminer*, establishes a metaphorical relation between the practice of philosophy and the explorations of a traveler mapping and negotiating unexplored terrain. This philosophical activity of path-breaking also finds an echo in Derrida's discussion of "Bahnung" (*frayage*), a radical path-breaking that is comparable to the formation of new neural pathways (an idea Derrida borrows from Freud). Jacques Derrida, "Freud et la scène de l'écriture," *L'écriture et la difference,* (Paris: Éditions Seuil, 1967), 298.

[320] Beckett tends to associate style with influence, with excess, and with uncontrolled meanings that flow through inherited language; it was to escape such allusive excesses—at least according to what Beckett tells us—that he chose to write in French. Interestingly, Proust expresses a similar anxiety of influence with respect to style in his essay on Flaubert. For Proust, style is an involuntary inheritance that must be "purged" through deliberate imitation and parody if a writer is to find his or her own voice. Proust describes "l'intoxication flaubertienne" and "la vertu purgative, exorcisante du pastiche." He advocates a "pastiche volontaire pour pouvoir, après cela, redevenir original, ne pas faire toute sa vie du pastiche involontaire." Proust, "À propos du « style » de Flaubert," *Contre Sainte-Beuve,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964, first published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* [1920]).

[321] It is fitting, given the highly allusive character of Merleau-Ponty's writing, that he discriminates little between one's own style and styles inherited from others. His theory of style is heavily inflected by that of André Malraux, and involves the classic idea of *la demarche* discussed by Malraux as well as by Baudelaire and Balzac. See Balzac's "Théorie de la démarche" (Paris: Didier, 1853), and Baudelaire's "À une passante," *Les Fleurs du Mal,* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010). Merleau-Ponty's writing is also littered with allusions, some cited, others not, to figures as diverse as Husserl, Bergson, Proust, Stendhal, Simon, Valéry, Michaux, Pascal, Mallarmé, Malraux, T.E. Lawrence and others.

reconfigurations of the dynamic fields of space and language. We find Merleau-Ponty's most concentrated discussion of style in the 1952 essay, "Le langage indirect et les voix du silence," where he describes it both as an effect of perception— "aussi reconnaissable pour les autres, aussi peu visible pour [l'artiste] que sa silhouette ou ses gestes de tous les jours" (S, 86)—*and* an expressive act that expands the surroundings in which it is embedded. Merleau-Ponty's theory of style depends upon his linkage between space and language, which he describes as flexible fields that expand in response to the perspectives or styles inhabiting them. Leaving open, for the moment, the question of the relation between language and space—whether they are parallel or whether the body's movement between them implies a more complex relation—we can say that the manner in which a body articulates space serves as a model for creative change in general. A body's desires, needs and movements determine the affective qualities of its surrounding space, and framing, focusing or mirroring sections of space may "open" it so as to suggest new possibilities for its navigation and cohabitation.[322] A style of speaking or writing (negotiating language) can alter the field of language, which, like space, expands in response to the movement of one of its parts (a particular way of using words, perhaps). An innovative poet or writer, by her way of using or inhabiting pre-established language, may jostle or shake the linguistic apparatus in order to "tear" new sound from it in the same way that a body's exploratory movements unfurl a landscape.

It is important that phenomenology itself operates as *style*: "La phénoménologie se laisse pratiquer et reconnaître comme manière ou comme style" (PP, 8). Merleau-Ponty's figurative, allusive and at times aureate writing varies language as it is commonly used and becomes the idiom by which phenomenology attempts to perform its theory of style.[323] Scenes materialize from the text, and illustrations flow like counterpoint, tangling threads of linear argument.[324] Readers understand Merleau-Ponty's sense obliquely or through implication—by the pressure of what is unsaid—and we might attribute Merleau-Ponty's use of imagery, metaphor, resonant figures, and what emerges

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[322] In the *Phénoménologie*, Merleau-Ponty writes: "la perception esthétique ouvre à son tour une nouvelle spatialité," PP, 340.

[323] Merleau-Ponty's commentators and critics frequently discuss the particularity of his idiom. Renaud Barbaras, for instance, observes of Merleau-Ponty's work: "Personne ne l'ignore, mais peu l'ont lue, comme si sa pensée avait la vertu de nous dispenser de l'étudier, comme si elle se résumait à une intuition ou un style, qu'il s'agirait seulement de reprendre à son compte." *De l'être du phénomène: sur l'ontologie de Merleau-Ponty,* (Grenoble: J. Million, 1991), 9. Claude Lefort comments on the "charme singulier qu'exerce cet écrit philosophique," praising Merleau-Ponty's creation of an indirect language. "Preface," *L'œil et l'esprit*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), (henceforth cited in the text as OE). Both Lefort and Barbaras have attempted, in different ways, to take up Merleau-Ponty's improvisational gesture in an effort to somehow "complete" his unfinished work; Lefort has scrupulously edited and published Merleau-Ponty's lecture notes, working notes, and manuscripts of *Le visible et l'invisible* and *La prose du monde*, while Barbaras has been criticized by his American translators for having "completed" Merleau-Ponty's unfinished ontology in *De l'être du phénomène*. (In their translators' introduction to *The Being of the Phenomenon*, Leonard Lawlor and Ted Toadvine claim that Barbaras develops an original philosophy from his study of Merleau-Ponty, overstepping the boundaries of critical exegesis).

[324] Berel Lang's observation is of relevance here: "Philosophical discourse is to be taken not only literally, at its own word (as required by the prescriptions of method), but also representationally, at more than its word—that is, as style." "Style of Method: Repression and Representation in the Genealogy of Philosophy" in *The Question of Style in Philosophy and the Arts*, eds. Caroline Van Eck, James McAllister and Renée Van de Vall, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 18-37, 27.

over the span of his career as a distinct poetic lexicon (fissure, pleat, fold, tissue, hollow, wake, wave, crest, tide, flesh, chiasm) to his stated understanding of philosophy as a literary practice. But we must ask what concept of the "literary" is operating when Merleau-Ponty writes, for instance: "Dès lors la tâche de la littérature et celle de la philosophie ne peuvent plus être séparées".[325] For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology, like literature, attempts to *create* or to *become* an experience rather than describe or explain it.

Merleau-Ponty never mentions Beckett's work as exemplary of the indirect language he describes. His preferred literary examples are Stendhal, Proust, Valéry, Claudel, Claude Simon, Balzac, Michaux and Artaud,[326] and Beckett's most radical experiments in style and syntax occur after Merleau-Ponty's death. Yet, Merleau-Ponty's discussion of style in relation to indirect language, which appeals to the body's experience of space, anticipates Beckett's experimental work from the 1980's, particularly *Worstward Ho*, and *Quad*. Merleau-Ponty describes indirect language, locating it in writers such as Balzac and Stendhal, and attempts to enact it by fashioning a distinctively fluid language of overlapping figures for phenomenology. He develops the idea of *style* as spanning physical and linguistic space, jostling them to produce new modes of meaning (*sens*), and his sense of phenomenology as a literary practice leads Merleau-Ponty to develop a theory of indirect language (in literature) that is uncannily consonant with Beckett's syntactical reconfigurations and experiments of the 1980's. An intimate relation between *style* and literary, indirect language emphasizes the position and perspective of the body in space as the foundation for the emergence of meaning in language.

I. Style by Subtraction: A Language of the Body

Style, for Merleau-Ponty, is primary. Before it becomes the signature of an artist or the marker of a period, it is a perspective given to the body and demanded (*exigé*) by its perception. And yet metaphorical crosscurrents emerge in Merleau-Ponty's writing that suggest that style is also a language to be "honed." These contradictory metaphors present style as *both* bodily *and* linguistic, and underscore the point that perception involves a process of selection and a *mise en forme* according to perspective that is highly expressive.

Although we find references to style in the *Phénoménologie,* it wasn't until the 1950's that Merleau-Ponty's engagement with structuralism led him to extend his notion of the body-subject into a precise theory of style. This engagement with structuralism resulted in two published essays and the abandoned manuscript, *La prose du monde.*[327]

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[325] Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et non-sens*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 36.

[326] In his introduction to *La prose du monde*, Claude Lefort cites Merleau-Ponty's note stating his intention to write a response to Sartre, with special attention to five literary figures: "Il faut que je fasse une sorte de Qu'est-ce que la littérature ?, avec une partie plus longue sur le signe et sur la prose, et non pas toute une dialectique de la littératire mais cinq perceptions littéraires : Montaigne, Stendhal, Proust, Breton, Artaud," Claude Lefort, "Avertissement," *La prose du monde,* vii.

[327] Both essays, "Le langage indirect et les voix du silence" and "Sur la phénoménologie du langage," were reprinted in *Signes. La prose du monde* was edited and published after Merleau-Ponty's death by Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). For speculation as to why Merleau-Ponty might have abandoned the work,

"Le langage indirect et les voix du silence," in which we find an extended treatment of style, began as a chapter of *La prose du monde* that Merleau-Ponty excerpted and revised for publication in *Les temps modernes*. This essay performs the difficult task of welding elements of structuralism, which challenges the existence of a willing subject or agent,[328] to Husserlian notions of radical subjectivity.[329] It is partly in order to negotiate this difficulty that Merleau-Ponty conceives of language on the model of space: Just as the physical body orients space, so does *la parole* articulate language, making its way among available significations.

Already in the *Phénoménologie,* Merleau-Ponty describes language using spatial metaphors. He describes a "monde linguistique" in which the word (*mot*) is but a certain *place* (*lieu*), and speaks of the power of words to open a new *field* or *dimension* of our experience: "[L'opération d'expression,] quand elle réussit…ouvre un nouveau champ ou une nouvelle dimension à notre expérience."[330] This figurative gesture finds a reprise in "Le langage indirect," when Merleau-Ponty describes language as a *universe,* "capable de loger en lui les choses mêmes" (S, 70). This treatment of language as a world (or as space) enables Merleau-Ponty to theorize *style* as an exploratory mode of being. The style of a friend's voice on the telephone, Merleau-Ponty claims, gives us the friend himself, *as if he were entirely* his manner of speaking, of beginning and ending his sentences, of pathmaking through the unsaid (*cheminer à travers les choses non dites*, S, 69). Before describing how style functions as a variation on existing structures, it is necessary to insist upon its inherence, to explore the manner in which it operates as a principle of selection and subtraction (from being) and how its continuity lays the foundation for signification.

"Le langage indirect et les voix du silence" begins with an elegant description of Saussure's idea of linguistic difference. With Saussure, Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea that words merely express a pre-existing "signified" or thought. He writes: "Dire, ce n'est pas mettre un mot sous chaque pensée" (S, 71). Rather, signs gather their meaning only in

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see Galen A. Johnson, "Structures and Painting: 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,'" *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting,* ed. Galen A. Johnson, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993).

[328] Structuralism has generated persuasive arguments against agent-centered accounts of creativity. Foucault and Barthes, in particular, have argued that the subject as author operates not by her will or intention to create, but is *produced by* linguistic, social and historical structures. Amidst increasing reliance on cyber-networks, digital archives and devices for external memory storage, theorizing creativity as a variation within a structure (as "passive agency") is of no small importance. Ideas about the manner in which language creates the subject go back at least as far as Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*, which claims that the subject position is created by the subject-predicate structure of a sentence. For Nietzsche, a trick of grammar creates the illusion of an independent consciousness capable of willing and intending. More recently, Judith Butler has suggested a new account of agency as follows: "It is by being interpolated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible." Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative,* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" (1969), *Dits et Écrits*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), and Barthes, "La mort de l'auteur" (1968), *Le Bruissement de la langue,* (Paris: Seuil, 1984).

[329] Merleau-Ponty engages with Husserl's work, "La subjectivité transcendantale est intersubjectivité" in his essay, "Sur la phénoménologie du langage." For a discussion of Husserl and structuralism, see also James Schmidt, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Between phenomenology and structuralism*, (London: Macmillan, 1985).

[330] Merleau-Ponty also asserts the following: "La parole est un geste et sa signification un monde," PP, 224.

relation to other signs. Merleau-Ponty's understanding of Saussure's fundamental insight, as he calls it, prompts vivid descriptions of the manner in which thought moves within language, haunting words, pulling them together in a certain way: "[les mots] sont hantés à distance par elle [la pensée] comme les marées par la lune." Instead of preceding words, thought serves to orient the linguistic structure; they de-center it, so that by an operation of language on itself—a torsion—meaning emerges. Language "se laisse défaire et refaire par elle [la pensée]" and "porte son sens comme la trace d'un pas signifie le mouvement et l'effort d'un corps" (S, 72). Merleau-Ponty describes language as a vast system or structure, capable of signification only through a kind of continual negotiation of its parts. Describing the manner by which a child first begins to speak, he writes: "c'est la langue tout entière comme style d'expression, comme manière de jouer de la parole qui est anticipée par l'enfant avec ses premières oppositions phonématiques. Le tout de la langue parlée le happerait comme un tourbillon, le tenterait par ses articulations internes […]" (S, 65). It is the *lateral* liaison from sign to sign, Merleau-Ponty explains, that enables any relation between sign and meaning: "les phonèmes sont d'emblée des variations d'un unique appareil de parole et […] avec eux l'enfant semble avoir « attrapé » le principe d'une différenciation mutuelle des signes et acquis du même coup *le sens du signe*" (S, 65). The mutual differentiation of signs—the idea that signs draw their meaning from the signs surrounding them—leads Merleau-Ponty to describe language as more a *being* than a means, and as a universe or fabric that supports folds or contractions: "[la parole] n'est jamais qu'un pli dans l'immense tissu du parler" (S, 68).[331]

This description of language as a fabric or organic tissue (flesh) makes the point that *la parole,* like style in general, both differs from and inheres in its surroundings and sustains an abiding relation with bodily experience. Derrida underscores this point in his study of style in Nietzsche: "Le style éperonnant […] tenant sa puissance apotropaïque des tissus, toiles, voiles qui se bandent, se ploient ou déploient autour d'elle."[332] Derrida's image of style gathering its force from taut, resistant tissues not only emphasizes style's simultaneous difference and belonging to its surroundings, but the erotic overtones of this passage suggest the creative, seminal power of style, which can expand the structure of which it is a part.[333] Just as a word, rather than expressing a determinate meaning, "marque un écart de sens entre lui-même et les autres" (S, 63), so does style, in general, constitute a variation or difference within a structure. Merleau-Ponty's notion that we are grafted (*enté*) onto the universal by that which is most our own (S, 84) suggests an intimate metonymy between style and being; the perspective of a body may be construed as a local *concentration* of universal being. It is this idea that

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[331] Consider also: "Beaucoup plus qu'un moyen, le langage est quelque chose comme un être," (S, 69), and: "Son opacité, son obstinée référence à lui-même sont justement ce qui fait de lui un pouvoir spirituel: car il devient à son tour quelque chose comme un univers," (S, 70).

[332] Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/Eperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 40.

[333] Merleau-Ponty argues that, to constitute itself as difference, style must "disengage" but retain within it traces of its inherence in a larger whole, (S, 85).

Merleau-Ponty succeeds in making clear, towards the end of his career, through his notion of the flesh (*la chair*).[334]

From this discussion of linguistic difference, Merleau-Ponty goes on to elaborate a notion of style in "Le langage indirect" by linking it to the perceiving body and its position in the world. Succinctly, he writes that what is given to the artist with her style is not a "manner" or a number of procedures or tics that one could inventory: "c'est un mode de formulation aussi reconnaissable pour les autres, aussi peu visible pour lui que sa silhouette ou ses gestes de tous les jours" (S, 86). To describe style as a "mode" suggests its status as a variation or permutation, while "formulation" implies style's expressive function—its job of bringing into visibility and giving form. But style is also figured in this passage as a body's silhouette or shadow, or as the habitual gestures of which the artist is unaware. Merleau-Ponty's metaphors for style emphasize that it is both an involuntary effect of a *body*—style is described in one instance as an organ—and as a variation or modulation of a structure, operating with its own syntax and coherence.

What his first system of metaphors shows vividly is that style, for Merleau-Ponty, has more in common with natural and bodily processes than with affectation or artifice. Style is associated with organs, germination, automation, and is described as a *relief*—an imprint, effect, or trace of a body's movement. For example, Merleau-Ponty attributes the flowering of an artist's style to the fecund moment at which it *germinated* on the surface of an artist's experience: "Avant que le style devienne pour les autres objet de prédilection […] il faut qu'il y ait eu ce moment fécond où il a germé à la surface de son expérience, où un sens opérant et latent s'est trouvé les emblèmes qui devaient le délivrer et le rendre maniable pour l'artiste en même temps qu'accessible aux autres" (S, 85). Here, meaning (*un sens opérant et latent*)—rather than the artist himself—becomes the grammatical subject of the sentence, and finds for itself the emblems that will disengage it from its inherence and make it visible. Merleau-Ponty describes style as something *born* without the painter's awareness (*un style qui naît comme à son insu*) and links it to the painter's perception: "Il faut le voir apparaître au creux de la perception du peintre comme peintre: c'est une exigence issue d'elle" (S, 87). The idea that style is an exigency of perception, or that "la perception déjà stylise," presents an image of style as the natural outgrowth of a body's take *(prise)* on the world. Metaphorical descriptions of style as involuntary bodily processes find reprisals throughout the essay, as when Merleau-Ponty remarks: "le style en chaque peintre vivait comme la *pulsation* de son cœur" (S, 99) or when he describes expression as "un nouvel *organe* de la culture humaine" (S, 96).[335] In his last published work, *L'oeil et l'esprit*, Merleau-Ponty paraphrases Michaux's

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[334] Merleau-Ponty's description of the "flesh of being" in *Le visible et l'invisible* expresses a kinship or coherence among disparate manifestations of being. For a description of how Merleau-Ponty arrives at his notion of the flesh, see Emmanuel de Saint-Aubert "L'empreinte initiale de la chair" *Du lien des êtres aux éléments de l'être,* (Paris: Vrin, 2004), 146.

[335] Italicized phrases are my own emphasis in the two preceding quotations. In a relevant essay on Merleau-Ponty's theory of style, Linda Singer argues that "[Style] functions as the qualitative correlate of the perspectivalism that is at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's ontology. Style is the affective or modal consequence of being an embodied point of view." She also writes: "The body image has the coherence of a style because, like the work of art, it is the expressive vehicle of a point of view." Singer, "Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style," *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting,* ed. Galen A. Johnson, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 240.

observation about the colors of a painting: "les couleurs de Klee semblent *nées* lentement sur la toile, émanées d'un fond primordial, « *exhalées* au bon endroit » comme une patine ou une moisissure" (OE, 69-70, my emphasis). That style is born, exhaled, germinated, figured as a pulse and associated with organs leads us to understand it as an organic effect—one that is also tightly woven with the physical body.

Style may be involuntary and *given* with the body's perception, but its successful execution in works of literature or painting requires a tireless attention to the world and a honing of perception into a distinctive "voice" or communicable vision. Merleau-Ponty will insist on the importance of the body to works of expression until the very end of his life; in *L'œil et l'esprit*, he expands Valéry's observation that "le peintre 'apporte son corps,'" to make the following claim: "c'est en prêtant son corps au monde que le peintre change le monde en peinture" (OE, 16). But Merleau-Ponty's earlier essay qualifies the relation between style and the body, describing with derision the improvisation of *"peintre-enfants"* who assume:

> qu'il suffit d'avoir une main pour peindre. Ils tirent de leur corps de menus prodiges comme un jeune homme morose peut toujours tirer du sien, pourvu qu'il l'observe avec assez de complaisance, quelque petite étrangeté bonne à nourrir sa religion de lui-même (S, 83).

Merleau-Ponty's desultory description of morose adolescents discourages us from thinking that style is synonymous with *self*. Style is not introversion, nor is it a return to the individual. The association between style and the organic process of the body does not imply that style is entirely *automatic*, for it requires awareness and effort.

A tension emerges between style characterized as natural and inevitable (like bodily processes) and style as the work of fashioning a voice or vision in the act of looking at the world. If it is to be visible to others, style must develop from a body's interaction with the world. Merleau-Ponty suggests: "il y a aussi l'improvisation de celui qui, *tourné vers le monde* qu'il veut *dire*, a fini, chaque parole en appelant une autre, par se constituer une voix apprise qui est plus sienne que son cri des origines" (S, 83 my emphasis). Here the "natural" components of style blend with the cultural fashioning of language: Words, by calling for one another, assemble *themselves* into a voice that, while "learned" and "constituted," is more natural to the speaker than his primitive cry.

Merleau-Ponty borrows a phrase from Malraux, which encapsulates this apparent paradox at the core of his concept of style: "Combien de temps, dit Malraux, avant qu'un écrivain ait appris à parler avec sa propre voix" (S, 84). The difficulty involved in thinking that one must nevertheless *learn* what is given is short-circuited by Merleau-Ponty's recourse to the concrete example of language learning. When we learn a language, we inherit an existing structure (of grammatical forms, syntax, vocabulary), but progressively mold it into our own means of expression. This example illustrates that accepting the rules of a given system and forging particular innovations are mutually compatible. The relevance of blending an active, subject position with a passive, objective one underscores the curious harmony between perception of the world and expression (*la perception déjà stylise*). And yet the fact that style is not effortless urges us to wonder whether in fact diligence precludes spontaneity, and whether a body's involuntary functioning is necessarily at odds with the activity of communicating. The fact that style, while it derives from our perception of the world—our perspective—must be accepted, honed and developed in order to be legible to others as artistic expression,

brings us to the second system of metaphors that animates Merleau-Ponty's account of style.[336]

The continuity and coherence of a style is assured by a logic that decides what of the world will be of interest, and Merleau-Ponty tends to describe the "system of equivalences" by which a style makes itself noticeable as a kind of *language.* Style is figured as a language early in the essay, when Merleau-Ponty describes the consistency and evolution of a painter's style. He writes: "le langage de sa maturité contient éminemment le faible accent de ses premières œuvres" (S, 85). He later describes the significance of this figuration in greater detail: "Le style est chez chaque peintre le système d'équivalences qu'il se constitue pour cette oeuvre de manifestation, l'indice universel de la « déformation cohérente » par laquelle il concentre le sens encore épars dans sa perception et le fait exister expressément" (S, 88). Predictably, a 'language of painting' exists because painters reinvest *the same* 'system of equivalences' they detect in the world into the pseudo-space (*quasi-espace*) of a canvas (S, 88). But more importantly, the painter constitutes for himself a structure or system according to which he can order, manage or orient a world—a world described by Merleau-Ponty as "l'inaccessible plein des choses." Style begins with the painter's perception; he arranges (*ménager*) "certains creux, certaines fissures, des figures et des fonds, un haut et un bas, une norme et une déviation, dès que certaines éléments du monde prennent valeur de dimensions sur lesquelles désormais nous reportons tout le reste, dans le *langage* desquelles nous l'exprimons" (S, 88). The idea that ordering space according to certain dimensions is interchangeable—at least metaphorically—with the fashioning of a language, shows not only the arbitrariness of our ordering structures (there could be other dimensions, other languages) but suggests that language and space (parallel in structure) are dynamic systems amenable to shaping.

Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of style as a language with its own logic suggest an important relationship between style and signification. Merleau-Ponty writes: "Il y signification lorsque les données du monde sont par nous soumises à une « déformation cohérente »" (S, 87). This sentence is the more precise, refined version of a stronger claim he makes in an early draft of this essay in his manuscript of *La prose du monde*: "Le style est ce qui rend possible toute signification" (PW, 81). Signification, we might say, results when we reshape givens according to a certain style, which Merleau-Ponty defines, in his second system of metaphors, as a kind of syntax or logic. Style orders *(commander)* "l'arrangement du tableau aussi impérieusement qu'une syntaxe ou qu'une logique" (S, 89). To attribute "syntax" to style is to locate its power to reorient and refashion existing structures in the *consistency* of its modulations. This refers us back to the artist's body: for no matter how unprecedented, radical or innovative it might appear to others, style for the artist seems to come directly from the *world*. He thinks he is

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[336] We might hazard the observation that voice—an idea of central concern to phenomenology and of no small importance to Beckett—is where structures of language and the body coexist un-problematically. This would mean that vocalized language could bridge the gap between the two metaphorical systems through which Merleau-Ponty describes style: That of the body and that of language. Philosophically, voice has fallen out of favor. (Derrida attacks it as the nexus of *presence*, associating it with a yearning for immediacy that is impossible given that it is the play of differences, marks or traces, that stimulate signification.) But the concept of voice, which Merleau-Ponty does not discuss at any length, may support his insistence on style as simultaneously bodily and linguistic.

merely "spelling out" nature at the moment he is recreating it (*il croit épeler la nature au moment où il la recrée*) (S, 90). Style is thus the genesis or mechanism of signification, but it can also move beyond pre-established meanings to affect and reshape the dynamic structures of language and space.

We see that Merleau-Ponty's two strains of metaphors—style as bodily perception and style as expressive language—are not mutually exclusive if we anchor our discussion in an illustration Merleau-Ponty gives in his text. Borrowing an example from Malraux, Merleau-Ponty describes a woman passing by (*une femme qui passe*) as "une variation très remarquable de la norme du marcher, du regarder, du toucher, du parler que je possède par-devers moi parce que je suis corps." The woman is "une certaine manière d'être chair donnée toute entière dans la démarche ou même dans le seul choc du talon sur le sol" (S, 87). The woman's every movement expresses her relationship to being, or her body's hold on the world. Her perspective is different from that of her observer, but recognizable because I am *body* (*je suis corps*). An emphasis on the body is important, since Merleau-Ponty argues elsewhere that it is an experience of corporality that assures our belonging to a homogenous physical world.[337] An observer perceives this woman as *expressive* rather than inert (a mere appearance or "colored mannequin") because he experiences an imaginative sympathy based on his own experience of corporality. Were he a painter, Merleau-Ponty imagines, on his canvas would appear "l'emblème d'une manière d'habiter le monde, de le traiter, de l'interpréter par le visage comme par le vêtement, par l'agilité du geste comme par l'inertie du corps, bref d'un certain rapport à l'être" (S, 87). The woman expresses her relationship with being, or the manner in which she orders her world by inhabiting it. Style is therefore bodily, perspectival and "subtractive," while at the same time exhibiting the properties of a coherent language. (The woman orients her surroundings according to her interests and habits.)

Merleau-Ponty does not comment on the potential curiosity of multiple styles blending in a single space, perhaps because it does not appear to him problematic. He does not worry, in other words, that the painter's style will dominate or absorb the style of the woman. According to Merleau-Ponty's idea of style, we may assume that layering and communication between different styles is possible: "ils passent l'un dans l'autre" (S 78). We might go further in this vein by observing the interdependence between the body's limited perspective and the fashioning of language.[338] Consider the following: "Je suscite une vie universelle, comme je m'installe d'un coup dans l'espace par la présence vivante et épaisse de mon corps. Et comme l'opération du corps, celle des mots ou des peintures me reste obscure : les mots, les traits, les couleurs qui m'expriment sortent de moi comme mes gestes […]" (S, 121). Gesture emerges here as a site of convergence between the body and language. The body's limitations, created by its *position* in space, are compared to coherent manner in which words and paintings come out *(sortent de moi)* as bodily gestures might. This link between the spatial orientation of the body and the emergence of a certain kind of language facilitates, through the body, an expressive communication by means of style.[339]

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[337] For instance: "la prise de notre corps sur tout objet possible fonde un seul espace," S, 113.

[338] For an extended version of this argument see also "Le corps come expression et parole," PP, 213-150.

[339] Words, for Merleau-Ponty, have a certain physiognomy "parce que nous avons à leur égard comme à l'égard de chaque personne une certaine conduite qui apparaît d'un seul coup dès qu'il sont donnés…." He

That style, as variation, provides regularity or continuity does not imply the existence of *one* norm: rather, style deviates by differing from other styles.[340] In this way, styles (as particular perspectives) have the power to imply an invisible whole. The idea that objective being is implied by the multiplicity of perspectives or styles evokes Husserl's theory of perception, to which Merleau-Ponty alludes in the essay, "Sur la phénoménologie du langage" (S, 148). According to Husserl, perception gives us only *Abschattungen* (adumbrations or shadows)—which are limited sides, angles, aspects or views of a thing that is in reality inexhaustible. Insofar as these views or *Abschattungen* are related and suggest each other, they imply the existence of an objective world. The idea that the real is given only in particular profiles, perspectives or styles clearly resonated with Merleau-Ponty (we may think of his fascination with Cezanne, who painted in series, producing version after version, variation after variation of *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, tirelessly trying different angles in an attempt to reach the elusive thing itself). In the same essay, Merleau-Ponty solidifies the connection between style as bodily perspective and style as variation through his use of the phrase "*conduites perspectives*" to describe the way in which the styles of others work suggestively on our own bodies, leading us to adopt their position or attitude (S, 153).[341]

　　Merleau-Ponty's illustration of indirect language as communication via attitudes of the body further reinforces a relation between the body's orientation of space and language. Style, like certain seminal cases of *la parole*, is a double gesture of distinction and belonging: only by belonging to, inhabiting, or "taking up" a readymade system can a style deviate, differ and distinguish itself from that in which it inheres (*la parole épouse les significations disponibles*). The first step in understanding how style affects a structure to create new meaning is to probe more deeply into the parallel Merleau-Ponty draws between space and language, for it is his understanding of the manner in which the body "creates" space by moving through it that founds his more general notions of creativity and expression. Specifically, thinking of language using the model of space allows Merleau-Ponty to extend the ideas he develops about the body's role in creating

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quotes Werner: " «Mais soudain je remarque que le mot se fraie un passage dans mon corps. C'est le sentiment—difficile à décrire—d'une sorte de plénitude assourdie qui envahit mon corps et qui en même temps donne à ma cavité buccale une forme sphérique […] Le mot lu n'est pas une structure géométrique dans un segment d'espace visuel, c'est la présentation d'un comportement et d'un mouvement linguistique dans sa plénitude dynamique. » Qu'il s'agisse de percevoir des mots ou plus généralement des objets « il y a une certaine attitude corporelle, une mode spécifique de tension dynamique qui est nécessaire pour structurer l'image»," PP, 282-3.

[340] Berel Lang observes: "style *requires* multiplicity: No one style without two," in "The style of method: repression and representation in the genealogy of philosophy" in *The question of style in philosophy and the arts*, 24.

[341] The "conduite" is closely related to Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body schema *(le schéma corporel)*. The body schema is universal, as it maps our relation to our surroundings and gives us the ability to emulate, in a sense, the styles of other bodies: "Un « schéma corporel » ou « postural » nous donne à chaque instant une notion globale pratique et implicite des rapports de notre corps et des choses, et comme son relèvement sur elles. Un faisceau de mouvements possibles ou de « projets moteurs » rayonne de nous sur l'entourage. Notre corps n'est pas dans l'espace comme des choses : il l'habite ou le hante, il s'y applique comme la main a l'instrument […] par lui, nous avons directement l'accès à l'espace […]" "Un inédit de Maurice Merleau-Ponty" [1962], *Parcours deux 1951-1961*, (Paris: Verdier, 2000), originally printed in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 4 (Oct. 1962).

space (*Phénoménologie de la perception*) to the ways in which expressive speech expands a signifying structure to create new "landscapes" within language.[342]

II. Corporeal and Geometric Space: Expressive and Empirical Language

The creative work performed by *style* is, in some ways, a more general case of the manner in which *la parole* (speech) may affect the system of language in which it is embedded. That is to say, style has the power to expand or to instigate changes within a total structure, whether that structure is geometric space or established (empirical) language. Style, insofar as it differs from its surroundings, enables both signification and expression, which it achieves by modulating the structure from it which differs: "chaque acte d'expression ne devient signifiant que comme modulation d'un système général d'expression et en tant qu'il se différencie des autres gestes linguistiques" (S, 131). In certain cases, speech (*la parole*) works back on its linguistic structure, stretching language so that it evolves. But how is it that certain instances of speech (*la parole*) can alter the existing repertoire of expressive possibilities to expand language (*la langue*)? Merleau-Ponty states clearly that speech (*la parole*) can "espouse" pre-existing significations, "impregnating" them with new life: "La parole, en tant que distincte de la langue, est ce moment où l'intention significative encore muette et tout en acte s'avère capable de s'incorporer à la culture […] en transformant le sens des instruments culturels." This mysterious activity of expression takes place by a sort of ruse, whereby new meaning reconfigures a pre-existing structure, modulating it so that it expresses what the system doesn't yet contain: "[l'intention significative] nous donne après coup l'illusion qu'elle était contenue dans les significations déjà disponibles, alors que, par une sorte de *ruse,* elle ne les a épousées que pour leur infuser une nouvelle vie" (S, 149). The image of nascent significations "coupling with" or "marrying" existing significations so as to expand their possibilities vividly illustrates Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on *reprise* as the key to novelty and creative originality. Rather than as a rupture or break, creativity is construed as a *continuation* that involves taking up (*reprendre*) an unfinished gesture (of one's predecessors, for instance) or acknowledging one's situation within a tradition. Novelty occurs as variation.

The thesis that style works back on a system, reshaping it creatively, relies on the fact that space and language are *open* systems or *dynamic* structures, amenable to shaping. Merleau-Ponty's writings on space in the *Phénoménologie* demonstrate this point: that space is more mutable and elastic than the classical Cartesian conception of it

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[342] This resonates with Deleuze's definition of style as a language within a language. He discusses the fact that excellent literary stylists seem to "create" language, echoing Proust's assertion that "Les beaux livres sont écrits dans une sorte de langue étrangère." Deleuze writes: "Création syntaxique, style, tel est ce devenir de la langue […] la littérature opère une décomposition ou une déconstruction de la langue maternelle, mais aussi l'invention d'une nouvelle langue dans la langue, par création de syntaxe […] On dirait que la langue est prise d'un délire, qui la fait précisément sortir de ses propres sillons." Deleuze further emphasizes that it is the interstices, silences, spaces or holes (*écarts*) in language that enact this transformation-from-within of language under the pen of a writer. "La Littérature et la vie," *Critique et Clinique*, (Les Éditions Minuit: Paris, 1993), 16. In his article "Deleuze's Style," Ronald Bogue adds that Deleuze cites Gherasim Luca and Beckett as exemplars of the syntactic creation he describes.

would have us believe. Merleau-Ponty distinguishes two versions of space: one is geometric, homogenous and exterior (Cartesian), while the other is corporeal. He argues that geometric, objective space is a second-order construction founded on "corporeal space," which is fashioned by the desires and interests of the body. Merleau-Ponty extends his theory of the body-as-subject of experience to argue that the body *creates* the space in which it moves. It is the "prise du sujet sur son monde qui est l'origine de l'espace" (PP, 299). Rather than being *in* space or *part of space*, as the Aristotelian idea of space-as-container would have it, the body, for Merleau-Ponty, is the *origin* of all expressive spaces (PP, 182). This is a powerful and yet highly intuitive idea: "il n'y aurait pas pour moi d'espace si je n'avais pas de corps" (PP, 132).[343] In a characteristically beautiful passage, Merleau-Ponty figures corporeal space as the darkness of a theater—the background against which visible spectacles appear: "L'espace corporel peut se distinguer de l'espace extérieur et envelopper ses parties au lieu de les déployer parce qu'il est l'obscurité de la salle nécessaire à la clarté du spectacle, le fond de sommeil ou la réserve de puissance vague sur lesquelles se détachent le geste et son but" (PP, 130). This metaphor of corporeal space as darkness illustrates the primacy of corporeal space with respect to geometric space (or to any perception); it also suggests that corporeal space affords possibilities of interpenetration and fluidity that are absent from objective space, in which things must be appositely arrayed.[344] Objective space or geometrical space—the space described by Descartes in *Dioptrics,* with which Merleau-Ponty takes issue in *L'œil et L'esprit*—is constructed upon a reserve of *corporeal* space, which is experientially prior.[345]

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[343] Merleau-Ponty suggests that sensation, as our body's contact with the world, opens the possibility for our (re)creation of space: "nous avons avec chacune d'elles [sensations] une manière particulière d'être à l'espace et en quelque sorte faire l'espace," PP, 267.

[344] In a fascinating passage of *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Merleau-Ponty describes the effects of night, specifically insofar as discrete borders between self and world are eroded: "Quand, par exemple, le monde des objets clairs et articulés se trouve aboli, notre être perceptif amputé de son monde dessine une spatialité sans choses. C'est qui arrive dans la nuit. Elle n'est pas un objet devant moi, elle m'enveloppe, elle pénètre par tous mes sens, elle suffoque mes souvenirs, elle efface presque mon identité personnelle. Je ne suis plus retranché dans mon poste perceptif pour voir de là défiler à distance les profils des objets. La nuit est sans profils, elle me touche elle-même et son unité est l'unité mystique du *mana*. Même des cris ou une lumière lointaine ne la peuple que vaguement. C'est tout entière qu'elle s'anime, elle est une profondeur pure sans plans, sans surfaces, sans distance d'elle à moi" PP, 335. Here Merleau-Ponty depicts the encroachment of things on the perceiving body as frightening, but, as his theater metaphor suggests, as highly creative, insofar as it affords the possibility of a kind of re-mapping.

[345] Merleau-Ponty takes issue with the following position: "C'est espace sans cachette, qui en chacun de ses points est, ni plus ni moins, ce qu'il est, c'est cette identité de l'Être qui soutient l'analyse des tailles-douces. L'espace est en soi, ou plutôt il est l'en soi par excellence […] Orientation, polarité, enveloppement sont en lui des phénomènes dérivés, liés à ma présence," OE, 47. Merleau-Ponty thinks the opposite. For him, polarity and orientation found our experience of space, and geometrical space described by Descartes is a second order construction: "Son tort [de Descartes] était de l'ériger en un être tout positif, au-delà de tout point de vue, de toute latence, de toute profondeur, sans aucune épaisseur vraie," OE, 48. Most forcefully, Merleau-Ponty contends: "L'espace n'est plus celui dont parle la *Dioptrique*, réseau de relations entre objets, tel que le verrait un tiers témoin de ma vision, ou un géomètre qui la reconstruit et la survole, c'est un espace compté à partir de moi comme point ou degré zéro de la spatialité. Je ne le vois pas selon son enveloppe extérieure, je le vis du dedans, j'y suis englobé," OE, 58.

But what are we to make of the seemingly derivative relationship between corporeal and geometric space?[346] And how does corporeal space assure the mutability of space even after it has been construed as geometric or objective? Merleau-Ponty introduces his two kinds of space as follows: "[l]'expérience révèle sous l'espace objectif […] une spatialité primordiale dont la première n'est que l'enveloppe et qui se confond avec l'être même du corps" (PP, 184). The key is that spatiality merges (*se confond*) with the being of the body. Merleau-Ponty reminds us of the body's ability to orient itself *directly* (rather than determining its position relative to exterior coordinates). When applied to the body, the word "here" designates the installation of "first coordinates" by which one orders all the rest. In other words, the body orders space in relation to its tasks, needs and desires: of importance for the ordering of space is "la situation du corps en face de ses tâches" (PP, 130). Merleau-Ponty then describes the polarizing effect of a body's inhabitation of space: "Déjà la simple présence d'un être vivant transforme le monde physique, fait apparaître ici des « nourritures », ailleurs une « cachette », donne aux « stimuli » un sens qu'ils n'avaient pas" (PP, 230). Thus a landscape organizes itself: a rock crevice takes on meaning as a hiding place or a grove of fruit trees becomes a site where food may be found, and space in general acquires orientation and significance (*sens*) in relation to the possibilities it affords the body. This suggests that space, created by the movement of our bodies, is mutable: it can and does change qualitatively in response to our explorations.

In the *Phénoménologie,* Merleau-Ponty relates the body's ability to "create space," and to endow its surroundings with significance, to what he calls *motricité.* He conceives *motricité* as an original form of intentionality and as that which makes signification possible.[347] Insofar as *motricité* enables space to remain dynamic, or capable of supporting new "spatialities," it may be related to style.[348] The word *motricité* is best translated, perhaps, by the English word *motivity*,[349] which refers to the body's power to

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[346] Merleau-Ponty gives a detailed, sometimes contradictory account of the interrelation between corporeal and exterior space in his chapter "La spatialité du corps propre et la motricité" PP, 130-131 in particular. He concludes only that intelligible space and corporeal space are interdependent and that "toute figure se profile sur le double horizon de l'espace extérieur et de l'espace corporel." Part of the confusion arises from Merleau-Ponty's tendency to change his terminology, introducing for instance, "la forme universelle d'espace," which may or may not be the same as intelligible or exterior space.

[347] Merleau-Ponty cites A.A. Grünbaum's, "Aphasie und Motorik," which appeared in 1930 in *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie,* calling *la motricité* "un mode original d'intentionnalité ou de signification," PP, 232. Earlier, Merleau-Ponty instructs us to understand *la motricité* as a mode of original intentionality in the context of a discussion about how consciousness is originally not a "je pense que" but a "je peux," and founded on the possibilities of the body, PP, 171.

[348] For a provocative discussion of the relationship between style and intentionality, see Charles Altieri's "Personal Style as Articulate Intentionality," *The Question of Style in Philosophy and the Arts,* 201-219. Altieri seeks to recuperate a sense of "responsibility" associated with first-person agency, "developing a model of intentionality within which the first person becomes a positive dynamic force." He replaces subjectivity with style, which, as articulate intentionality, navigates and orders a plenitude that both orients and endangers intentional movement.

[349] Colin Smith translates this word as "motility." I find that "motivity" maintains important resonances with the word "motive" as well "motor," thus linking movement to motivation in a way that underscores a relation of this concept to intentionality and, eventually, to signification. "Motricity," the most direct translation, sounds awkward in English and fails to emphasize the French term's etymological relationship with motor and motive, which correlates more closely with the feminine adjective "motrice."

move itself and to the ensemble of nervous and muscular functions that make this possible. Citing an article called "Aphasie und Motorik" (1930), Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that "la motricité, prise à l'état pur, possède le pouvoir élémentaire de donner un sens *(Sinngebung)*." He continues:

> Même si, dans la suite, la pensée et la perception de l'espace se libèrent de la motricité et de l'être à l'espace, pour que nous puissions nous représenter l'espace il faut d'abord que nous y ayons été introduits par notre corps […] « La motricité est la sphère primaire où d'abord s'engendre le sens de toutes les significations *(der Sinn aller Signifikationen)* dans le domaine de l'espace représenté » (PP, 176).

The identification of *motricité* as the sphere where significations arise suggests that both signification and language found themselves on the body's movements.[350] The idea that both representational (homogenous) space and language depend on *motricité* also signals the mutability of these sytems: if our body's movement has the power to create space, then organized systems of space and language can be *recreated* in like fashion.

Merleau-Ponty's insistence that our body is not *in space* (*dans l'espace*) but *of space* (*à l'espace*) underscores this power of the body to polarize space, to induce orientation and direction. Space is not a kind of ether in which all things float, but a force that enables connections between entities.[351] A body that inhabits space continually restructures it through its movements. Such movements, moreover, create spaces within space: structures, schemas or *habitus*, "qui dessinent autour de lui [le corps] un entourage humain" (PP, 384). We might think of *habitus* (as it is used in the *Phénoménologie*) as the space around the human body, fashioned and made familiar by its movements, tastes and desires.[352] Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the role of *habit* in the body's structuring of space. He defines habit as a modulation of *motricité* that "exprime le pouvoir que nous ayons de dilater notre être au monde, ou de changer d'existence en nous annexant de nouveaux instruments" (PP, 177). *Motricité,* like style, engenders signification. As the body's faculty of movement, it inheres in space yet spurs alteration: it associates itself with the reconfiguration of space via bodily movement.

Merleau-Ponty calls the primary creation of space by the body an "irrational power," of which *la parole* "n'en est qu'un cas particulier," thus linking an individual's

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[350] The idea that language is based on the body is a familiar idea (going back to traditions of ancient rhetoric, where divisions of a speech were named for body parts and segmented by "joints"). Merleau-Ponty develops the notion that language stems from gesture in his chapter, "Le corps comme expression et parole," in the *Phénoménologie*. Kevin Aho offers a useful discussion of the bodily origins of language in Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in "The Missing Dialogue Between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty: On the Importance of the Zollikon Seminars," *Body and Society* 11, no. 2 (2005): 1-23.

[351] "L'espace n'est pas le milieu (réel ou logique) dans lequel se disposent les choses, mais le moyen par lequel la position des choses devient possible. C'est-à-dire qu'au lieu de l'imaginer comme une sorte d'éther dans lequel baignent toutes les choses ou le concevoir abstraitement comme un caractère qui leur soit commun, nous devons le penser comme la puissance universelle de leurs connexions" PP, 290-291.

[352] *Habitus* is a term that Marcel Mauss adapts from Aristotle and redefines in his 1934 article, "Techniques du Corps." There is not space here to do full justice to Pierre Bourdieu's later development of this concept in the 1970's, but it is worth mentioning a connection he makes (in a footnote) between habitus and the development of an "original discourse" *(le discours originel)*. For him, habitus is the place where an original (clan-based) discourse engenders itself. *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement,* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), 192-93. In the same work, Bourdieu's description of the relation between style and *distinction* emphasizes the paradoxical belonging *to* and difference *from* a structure that we have identified as a characteristic of style.

use of language to the fundamental project by which a body orients its space (PP, 230). (It is implied, perhaps, that such a project takes place *before* the ordering structures of reason are developed.) In "Le langage indirect et les voix du silence," a variant of Merleau-Ponty's argument about space is applied to language: just as geometrical space is constructed upon corporeal space, so does empirical or ready-made language draw upon expressive, "operant language." This distinction is familiar:[353] we find it, for instance, in Mallarmé, whom Merleau-Ponty cites as he elaborates the difference between "authentic" language and its ready made counterpart: "Distinguons l'usage empirique du langage déjà fait, et l'usage créateur, dont le premier d'ailleurs, ne peut être qu'un résultat." Merleau-Ponty rehearses the idea that empirical language is but "le rappel opportun d'un signe préétabli," whereas authentic language communicates by means of what it doesn't say—by the silences or spaces between words. The power of language to communicate *directly*, Merleau-Ponty remarks, is only a second-order effect, derived from an initial power to express what has never before been rendered in words (S, 72).

One of Merleau-Ponty's moves in this later essay is to test out an analogy between language and painting as forms of expression. Such a comparison, he tells us, "va peut-être nous faire déceler sous le langage parlé un langage opérant ou parlant dont les mots vivent d'une vie mal connue, s'unissent et se séparent comme l'exige leur signification latérale ou indirecte, même si, une fois l'expression accomplie, ces rapports nous *paraissent* évidents" (S, 122). What the comparison between language and mute arts of expression such as painting teaches us is that the indexical use of ready-made language is founded on a creative use of language (*l'usage créateur*). Creative language expresses indirectly rather than by point-to-point correspondence between sign and referent: it reconfigures the signifying apparatus so as to allow lateral or oblique meaning to emerge in the silences between what is said directly. Merleau-Ponty's comparison between language and painting could be said to desensitize us to empirical language. It follows that if we were to pretend we'd never spoken, we might catch a glimpse of an expressive use of language, in which words lead the vague life of colors, reconfiguring themselves in response to an intention not yet formed.

Merleau-Ponty's turn to painting in his philosophical writings must be understood as part of his project to develop a language for philosophy by recourse to spatial logic, coloration and affective communication. Claude Lefort underscores Merleau-Ponty's attempt to avoid explication or theoretical exegesis in favor of rendering something visible through the use of words. Philosophy "ne doit s'ouvrir son chemin qu'en accueillant l'énigme que hante le peintre, qu'en liant à son tour connaissance et création, dans l'espace de l'œuvre, qu'en faisant voir avec des mots." According to Lefort, *L'oeil et L'esprit* "n'indique pas seulement ce chemin, il le trace déjà par un certain mode d'écriture; il ne formule pas seulement une exigence, il la rend sensible. La méditation sur la peinture donne à son auteur la ressource d'une parole neuve, toute proche de la

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[353] Consider also: "On pourrait dire, en reprenant une célèbre distinction, que des *langages,* c'est-à-dire, les systèmes de vocabulaire et de syntaxe constitués, les « moyens d'expression » qui existent empiriquement, sont le dépôt et la sédimentation des actes de *parole* dans lesquels le sens informulé non seulement trouve le moyen de se traduire au-dehors, mais encore acquiert l'existence pour soi-même, et est véritablement créé comme sens. Ou encore on pourrait distinguer une *parole parlante* et une *parole parlée.* La première est celle dans laquelle l'intention significative se trouve à l'état naissant" PP, 224.

parole littéraire et même poétique."[354] Such a language resists resolution or completion, remaining open to insoluble paradoxes, making them visible without resolving them into positivistic statements that would suppress certain of their dimensions.

We must now ask how the collapsing parallel between space and language in Merleau-Ponty's writing influences the creative work of style. In the *Phénoménologie,* language is equated with the subject's manner of taking a *position* in a world of significations: "[Le langage] présente ou plutôt il *est* la prise de position du sujet dans le monde de ses significations (PP, 235)." Then the analogy between the body's movements (*comportement*) and a certain kind of speech is explained: "Le geste phonétique réalise, pour le sujet parlant et pour ceux qui écoutent, une certain structuration de l'expérience, une certaine modulation de l'existence, exactement comme un comportement de mon corps investit pour moi et pour autrui les objets qui m'entourent d'une certaine signification" (PP, 235). Just as the body structures and organizes its surroundings, so does creative language (*la parole parlante*) re-configure existing language. More than this, the manner in which language as *style* creates or carves (*creuse*) new language worlds within the existing one (in the same manner in which the body forges its *habitus* in existing space) effectively *modifies* existing conditons.

A particular style, a language within a language, or a literary world within the world, is not free fictionalizing without regard to existing conditions, but a modification of these conditions. This process of variation imitates and therefore reveals the structure of being: speech (*la parole*), as Merleau-Ponty writes in *Le visible et l'invisible*, "est partie totale des significations comme la chair du visible, comme elle, rapport à l'Être à travers un être, comme elle, narcissique, érotisée, douée d'une magie naturelle qui attire dans son réseau les autres significations comme le corps sent le monde en se sentant."[355] For Merleau-Ponty, flesh is an ontological designation that assures a kinship between a sensible *part* (*visible*) and the whole in which it inheres (*l'invisible*). The chiasm, discussed at length in the final section of *Le visible et l'invisible,* indicates a relations of mutual alteration between expressive acts (*le visible*) and the field of possibilities from which they differ and which they can modify. We could say, then, that style is a partial manifestation that has the creative power to alter the structure from which it disengages" style is a visible track that alters the structure of an existing landscape. If, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, there is a "chair du langage," *la parole* reacts back on this flesh of which it is part, transforming it.

Style emerges, in the case of already-established systems of language and space, as the "agent" of creative reconfiguration. In the case of empirical language, style jostles a linguistic apparatus (*parole parlée*) that has calcified. Merleau-Ponty describes operant language or *parole parlante,* where meaning is created, as "une autre manière de secouer l'appareil du langage ou du récit pour lui arracher un son neuf" (S, 75). In the *Phénoménologie* Merleau-Ponty observes that a new way of saying (*une parole nouvelle et authentique*) *presupposes* a linguistic setting that it will enrich. Creative novelty is thus aligned with variation and reconfiguration: "la communication suppose (tout en la dépassant et en l'enrichissant dans le cas d'une parole nouvelle et authentique) un certain

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[354] Lefort, "Preface" to OE, vii.
[355] Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible,* 156.

montage linguistique par lequel un sens habite les mots" (PP, 364).[356] Since meaning must live in words, there can be no going back to a pre-linguistic past where the generation of a "*parole authentique*" might be possible ex nihilo. There is, for Merleau-Ponty, "caché dans le langage empirique, un langage à la seconde puissance, où de nouveau les signes mènent la vie vague des couleurs" (S, 73). Such a living language emerges when, for instance, a poet or novelist *inhabits*[357] existing language and introduces a style that shakes its apparatus, marrying existing significations to reconfigure them into new means of expression. Style, defined as a variation on a structure, acts passively by reshaping empirical or existing language *from within*.

In his summary of his past and future projects, submitted in preparation for his candidature at the *Collège de France*, Merleau-Ponty accents the importance of systemic variation and hints at why his "literary" style becomes inseparable from his practice of philosophy:

> Le sens d'un livre est premièrement donné non tant par les idées, que par une variation systématique et insolite des modes du langage et du récit, ou des formes littéraires existantes. Cet accent, cette modulation particulière de la parole, si l'expression est réussie, est assimilée peu à peu par le lecteur et lui rend accessible une pensée à laquelle il était quelquefois indifférent ou même rebelle d'abord. La communication en littérature n'est pas simple appel de l'écrivain à des significations qui feraient partie d'un a priori de l'esprit humain : bien plutôt elle les y suscite par entraînement ou par une sorte d'action oblique. Chez l'écrivain la pensée ne dirige pas le langage du dehors : l'écrivain est lui-même comme un nouvel idiome qui se construit, s'invente des moyens de l'expression et se diversifie selon son propre sens.[358]

This description of literary meaning as that which communicates obliquely, effecting modulations of existing linguistic and literary forms, designs the contours of a style of indirect language that Merleau-Ponty will hone for the remainder of his life. This passage also suggests the kind of literary writing that would be most exemplary of this style—an allusive language that "means" through variation and appeals to the body's possibilities. As we will discuss in the next chapter, the invention of a wordless "language" of repetition, color and movement in *Quad,* and the composition of an unfamiliar but highly regular syntactical idiom in *Worstward Ho,* are both unusual but systematic variations of language and literary form. The next section of the present chapter considers Merleau-Ponty's own writing style to the extent that it performs the indirect language it describes, and his citations of authors and poets who exemplify the indirect language to which he also aspires. Though Beckett is not included among these examples, Merleau-Ponty's

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[356] This discussion takes place within the context of a discussion of lighting and its power to direct our gaze according to its *sens* (meaning and direction): "la perception suppose en nous un appareil capable de répondre aux sollicitations de la lumière selon leur sens (c'est-à-dire à la fois selon leur direction et leur signification, qui ne font qu'un)…" My point here is to underscore the point that newness or creativity presupposes the institution of a prior (linguistic or perceptual) "setting." This is important because it undermines the nostalgia for origins (a longing for a time *before* empirical language) that Merleau-Ponty's writings occasionally express, for instance: "Si nous voulons comprendre le langage dans son opération d'origine il nous faut feindre de n'avoir jamais parlé, le soumettre à une réduction," S, 75. Even a reduction (in Husserl's sense) is unnecessary if we consider style's power to induce change as predicated on the pre-existence of systems in which it can induce its variations.

[357] This notion of a writer inhabiting language is literalized in Beckett's *L'innommable*: "je suis en mots, je suis fait de mots, des mots des autres," 166.

[358] "Un inédit de Maurice Merleau-Ponty," *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Parcours deux 1951-1961*, 44.

description of indirect language closely anticipates the patterns of variation that distinguish Beckett's late choreography and prose.

III. Indirect Language and Phenomenology's Performance as Style

In an early essay, "Le roman et la métaphysique" (1945), Merleau-Ponty suggests a chiasmic relationship between philosophy and literature, claiming that great novelists (Stendhal, Balzac and Proust) are driven by philosophical ideas and that a novel or play can be a means of metaphysical research.[359] On the other hand, philosophy is conceived not as an attempt to *explain* the world or to discover its conditions of possibility, but as the formulation of an *experience* of the world. This means that metaphysics, in an altered sense of the term, "ne peut être plus rapporté au-delà de son être empirique—à Dieu, à la Conscience—, c'est dans son être même, dans ses amours, dans ses haines, dans son histoire individuelle ou collective." It is by bringing metaphysics down to earth (and into the affective life of the body)[360] that Merleau-Ponty aligns the task of philosophy with that of literature. A novel, for Merleau-Ponty, does not thematize ideas, but makes them exist "comme des choses."[361] Beyond this, expressive language—especially poetry—has the power to modify existence, opening dimensions and expanding the field of what is thinkable and livable. Merleau-Ponty's discussion of style as an agent of creative change becomes concretized in *indirect language,* which Merleau-Ponty both describes and, to some extent, performs in his phenomenological writing. "L'expression philosophique," he explains, "assume les mêmes ambiguïtés que l'expression littéraire, si le monde est fait de telle sorte qu'il ne puisse être exprimé que dans des « histoires » et comme montré du doigt."[362] Experiential truth is such that it cannot be stated directly, but only gestured toward, evoked, or rendered obliquely in the form, perhaps, of stories. Philosophy, like literature, should communicate indirectly, expressively, through style, according to Merleau-Ponty, and he conceives of phenomenology itself as movement or as *style.*[363]

Indirect language, via style, predates the genre distinction between philosophy and literature, and justifies Merleau-Ponty's focus on crafting a *language* rather than devoting himself to the compositon of novels or plays. But the development of an indirect language in Merleau-Ponty's writing is both supplemented and upstaged by the literary examples he cites. Attention to his use of literary examples, as well as to his poetic lexicon and overlapping similes, reveals that, despite his beautifully textured prose,

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[359] Eric Matthews usefully underscores this point in his study of Merleau-Ponty: "The task of that kind of philosophy [phenomenology] cannot be distinguished from that of the novel, and novels and plays can become 'philosophical' in their very being, in that the writing of a novel may be regarded as a form of phenomenological research." Matthews, *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty,* (Chesham, UK: Acumen Publishing, 2002), 135.

[360] Merleau-Ponty cites Pascal in claiming that metaphysics "est présente […] dans le moindre mouvement du coeur." The phonic relationship between corps and *cœur* reinforces this connection, as does the fact that the heart sustains the life of the body. Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et non-sens,* 36.

[361] Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et non-sens*, 34.

[362] Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et non-sens,* 37.

[363] This is a reference to the preface of the *Phénoménologie*: "la phénoménologie se laisse pratiquer et reconnaître comme manière ou comme style, elle existe comme mouvement […]" PP, 8.

Merleau-Ponty's texts fall short of performing the radical style of indirect language they propose. And yet such radical style is not unrealizable, for it is taken up (indirectly) by Beckett's experiments around bodily movement and syntax in the 1980's.

We might begin by asking what it means, concretely, to claim that style, as movement, painting or expressive language, opens dimensions, expanding space as well as the field of possibilities for signification. Style as the modulation of a setting, linguistic or spatial, depends upon Merleau-Ponty's observation in the *Phénoménologie* that the body is like a work of art. Both the body and the artwork signify without breaking their inherence in space and in time. In both cases, "on ne peut distinguer l'expression de l'exprimé."[364] The body's manner of relating to, moving within and perceiving space—its style—founds expressive or artistic language: "c'est l'opération expressive du corps, commencée par la moindre perception, qui s'amplifie en peinture et en art" (S, 112). Merleau-Ponty's description of philosophical communication as style further underscores this idea: "un texte philosophique encore mal compris me révèle au moins un certain « style » […] qui est la première esquisse de son sens, je commence à comprendre une philosophie en me glissant dans la manière d'exister de cette pensée, en reproduisant le ton, l'accent du philosophe" (PP, 219). In order to understand, according to this example, as readers we must inhabit a manner of existing (*glisser dans la manière d'exister de cette pensée*), or adopt, for a time, a movement or style. A language that would induce us, as readers, to imitate or to adopt the trajectory of a thought or of another person would not communicate by propositions and arguments, but appeal instead to the physical body in space as well as to the language-body. (These two versions of the body may not be, strictly speaking, separable). Given Merleau-Ponty's assertion that phenomenology is a *style* or movement before becoming aware of itself as philosophy (PP, 8), the *motricité* associated with the body's power to orient space founds phenomenology's expressivity. By means of indirect language, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology signifies *as style,* deriving its transformative powers from the body's way of shaping or modulating the settings in which it inheres.

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[364] "Ce n'est pas à l'objet physique que le corps peut être comparé, mais plutôt à l'œuvre d'art. Dans un tableau ou dans un morceau de musique, l'idée ne peut pas se communiquer autrement que par le déploiement des couleurs et des sons […] Il n'en va pas autrement d'un poème ou d'un roman, bien qu'ils soient faits de mots […] De même que la parole signifie non seulement par les mots, mais encore par l'accent, le ton, les gestes et la physionomie […] de même que la poésie, si elle est par accident narrative et signifiante, est essentiellement une modulation de l'existence […] Mais s'il se détache de notre gesticulation vitale, le poème ne se détache pas de tout appui matériel, et il serait irrémédiablement perdu si son texte n'était exactement conservé ; sa signification n'est pas libre et ne réside pas dans le ciel des idées : elle est enfermée entre les mots sur quelque papier fragile […] Quant au roman, bien qu'il se laisse résumer, bien que la « pensée » du romancier se laisse formuler abstraitement, cette signification notionnelle est prélevée sur une signification plus large, comme le signalement d'une personne est prélevé sur l'aspect concret de sa physionomie. Le romancier n'a pas pour rôle d'exposer des idées ou même d'analyser des caractères, mais de présenter un événement interhumain, de le faire mûrir et éclater sans commentaire idéologique, à tel point que tout changement dans l'ordre du récit ou dans le choix des perspectives modifierait le sens *romanesque* de l'événement. Un roman, un poème, un tableau, un morceau de musique sont des individus, c'est-à-dire des êtres où l'on ne peut distinguer l'expression de l'exprimé, dont le sens n'est accessible que par un contact direct et qui rayonnent leur signification sans quitter leur place temporelle et spatiale. C'est en ce sens que notre corps est comparable à l'œuvre d'art," PP,187-8.

The merit Merleau-Ponty sees in the work of art, whether painting, dance, music, poetry or the novel, is the manner in which content shapes form in the work and vice versa. The solidarity between expression and what is expressed is a powerful idea that Merleau-Ponty will try to import into his philosophical writings, which, in this sense, might be said to be "literary." Importantly, Merleau-Ponty defines the literary work of art as a *modulation* from *within* of the existing structure of language: "toutes les œuvres littéraires […] ne sont que des cas particuliers dans les permutations possibles des sons qui constituent le langage et de leurs signes littéraux." The effect of modulation achieved by "un certain arrangement des instruments déjà signifiants" that "suscite chez l'auditeur le pressentiment d'une signification autre et neuve" (S, 147) is compared to the effect of unveiling a painting in a room: we are able to register a change, without being able to say exactly *what* has changed. This modulation is described, in the same vein, as the change of atmosphere, not necessarily reducible to a list of observable phenomena, by which we intuit that a storm is about to break. Merleau-Ponty draws a further example of indirect communication from Balzac's *La comédie humaine,* in which a bouquet signifies love by virtue of the manner in which its presence alters an established context within the world of the novel: "L'amour *est* dans les bouquets que Félix de Vandenesse prépare pour Madame de Mortsauf aussi clairement que dans une caresse […] Le bouquet est jusqu'à l'évidence un bouquet d'amour, et portant il est impossible de dire ce qui en lui signifie l'amour" (PP, 377). These examples of indirect communication are described by Merleau-Ponty as "literary" to the extent that they communicate by modulating a setting (often, but not always, by inducing a sensible change). Style in literature, then, operates through indirect language; this way of reconfiguring surroundings is what Merleau-Ponty identifies in both the body and in the work of art.

Pierre Bourdieu's description of style in language as a *distinction* or deviation from familiar ways of speaking or writing helps us to appreciate Merleau-Ponty's idea of indirect language as a constellation of omissions that "means" by what it doesn't say. For Bourdieu, the value of wise language (*langage savant*) "réside dans un *écart*, c'est-à-dire dans la distance par rapport aux manières de parler simples et communes: […] Une figure de mots ou de style n'est jamais qu'une altération de l'usage."[365] In some ways, Merleau-Ponty's view of style as a *via negativa* is more radical, for the "alteration of usage" that marks it is motivated by an ineffable "intention" that inhabits existing significations and configures them according to its needs. Merleau-Ponty compares expressive language to the "zones of emptiness" that bring liquid to a boil:

> l'intention de parler […] apparaît comme l'ébullition dans un liquide, lorsque, dans l'épaisseur de l'être, des zones de vide se constituent et se déplacent vers le dehors […] Cette ouverture toujours recréé dans la plénitude de l'être est ce qui conditionne la première parole de l'enfant, comme la parole de l'écrivain, la construction du mot comme celle des concepts. Telle est cette fonction que l'on devine à travers le langage, qui se réitère, s'appui sur elle-même, ou qui, comme une vague se rassemble et se reprend pour se projeter au-delà d'elle-même (PP, 238-239).

The image of "*zones de vide*" developing in the thickness of being gives us a vivid image of indirect language as an *imprint* or *trace* (also empty) of an ineffable "intention"—or, we could say, of an "unspeakable trajectory." Language, like flesh and like being, supports signification. Like a wave, (an image we find often in Merleau-Ponty's writing),

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[365] Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement*, (Paris: Les éditions minuit, 1979), 250.

expressive language disengages and returns, creating space, and thus modifying its surroundings by its movement.

A relationship between the movement of the body and indirect language is best exemplified in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of a passage from Stendhal's *Le rouge et le noir*. Merleau-Ponty claims that a novel "exprime tacitement comme un tableau." One can talk about the subject of a novel the way one can talk about the subject of a painting, and yet what counts is not what is said explicitly, or what can be summarized, but the manner by which we (as readers) are made to experience the lacks, profiles or gaps that compose a character's experience. The desire of Julien Sorel to murder Mme de Rênal "nest *dit* nulle part." Merleau-Ponty writes: "Il n'est pas besoin de « Julien pensait », « Julien voulait ». Il suffit, pour exprimer, que Stendhal se glisse en Julien et fasse paraître sous nos yeux, à la vitesse du voyage, les objets, les obstacles, les moyens, les hasards" (S, 123). It is by assuming the imaginary *body* of his character, and with it Julien's manner of moving and perceiving, that Stendhal renders his murderous intent. Merleau-Ponty continues:

> cette proportion inusitée des choses omises aux choses dites, ne résulte pas même d'un *choix*. Consultant sa propre sensibilité à autrui, Stendhal lui a trouvé soudain un corps imaginaire plus agile que son propre corps, il a fait comme dans une vie seconde le voyage de Verrières selon une cadence de passion sèche qui choisissait pour lui le visible et l'invisible, ce qu'il y avait à dire et à taire. La volonté de mort, elle n'est donc nulle part dans les mots: elle est entre eux, dans les creux d'espace, de temps, de significations qu'ils délimitent […] [Le romancier] s'installe dans la conduite d'un personnage et n'en donne au lecteur que la griffe, la trace nerveuse et péremptoire dans l'entourage. Si l'auteur est écrivain, c'est-à-dire capable de trouver les élisions et les césures qui signent la conduite, le lecteur répond à son appel et le rejoint au centre virtuel de l'écrit, *même si ni l'un ni l'autre ne le connaissent*. Le roman comme compte rendu d'événements, comme énoncé des idées, thèses ou conclusions, comme signification manifeste ou prosaïque, et le roman comme opération d'un style, signification oblique ou latente, sont dans un simple rapport d'homonymie" (S, 123-124).

As readers and bodies we are familiar with the repertoire of possibilities available to a human body, and we recognize tension, passion and distress in a manner of behaving and moving. Stendhal, installing himself in the movement, or *conduite* (bodily attitude) of his character, gives us the ellipses and limitations of perspective that compose the landscape of Julien's experience. Between the words, at the virtual center of writing, we as readers grasp not only what is meant, but a different, more indirect way of meaning through an appeal to the manner in which a body structures its space into perspectives and expresses its passions in the cadence of its movements. *Le rouge et le noir* orients language around the activities or experiences of a body, relating literary language, at least in this instance, to the structuring, styling effect of a body moving in space.

Stendhal was an important literary reference for Merleau-Ponty, who devoted his 1952-3 lectures at the *Collège de France,* "Recherches sur l'usage littéraire du langage," to an analysis of Valéry and Stendhal.[366] Michel Collot suggests that the genius Merleau-Ponty finds in Stendhal's writing is attributable to the manner in which Stendhal renders scenes in his novels according to a specific and exclusive point of view: "La notion de perspective, chère à Merleau-Ponty, désigne notamment cette dépendance entre l'organisation du visible et le point de vue du sujet. Un des aspects qui retient Merleau-

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[366] Merleau-Ponty, *Résumés de cours : Collège de France 1952-1960*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

Ponty chez Stendhal, c'est précisément cette mise en perspective du monde."[367] This forming of the world into perspectives according to a body is how meaning develops as style. Collot further describes the meaning of a text in terms of landscape: "Le sens d'un texte, comme celui d'un paysage, repose sur la disposition des éléments qui le composent; c'est par son aptitude à créer de nouveaux rapports et de solidarités inédites entre les mots qu'un écrivain peut rendre compte de la singularité de son rapport au monde."[368] Importantly, the subject-as-body, for Merleau-Ponty, organizes and reorganizes the landscape of space and words through its style. Merleau-Ponty explains that, for the writer who works with language, "il s'agit de produire un système de signes qui restitue par son agencement interne le paysage d'une expérience, il faut que les reliefs, les lignes de force de ce paysage induisent une syntaxe profonde, un mode de composition et de récit, qui défont et refont le monde et le langage usuels."[369] Stendhal's way of rendering the landscapes exclusive to the perspectives of characters may explain his importance to Merleau-Ponty's theory of literature, but do we find in *Le rouge et le noir* a "*syntaxe profond,*" induced by the body's creative relation to its landscape? Do Stendhal's phrases unmake and remake usual language? It seems that for a more radical undoing and redoing of *syntax* (at least), Merleau-Ponty would have been better served by the examples of elliptical syntax in *Comment C'est* or *Worstward Ho,* which dramatically refashion the usual modes of existing language.

Beckett is not Merleau-Ponty's only notable omission. In a letter to Claude Simon, Merleau-Ponty regrets not having read Robbe-Grillet.[370] (We can imagine that the evocative and significant smashing of the centipede in *La Jalousie* and the cadences and elliptical perspectives in this work in general would have nourished Merleau-Ponty's thinking about style and indirect language.) In 1961 Merleau-Ponty gave a course on Claude Simon, whose work he deemed, along with that of Stendhal, exemplary of indirect language and literary style.[371] Claude Imbert suggests that what impressed Merleau-Ponty about *La Route des Flandres* was the way in which the novel "avait su dire la guerre par la non-perception de la guerre, dans un chevauchement de souvenirs, d'imaginaire et d'impersonnalité."[372] Here again, a certain kind of literature manages to "say" by not saying, and embraces the *via negativa* of indirect language that seems, more often then not, to appeal to the body's way of fashioning perspectives. Beckett's works too, we might observe, say by not saying; *Watt,* with its glitches and deviations, has been

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[367] Following George Blin (*Stendhal et les problèmes du roman,* (Paris : José Corti, 1954)), Collot further describes Stendhal as "l'inventeur de la technique de restriction de champ qui donne à voir à travers le point de vue exclusif d'un personnage, selon le procédé que Genette a baptisé focalisation interne." Michel Collot, "L'œuvre comme paysage d'une expérience," *Merleau-Ponty et le littéraire,* eds. Anne Simon and Nicolas Castin, (Paris: Presses de l'École Normale Supérieure, 1997), 23-38, 29.

[368] Collot, "L'œuvre comme paysage d'une expérience," 29. Collot also makes an important connection between landscape and subjectivity: "Le paysage est toujours lié à l'activité d'un sujet," 29.

[369] Merleau-Ponty, *Résumés de cours,* 40.

[370] Merleau-Ponty, "Cinq notes sur Claude Simon" (1961), *Parcours deux: 1951-1961*, (Paris: Verdier, 2000), 310-317, 314.

[371] Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de Cours 1959-1961*, ed. Stephanie Menasé, (Paris: Gallimard, 1996). See also Jacques Neefs, "Le Style et vision (Merleau-Ponty et Claude Simon)," *Merleau-Ponty et le littéraire,* eds. Anne Simon and Nicolas Castin, (Paris: Presses de l'École Normale Supérieure, 1997), 116-131.

[372] Claude Imbert, "L'Écrivain, le peintre, et le philosophe," *Merleau-Ponty et le littéraire,* eds. Anne Simon and Nicolas Castin, (Paris: Presses de l'École Normale Supérieure, 1997), 53-80, 75.

read as a profound commentary on a war it never mentions. And *Fin de Partie,* as Adorno persuasively argues, may involve an oblique critique of the holocaust, all the more penetrating because of what it doesn't mention.[373] In the same letter to Claude Simon, Merleau-Ponty compares Simon's literary oeuvre to a body (Simon's own). He writes: "Si vous reprenez vos livres, ou bien ils sont encore trop près de vous, vous reconnaissez les phrases dès leur début, comme vous reconnaissez vos bras et vos jambes."[374] This underscores, literally, the idea that a literary work of art is the expression of the physical body, to the extent that an author recognizes his sentences in the same way he would recognize his arms or his legs. Indirect language, as explored through a series of literary examples, is the trace of the body's movement in a linguistic field that induces transformations in the topography of existing language.

      Balzac, Stendhal and Claude Simon by no means exhaust Merleau-Ponty's catalogue of literary examples, and the fact that so much literature is woven into his texts contributes to the stylized language he cultivates for his phenomenology. The work of Anne Simon has shown the manner in which Proustian rhythms and images shape the prosescape of *Le visible et l'invisible.*[375] And Merleau-Ponty's writing, more generally, is haunted by the syntax and repertoire of images of other writers (Bergson, Husserl, Malraux, Valéry, Mallarmé, Michaux, Ponge, Sartre, Balzac, Stendhal, Simon, to name a few). But the dense allusions embedded in Merleau-Ponty's texts do not signify some lack of creative originality on the part of their author. Rather, the fusion of philosophical and literary styles in the making of a Merleau-Pontian, phenomenological style is in keeping with our definition of style as a modification of an *existing* landscape; it involves "taking up" the unfinished gestures of others:

> Ce n'est pas avec des « représentations » ou avec une pensée que je communique d'abord, mais avec un sujet parlant, avec un certain style d'être et avec le « monde » qu'il vise. De même que l'intention significative qui a mis en mouvement la parole d'autrui n'est pas une pensée explicite, mais un certain manque qui cherche à se combler, de même la reprise par moi de cette intention n'est pas une opération de ma pensée, mais une modulation synchronique de ma propre existence, une transformation de mon être" (PP, 224).

S*tyle* invites the taking up *(reprise)* of a movement, communicates through a "synchronic modulation" of familiar surrounds, and, more exaggeratedly, transforms being. Merleau-Ponty is not threatened by style, as Beckett and Proust claim to be (the former attempts to escape it by writing in French, while the latter claims that the styles of others must be purged through pastiche). Instead, his prose weaves together the syntactical styles of other writers, taking up their particular ways of organizing words in a gesture of reprise. This weaving and bricolage becomes, curiously, a mark of Merleau-Ponty's *own*

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[373] Theodor Adorno, "Trying to Understand Engdame" trans. Michael T. Jones, *New German Critique*, no. 26, *Critical Theory and Modernity* (Spring-Summer, 1982): 119-150.

[374] The letter continues as follows: "vous ne voyez pas la fusée tracer son sillage. Ou bien, si le livre est ancien, vous ne les reconnaissez pas d'emblée, mais alors vous avez l'accablante impression d'avoir perdu un talisman qui était en votre possession quand vous l'avez écrit. Si vous écriviez de la philosophie, vous auriez, proportion gardée, des à-coups de la même espèce. Les seuls intellectuels heureux sont peut-être les purs critiques qui regardent la littérature comme un entomologiste les espèces vivantes, qui ont la passion maniaque de la chose écrite, et seulement comme consommateurs." Merleau-Ponty, "Cinq notes sur Claude Simon" [1961], *Parcours deux: 1951-1961*, 315.

[375] Anne Simon, "Proust et l' « architecture du visible »," *Merleau-Ponty et le littéraire,* 105-116.

organization of language; it performs, in this respect, the generation of a style as a *variation* of what has come before.

But style, for Merleau-Ponty is both the variation of physical surroundings (or existing linguistic and cultural fields) according to a bodily perspective *and* a consistency that facilitates recognition and the creation of meaning. Style must be communicable as a language, or, better, as a language within a language, following Deleuze's description.[376] A sustained reading of Merleau-Ponty shows a marked consistency in the selection of metaphors and similes. The repetition and coherence in his figurative language reveals what one might call a "rubric," which is not to be confused with the rigidity of a philosophical system. A rubric, etymologically, is a type of red chalk developed from red ochre, a natural pigment found in the earth. In the early days of printing, a rubric was used to mark headings and the first letters of book sections. It was used to define and delimit sections—as a marker, we could say, between background and foreground. The term is now used to designate a standard or system, but in assigning to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy an internal rubric, we keep these early definitions in mind and read Merleau-Ponty's rubric of philosophical language as the manifestation of a coherent style.

In Merleau-Ponty's lexicon of images, there is a persistence of certain words and themes. The notion of a hollow or void (*creux*) comes to mind, as do the following word-images: a wave (*vague*), a wake (*sillage*), trace (*trace*), fabric (*tissu*), fold (*pli*), gap or interval (*écart*), grafting (*enté*), flesh (*chair*), the chiasmus and a discourse around magnetism and polarization. This repertoire of recurring poetic images helps to fashion a language within language or a "*monde linguistique découpé de langage.*"

In addition to these recurring images, a series of poetic and rhetorical devices in Merleau-Ponty's writing contributes to the literary character of his style. The most important and prevalent of these devices is simile, which occurs in overlapping fashion as if to suggest that what is being described is *like,* but finally *exceeds* whatever it is to which it is being compared. Simile in Merleau-Ponty is perhaps a way of delimiting what cannot be named directly, of layering image upon image in the hope that an outline of the ineffable may appear. Anne Simon and Nicolas Castin have identified these overlapping similes and the more general appearance of continual qualifications in Merleau-Ponty's writing as instances of *epanorthosis*, a figure of speech associated with self-correction that is also prevalent in Beckett's work, especially *L'innommable*.[377] Examples of continual shifting among images and auto-correction are numerous in Merleau-Ponty. In *Le visible et l'invisible*, we find: "C'est comme si notre vision se formait en son cœur, ou comme s'il y avait de lui à nous une accointance aussi étroite que celle de la mer et de la plage" and "il y a deux cercles, ou deux tourbillons, ou deux sphères."[378] Shifting images and continual self-correction enable Merleau-Ponty's writing to maintain awareness of its own contingency and to avoid rigidifying into propositional truth-claims; the qualification "as if" (*comme si*) implies that whatever is claimed might just as well be

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[376] Deleuze, *Critique et Clinique*, 15-16

[377] Just one example is the following: "il n'y a pas de liens ici, il est comme enraciné, c'est des liens si l'on veut, il faudrait que la terre tremble, ce n'est pas de la terre, on ne sait pas ce que c'est, c'est comme de la sargasse, non, c'est comme de la mélasse," Beckett, *L'innomable*, 129.

[378] Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible,* 171 and 180. The second example is the one Anne Simon and Nicolas Castin cite in their "Avant-Propos," *Merleau-Ponty et le littéraire,* 9-19, 16.

otherwise. In addition to smile and epanorthosis, Castin and Simon identify chiasm (as a rhetorical figure), interrogation, metaphor, assonance, alliteration and paranomasia in Merleau-Ponty's writing, as well as "un jeu de correspondances et d'« échanges », de « rapports latéraux » et de « parentés » qui vient sous-tendre l'avancée philosophique, et donner à son langage le poids d'incarnation qui la justifie."[379] The confusion between meaning and sound associated with paranomasia (the juxtaposition of words with similar sounds and different meanings) is a privileging of sound sensations over semantic meanings, a thickening and texturing of the sound surface of language. It is a similar re-alignment of associative links that drives the sensory "logic" of Lucky's *discours* in *En attendant Godot.*

Merleau-Ponty claims that literature, or, more broadly, aesthetics, has the power to *open* space. This claim depends on a distinction between objective space and a more primary, dynamic and flexible space organized—and even created—by the wants, interests and movements of the body. Merleau-Ponty gives the following example: "ce n'est pas dans l'espace objective que l'organiste joue. En réalité, ses gestes pendant la répétition sont des gestes de consécration: ils tendent des vecteurs affectifs, ils découvrent des sources émotionnelles, ils créent un espace expressif comme les gestes de l'augure délimitent le *templum*" (PP, 181). A "literary" philosopher, like (some) prophets or like the artist-musician in Merleau-Ponty's example, has the almost ritualistic power to bring spaces into being through an expressive performance of style. To continue the previous example, Merleau-Ponty describes music breaking across visible space to forge a new dimension: "[la musique] insinue à travers l'espace visible une nouvelle dimension où elle déferle comme, chez les hallucinés, l'espace clair des choses perçues se redouble mystérieusement d'un « espace noir » où d'autres présences sont possibles" (PP, 267). But we must ask: is this doubling of space—this creation of a realm in which other presences are possible—something that Merleau-Ponty's language achieves? Do his literary devices invest his language with the power to expand the existing signifying apparatus, tearing from it new sound? Despite attempts to perform the indirect language he describes, Merleau-Ponty's philosophical writing is perhaps not radical or different enough to tear from language new ways of sounding so as to create "sense." It falls short, I suggest, of the space-opening power of aesthetic performativity that he describes. And yet we might identify an actual demonstration of this incantatory power to open space, to double it with dimensions in which other presences are possible, and to challenge usual ways of meaning by transforming language so that it appeals to the body and to sensation. The peopling of the void in *Worstward Ho*, or the incantatory phrase-fragments of *Mal vu mal dit* illustrate more forcefully than Merleau-Ponty's philosophical-poetic language, or even the literary examples he cites, what it might mean to re-invent the world through a modulation of existing language.[380]

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[379] Castin and Simon, "Avant-Propos," *Merleau-Ponty et le littéraire,* 15-16. They also identify a complex use of internal focalization, whereby Merleau-Ponty adopts the point of view of Sartre or Husserl in such an involved way that a reader forgets that Merleau-Ponty is merely retracing the philosophical views with and against which he is working.

[380] To re-imagine philosophy as a reinvention of language according to the properties of the silent, spatiality of, say, painting, neglects the category of the temporal, or at least it threatens to. We might

respond to such a query on the part of the reader—the inevitable response: "What about time?"—by recourse to an argument Berel Lang makes in his essay, "Style of Method." Style, Lang argues, is part of the *genealogy* (the series of questions, answers and motives) that gives rise to philosophical writing but which is most often *repressed* in philosophical writing out of a desire to fashion philosophy as an a-historical, a-personal and a-temporal *method*. Lang likens the repression of genealogy in philosophical writing (Nietzsche, Plato, Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein etc. are exceptions) to a "noble lie" told by philosophers to themselves about the "atemporality of a temporal discourse." Style, then, must be associated not only with the *situation* of a body in space (its limited perspective), but also with the inherence of that body in time. The idea that transcendence is possible *only* by assuming the situation of one's body in space also requires an acceptance of the situation of one's body in time. Neither time nor space is a homogenous system; rather, they are *dynamic* in response to the way we move within them—to style. Situation in space *and in time* is necessary for subjectivity and to Merleau-Ponty's reformulation of subjective agency as style. Arguably, discourses concerning boundaries and limits apply to time as well as to space, but our focus here has been to trace the effects of style as the organization of a bodily perspective, and the most natural chain of metaphors leads us to painterly perception and to the framing of a landscape.

Chapter 5
The Graft of the Body in Language: *Quad* and *Worstward Ho*

A vivid passage of *Le visible et l'invisible* imagines a language that would not require a writer or speaker to organize its words. Rather, words would assemble themselves through their scripter (a philosopher, perhaps) by a spontaneous interlacing of meaning and by an "occult traffic of metaphor." This language would permit the *things themselves* to speak, rather than severing, as most language does, the connection between speaking subject and world. It is a language of this genre—an expressive, "living" language—that Bergson claims for philosophy. In this passage, deeply indebted to Bergson, semantically and stylistically, Merleau-Ponty reinstates the demand for the revitalization of language.[381] He adds that the work of such a language, a *langage opérant*, would be the task of creation through articulation, which is also the task of philosophy.[382]

But despite its layered images, which seem to hold signification in suspension, Merleau-Ponty's prose never breaks the contract of the sentence, nor dislocates the joints of language. Claude Lefort must go to great lengths to claim that his friend and mentor's work communicates via the indirect language it claims for philosophy. (He invokes the unfinished state of the manuscript of *Le visible et l'invisible,* implying that it was Merleau-Ponty's death that allowed his work to "speak" by means of what it didn't say.)[383] Though literary qualities in Merleau-Ponty's writing may be said to shift the genre boundaries of philosophy, his description of indirect language requires a radical linguistic innovation, which, for all its sonority and imagery, Merleau-Ponty's writing never fully achieves.

The style of indirect language Merleau-Ponty describes is realized, inadvertently, years later, in Beckett's experimental pieces, *Quad* (1981) and *Worstward Ho* (1983). The choice of these two works as instances of indirect language is motivated by the

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[381] Merleau-*Ponty, Le visible et l'invisible,* ed. Claude Lefort, (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 166, my emphasis. (Hereafter cited in the text as VI). See also Bergson's "L'intuition philosophique," *La Pensée et le Mouvant: Essais et conférences,* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1938), 117-142, in which he discusses the distortions of language and the importance of silence to philosophical conjecture.

[382] The necessity that philosophy interrogate *being* on this model leads to a definition of it according to the universal theme of *logos:* "ce logos est un thème absolument universel, il est le thème de la philosophie. Elle-même [la philosophie] est langage, repose sur le langage; ni pour parler du pré-langage ou du monde muet qui les double: au contraire, elle est langage opérant, ce langage-là ne peut savoir que du dedans, par la pratique, est ouvert sur les choses, appelé par les voix du silence, et continue un essai d'articulation qui est l'Être de tout être," VI, 166. Given that creation is always *re*-creation (*reprise*) for Merleau-Ponty (and never creation *ex nihilo*), philosophy's project could be more precisely described as the task of reconfiguring existing language by remobilizing its processes of articulation.

[383] The "l'ouvre inachevé," Lefort writes, "parle encore quand elle se tait, par la vertu qu'elle a de désigner ce qui est et sera toujours au-delà de l'exprimable." The work's unfinished state enables "le mouvement profond par lequel elle [la nécessité] s'installe dans la parole pour s'ouvrir à un inépuisable commentaire du monde, son avènement à un ordre d'existence où elle paraît s'établir pour toujours," VI, 341.

manner in which they *dramatize* or *perform* the body's relation to space as the motor or foundation for the possibility of meaning production. *Quad,* a wordless teleplay, involves the *parcours* of bodies in colored robes making paths across a white square, and I argue that this wordless, spatial drama serves to investigate the roots of meaning in language. *Quad* fashions its own language—one composed of the movements of bodies—to underscore the manner in which the body's organization of space is necessary to the possibility of meaning. This spatial "logic" of meaning is then *grafted* onto existing language in *Worstward Ho*, an experimental prose poem composed in English.[384] A study of these two works promises to show how expressivity in language models itself on the body's navigation of space, as suggested by Merleau-Ponty's notion of indirect language.

Beckett scholars tend to read *Quad* and *Worstward Ho* as paragons of a "dernière esthétique" associated with exhaustion, minimalism, despair and nihilism. The deeply enigmatic structure of both texts has led to diverse interpretations, yet these analyses tend to emphasize the difficulties of meaning rather than the ways in which language might be revitalized by experimental literature's involvement of the body (in particular its manner of orienting space by its movement). Deleuze's essay, "L'épuisé," set a precedent for reading *Quad* as a manic exhaustion of the possible, and critics tend to view it as an illustration of human compulsion, a "purgatorical calculus," the plight of the passive and the damned, or as a mathematical strategy for working through all possible combinations in a series.[385] This chapter contests the dominance of such readings by emphasizing the kaleidoscopic alterations of the visual, affective and acoustic space achieved by the movements of the brightly clad bodies. *Worstward Ho* is often read as a self-negating text, in which the language diminishes, dwindles, and even self-cannibalizes. And yet its elliptical, childlike syntax creates the bodily perspective necessary to its comprehension, and the self-reflexivity of its prose endows the text with a strange kind of sentience.

Merleau-Ponty's effort to determine the relation between the visible and the invisible leads him to describe "the visible" (*la visibilité*) moving into a lighter, more mobile body: a body of language. Visibility, he writes, "émigrait, non pas hors de tout corps, mais dans un autre corps moins lourd, plus transparent." He continues to suggest that the "flesh" of language is freer than that of the body: "[la visibilité] changeait de chair, abandonnant celle du corps pour celle du langage, et affranchie par là, mais non délivrée de toute condition," (VI, 198). If the visible is more agile in a *language body*, perhaps innovations in language suggest possibilities for change more generally. This would mean that the task of experimental literature is very close—if not identical—to that of philosophy as Merleau-Ponty describes it, for linguistic and literary innovations can dissolve and re-align boundaries between sense and nonsense, subject and object, active and passive, possible and real.[386]

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[384] On one of the final manuscript pages of *Worstward Ho*, we find a drawing that Beckett sketched of *Quad*. While this is not sufficient evidence of a relationship between the two works, it does suggest that Beckett was thinking about the spatial partitioning that happens in *Quad* as he was writing *Worstward Ho*. RUL (Reading University Library) MS 2602 f. 18v.

[385] Gilles Deleuze, "L'Épuisé," *Quad*, (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1992).

[386] A question remains as to whether experimental literature's power to "open dimensions" depends upon the metaphysical reassurance of a common world—a reassurance we find in Merleau-Ponty but not in Beckett.

We could say that the movement from *Quad* to *Worstward Ho* enacts a reversibility between space and language: if *Quad* dramatizes the body's transformative articulations of space, *Worstward Ho* collapses the parallel between language and space, so that the physical, spatial body enters language as if by means of a graft. The figure of the graft (rather than that of the parallel) illustrates the manner in which language in *Worstward Ho* is restyled through self-reflexivity. As a transfer of living tissue—either from one body to another, between parts of the same body—grafting achieves an invigorating variation that is not unrelated to the work of style. It is especially appropriate, then, that the word "graft" derives from the Latin *graphium*, which is a stylus used for writing.[387] The grafting (or re-grafting) of the body's spatial modes of meaning into language is a way of revivifying existing language (*la parole parlée*) and transforming it into an expressive language (*la parole parlante*) that founds itself on the body's navigation and negotiation of space.

I. The Spatial Language of *Quad*

Despite the captivating image it presents, relatively little has been written about *Quad*. In her introduction to a volume of the *Journal of Beckett Studies* devoted to the television plays, Ulrike Maude laments the lack of critical energy devoted to these works. But despite the fact that the title of her introduction refers to Beckett's mention of *Quad* as his "crazy invention for TV,"[388] the volume privileges analyses of the other television plays over the mute, mesmeric *Quad*.[389] Mary Bryden attributes a lack of critical attention to *Quad* to its effect on viewers: it leaves them "half-concussed, dazed, bereft of critical tools."[390] Yet, despite the absence of a sustained, exclusive analysis of *Quad*, say, in monograph form, critics do muse over it in their studies of other pieces. A Rorschach of sorts, the play has elicited a variety of observations: S.E. Gontarski observes the "sinister" (left-turning) movements of the players and their resemblance to Gustave Dorés engravings of Dante's damned, while Enoch Brater calls it "choreographed madness" that evokes the origins of Western theater in "the dithyramb and in the choral dance." Others have found a "Pythagorean element of the irrational" in the triangular movement of the players (Chris Ackerley), or references to the alchemical dances that fascinated W.B. Yeats (Minako Okamuro). More recent readings have focused on its mathematical properties, calling it a "purgatorial calculus," or interpreting it in relation to Leibniz's theory of the monad (Erik Tonning). Many critics find in *Quad* the regularity

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[387] "Graft" comes from the Old French *greffe,* the latin *graphium,* and the Greek γραφίον, which mean to write. The meanings "stylus" and "pencil" are also involved. Entry for "Graff," *The Oxford English Dictionary,* Second edition, 1989, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/80465, accessed 29 July 2011.

[388] Beckett in a letter to Dr. Müller-Freienfels, 30 Jan. 1980 (Süddeutscher Rundfunk), as quoted in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame,* 591.

[389] An exception to this is Brian Wall's study that reads *Quad* read as an allegory for alienation under late capitalism. Brian Wall, "*…but the clouds…*, *Quad,* and *Nacht und Träume*: Fantasy, Death, Repetition" *Journal of Beckett Studies* 18 (2009). See Maude's introduction in the same volume: "'Crazy Inventions': Beckett on TV," 1-9.

[390] Mary Bryden, "*QUAD*: Dancing Genders," *The Savage Eye/L'œil fauve: New Essays on Samuel Beckett's Television Plays*, ed. Catharina Wulf, (Amersterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1995).

and expressivity of a "language," which suggests that the patterning, ordering, and orienting of space it performs may be a paradigm for the artistic production of meaning (*sens*).[391]

Deleuze's reading of *Quad* as the logical "exhaustion" of a series has shaped much of the existing scholarship on *Quad*. But while many critics connect an ethos of "exhaustion" to Beckett's increasing minimalism, I'll suggest that a vexed relation to language drives *Quad* to locate the rudiments of significance in the patterning or articulation of space by bodies. It is in order to preface a reading of *Quad* in connection with *Worstward Ho*—a comparison that has not been sufficiently emphasized[392]—that I consider Deleuze's idea that *Quad* institutes a "language of space." In "L'épuisé," published in 1992 with Edith Fournier's French translation of *Quad*, Deleuze argues that *Quad* exhausts all "possibles" through combinatorial method, which works through "inclusive disjunctions" (i.e. "*il pleut. Il ne pleut pas*"). He also identifies three types of language in Beckett's work: a language of names and things (language I), one of flows of voices (language II), and a language III that is "non plus celle des noms ou des voix, mais celle des images, sonnantes, colorantes" (E, 72). Deleuze associates the television plays with this third language, which "ne procède pas seulement avec des images, mais avec des espaces" (E, 74). Despite the fact that Deleuze describes the teleplays as constituting a *language* of images and spaces, he argues that this language (and *Quad*) "exhaust space" by moving through all of its directions and possibilities.[393] Deleuze's justification for his reading of *Quad*—he writes: "Le texte de Beckett est parfaitement clair: il s'agit d'épuiser l'espace"—depends upon a refrain that is repeated three times in the French text: "tous ainsi épuisé" (*Quatre solos possibles, tous ainsi épuisés*). Beckett's English version, which simply reads, "all given," evokes less the theme of exhaustion (*Four*

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[391] The critical works referenced in this paragraph are discussed in greater detail below. They are: S.E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), Enoch Brater, *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's late style in the theater*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Chirs Ackerley, "'Ever Know What Happened?': Shades and Echoes in Samuel Beckett's Plays for Television," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 18 (2009); 136-64, Minako Okamuro, "Alchemical Dances in Beckett and Yeats," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui* 14 (2003); 87-105. Brett Stevens, "A Purgatorial Calculus: Beckett's Mathematics in 'Quad,'" *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. S.E. Gontarski, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), Erik Tonning, *Samuel Beckett's Abstract Drama: Works for State and Screen 1962-1985*, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), Catharina Wulf, "Introduction" in *The Savage Eye/L'œil fauve*, and Gilles Deleuze's "L'Épuisé." References to *Quad* as a language include Deleuze's classification of the television plays as a third "metalanguage" in Beckett's oeuvre, Catharina Wulf's reference to the teleplays as an expansion of Beckett's "artistic language," and Erik Tonning inclusion of *Quad* in his project to chart the emergence of an "abstract language" in Beckett's work after 1960.

[392] Deleuze makes impressionistic comparisons between *Worstward Ho* and the television plays towards the end of "L'Épuisé," which I discuss below: "N'y a-t-il donc aucun salut des mots, comme un nouveau style enfin où les mots s'écartaient d'eux-mêmes, où le langage devient poésie, de manière à produire effectivement les visions et les sons qui restaient imperceptibles derrière l'ancien langage (« le vieux style ») ? […] Beckett, dès le début, réclame un style qui procéderait à la fois par perforation et prolifération du tissu […] Et c'est tantôt de brefs segments qui s'ajoutent sans cesse à l'intérieure de la phrase pour tendre à tout rompre la surface des mots […] c'est tantôt des traits qui criblent la phrase pour réduire sans cesse la surface des mots comme dans le poème *Cap au pire* […]" Deleuze, "L'Épuisé," 106, (hereafter cited in the text as E).

[393] E, 76: "C'est dire que la considération de l'espace donne un nouveau sens et un nouvel objet à l'épuisement : épuiser les potentialités d'un espace quelconque."

possible solos, all given), although the intent to present all possible combinations remains (E, 81). Deleuzes view also contributes to a more general sense that Beckett's works drive towards exhaustion, both logical and physiological.

But Deleuze's assertion that the television plays constitute a "metalanguage" of images could also be taken to support (albeit obliquely) the idea that *Quad* reinforces connections between spatial patterning and verbal or written language. As the bodies move along their courses, they carve directions and shapes (eight triangles) into the square, creating regular patterns through their neatly ordered tracks and through the contrapuntal effect of their combined movement. Deleuze's argument may well rest on the sense that exhaustion and creation are interconnected, that with the exhaustion of possibles comes a demand for new forms. This is precisely the slant of Deleuze's interpretation I wish to emphasize, so as to counter the manner in which his discussion of exhaustion in *Quad* has contributed to a critical focus on its mathematical, logical and iterative nature at the expense of its instantiation of spatial and bodily ways of meaning.[394]

Quad dramatizes space and the body as the rudiments of sense, signification and language, and in this way constitutes an indirect *langage créateur* or *opérant*, in Merleau-Ponty's sense. But recursive elements in the piece (its rigid, repetitive circuitry) hint at various ambivalences involved in any creative process. The *undoing* of written or verbal language in *Quad*—an attempt to puncture the word surface and destroy it—presents possibilities for the revivification of language, for *langage créateur* not only tracks more carefully the lived quality of our experiences, but invents ways of "meaning" that exceed those of the *langue parlée* with which we are familiar. Here again, a radical mistrust of language is perhaps the motor of linguistic innovation, and the emphasis in *Quad* on the body and its navigation of space (even though the bodies' movements are determined in advance) suggests that this fundamental relationship of structuring and organization is crucial to linguistic innovation. *Quad* reaches under the skin of language to reveal the conditions and processes by which the invisible becomes visible (to use Merleau-Ponty's terminology); as a radical artistic experiment in the making of sense, *Quad* refashions its "playing field" through a series of kaleidoscopic variations of color, movement, and rhythm, differentiating and opening dimensions in a closed space.

Quad is a "piece for four players, light and percussion." Beckett stipulates: "The players (1,2,3,4) pace the given area, each following his particular course."[395] The moving, visual image, broadcast for the first time in 1981 by the German television company, *Süddeutscher Rundfunk*, is an energetic and carefully ordered pattern of color, rhythm, movement and sound. The four bodies are clad in gowns "reaching to ground, cowls hiding faces," each of which is a different color (1 white, 2 yellow, 3 blue, 4 red). The bodies scurry, their footsteps audible in the silences emerging in the canon of percussion instruments. These four bodies, described simply as "players" (not "characters" or "dancers" or "mimes") were to be as "alike in build as possible. Short and slight for preference. Some ballet training desirable. Adolescents a possibility. Sex

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[394] For example, Brett Stevens, in "A Purgatorial Calculus: Beckett's Mathematics in 'Quad,'" depicts the piece as an attempt to build a mathematical language.

[395] "Quad," *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works,* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 449-455 (hereafter cited in the text as Q).

indifferent" (Q, 453). As they move, the players hunch forward, as if bracing against a cold wind.[396] Each player is assigned a particular "course," which s/he follows whenever s/he is visible on the white square.[397] Each course is made up of eight moves along a side or across the diagonal of the square. There are four series, in which each player completes his course four times, either in solo or in combination with other players, so that all possible combinations are given. Just as each of the players has a particular color, so does each player have a "particular percussion, to sound when he enters, continue when he paces, cease when he exits," (Q, 452). A fugue of colors and instruments builds and diminishes with the entrances and exits of the figures. Beckett insists on "unbroken movement" and stipulates that lights fade out at the end of the piece with figure 1 pacing the square as it did in the beginning: "Without interruption begin repeat and fade out on 1 pacing alone." This symmetry between beginning and end gives viewers the sense that the piece continues forever, though the SDR version of *Quad* is only nine minutes long (followed by the impromptu sequel, *Quad II,* which lasts four minutes). The bodies in both versions make jerky turns to the left on their diagonal trajectories to avoid collision with each other and, more importantly, to avoid a center point labeled "E," which Beckett terms the "danger zone" (Q, 453).

Quad is, appropriately, the fourth of five television plays that Beckett wrote between 1965 and 1982.[398] Like any work in Beckett's canon, it bears traces of the interests and obsessions that develop throughout his career and develops Beckett's artistic language in a particular way.[399] Like its successor, *Nacht und Träume*, *Quad* relies on visual image and musical structure: refrains or leitmotifs recur in both (combinations of the colored figures recur in *Quad* and *Nacht und Träume* presents variations on a sequence of movements). *Quad*'s logical working through of series—its combinatorial element—recall *Watt* and scenes in other works that dramatize the working out of all possible combinations. (We might think of the scene involving Murphy's biscuits and Molloy's system of organizing his sucking stones).[400] Some critics identify the hooded gowns in *Quad* with the *djellaba* worn by the "Auditor" in *Not I*, a play that features a mouth (with the rest of the face in blackness) spewing and spitting barely intelligible words.[401] The precision of spatial dimensions in *Quad,* (Beckett specifies that each side of the square should be six paces and each diagonal ten) also reminds of the precise detail

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[396] This description comes from Beckett's cameraman for SDR, Jim Lewis, as quoted in Martha Fehsenfeld, "Beckett's Late Works: An appraisal," *Modern Drama* 25 (September 1982): "They held themselves in the same position Billie Whitelaw had used for *Footfalls,* 'crossing their arms tightly against themselves' under the loose gowns, 'in a bent shape which they kept throughout,' as if, Lewis said, 'they were resisting a cold wind,'" 360.

[397] Two women and two men participated in the SDR production of *Quad* in 1981. For an illuminating study of the gender and genre blending qualities of *Quad,* see Bryden's "*Quad:* Dancing Genders."

[398] The other plays are *Eh Joe* (1965), *Ghost Trio* (1975), *...but the clouds...* (1976), and *Nacht und Träume* (1982).

[399] In their introduction to *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Works, Life, and Thought,* ed. C.J. Ackerley and S.E. Gontarski, (New York: Grove Press, 2004), Ackerley and Gontarski describe Beckett's works as "forming part of a continuous series, if not a pattern," xi.

[400] Deleuze emphasizes the presence of the combinatorial in *Watt, Murphy,* and *Molloy,* E, 60.

[401] The "Auditor" of *Not I* is rumored to have been inspired by a woman Beckett saw on one of his trips to Tunisia. Enoch Brater mentions the similarity of the gowns in *Quad* to the djellaba worn by the "Auditor" in *Not I* in *Beyond Minimalism,* 108.

given of the dimensions of the cylindrical space in *Le dépeupleur* (1967). Finally, the tension we find in *Quad* between movement and stasis—the bodies move briskly but form a circuit in a closed space—can be related to moments in the trilogy in which spatial "doubling-back" redefines notions of "progress." Many of Beckett's most urgent artistic preoccupations find their reprise (or adumbration) in *Quad,* and the position of this piece as a variation or difference in the total series of his work gives it its own, unique sense. Our focus at present will be the manner in which, within the piece, words are replaced by bodies, whose courses make patterns in space to create a kind of language.

In *Quad,* the entrance of each player-body alters the soundscape and colorscape of the white square, opening affective dimensions within the closed space of its "playing field." The presence in the square of each player, with its associated color and percussion sound, works, as in the twist of a kaleidoscope, to alter the affective dimensions of the entire tableau. The moving swirls of color change with the entrances and exits of the players, which culminate in changing combinations of white, yellow, blue and red.[402] The entrances and exits of the players also alter the soundscape of the piece, since "each player has his particular percussion, to sound when he enters, continue while he paces, cease when he exits" (Q, 452).[403] The power of a particular body's movement to alter the affective dimensions of a whole is one of the ways in which we defined *style,* which is also understood by Merleau-Ponty to be the founding gesture of signification. *Quad*'s wordlessness foregrounds the movements of bodies as the vehicles behind the production of meaning, as the colored figures pattern space by means of their "courses" and combinations.[404] In this respect, *Quad* seems to explore the processes of signification.

But to interpret *Quad* simply as a celebration of the "origins" of language in the space-generating-and-reconfiguring movements of the body is to ignore a manifest discomfort in *Quad* and to miss one of the most important means by which it struggles to transform the capabilities of language. Like its medium, television, *Quad* presents a set of irreconcilable contradictions or incompossibles (though they are stretched out in serial fashion), creating a tension within the piece that has led many critics to characterize it as obsessive, manic or unbearable, and to associate it with Dante's version of hell. Beckett himself writes in his production notes for *Quad*: "An eye suddenly opens, suddenly shuts (can't bear anymore),"[405] and Martha Fesehnfeld characterizes *Quad* as "unbearable and unrelieved tension strained almost to the breaking point."[406] Similarly, Chris Ackerley

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[402] Initially Beckett sought to accentuate this effect by associating a colored light with the entrance of each player. But because the colored lights blended into a confusing shade of orange, Beckett's lighting design had to be abandoned as impractical. According to cameraman Jim Lewis: "We couldn't use the colored lights. First the combination of white plus blue plus red plus yellow produced an effect of an indefinite shade of orange. I worked on it and got a closer delineation but then the frequency of light going on and off with the entrance and exit of each player proved too distracting and had to be abandoned." Lewis as quoted in Fesehnfeld, "Beckett's late works," 359.

[403] In the text, Beckett suggests a drum, a gong, a triangle, and a wood block, but the actual instruments used were two Javanese gongs, an African wood block, an African talking drum, and "a wonderful wastebasket—from Rathmines (Beckett added whimsically)," Fesehnfeld "Beckett's Late works," 359.

[404] A predecessor to *Quad* exists in the form of the unpublished, *J.M. Mime*, a piece that Beckett began on commission and abandoned in the 1960's. For more on the relationship between *Quad* and *J.M. Mime*, see Brater, *Beyond Minimalism,* 107.

[405] Beckett as quoted in Bryden "*Quad*: Dancing Genders," 109.

[406] Fesehnfeld, "Beckett's Late Works," 361.

finds in *Quad* "an excessive rationality that borders on madness."[407] S.E. Gontarski is the most insistent, perhaps, about the sinister, infernal character of *Quad*.[408] The players' repeated "sinistral turns" (their jerky swerves to the left around the center point) motivate Gontarski to compare *Quad*'s endless cycling to the labors of Tantalus and Sisyphus (and, for other reasons, to Gustave Doré's engravings of Dante's *Inferno*).

Even though *Quad's* "language" operates in the domain of space, it employs similar tricks to those found in Beckett's worded works, namely the fusion of contradictions in an attempt to "say" the "unsayable." *Quad* teems with energetic ambivalence, encompassing madness and rationality, movement and stasis, the human and the mechanical. It tests the border between innovation and madness through the obsessive regularity of a designed series that seems to take on an unstoppable life of its own. The series, which seems variable at first because of the introduction of colors and sounds, hardens into a closed circuit of compulsive repetition. The television camera, fixed, raised and frontal over an unbroken stream of movement, again joins stasis with mobility (Q, 453).[409] The bodies move with their own volition but follow courses prescribed in advance; their steps are synchronized by beats heard on headphones worn under their cowls. Though *Quad* is in some ways mechanical, it has an all-too-human element that, according to Mary Bryden, creates its suspense. After musing that *Quad* might be better executed by "computer- or laser-controlled simulation," she rejects this idea, arguing that "live impulses towards an ever-potential asymmetry" and a "hint at precariousness" are what make the play so hypnotic."[410] Similarly, despite the "sexless" adolescence of the players, we cannot help but notice their bodies shifting under the thin material of the gowns as they execute their tightly controlled movements. The human scratching of footsteps mixes acoustic traces of the body with the metallic beat of the percussion instruments, and there is something bodily, too, about the crescendo and quickening of percussion as the players approach the center, which, "heart-like, thumps more insistently."[411] Other "live impulses toward a-symmetry," present themselves in the threat of collision and disruption that occurs each time the bodies approach the center, circle around each other, and move away.[412] The regular movement of the players is already interrupted by their "jerky," counter-clockwise turns; each turn strikes the viewer as willful, as if the players were trying to break out of their usual, clockwise track. By containing contradictions (spontaneity and regularity, variation and repetition, restriction and movement) *Quad* attempts, if not to *say* the unsayable, then at least create space in which the unsayable itself may find expression.

Just as the televised image presents a body that does not appear in the flesh, *Quad* forces together elements that cannot comfortably co-exist. The medium of television is particularly appropriate in that it is itself a space (a square screen) in which bodies are *both* present and absent. Critics often describe Beckett's television plays as investigating

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[407] Ackerley, "'Ever Know What Happened?,'" 136.

[408] S.E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, 179.

[409] In his manuscript notes, Beckett writes: "Some things fixed (body type, camera) then variations through combination." Quad MS 2861 "Quad" Typescript 06, RUL.

[410] Bryden, "*Quad*: Dancing Genders," 111.

[411] Bryden, "*Quad*: Dancing Genders," 111.

[412] *Quad*'s "problem," according to Beckett, is the "[n]egotiation of E without rupture of rhythm." He adds: "Or, if ruptures accepted, how best exploit?," Q, 453.

a spiritual realm populated by ghostly images—a point that is underscored by the fact that the titles of his teleplays involve dreams, ghosts, and quasi-material substances like clouds (*Quad* is an exception). Martha Fesehnfeld, for instance, describes a "border area that Beckett is exploring," a "mysterious climate inhabited by shadows" and semblances, "whose trembling air, like Dante's 'airy bodies,' is visible evidence of simultaneous being and nonbeing."[413] Through television, Beckett finds a way to represent absence, and to explore a spiritual or ghostly dimension in which figures can be both here and elsewhere. This mysterious "border area" is perhaps also a region between visible and invisible, and may suggest possibilities for renegotiating the reversible, provisional passage from one to the other.

The capacity of *Quad* to express the inexpressible, as an "operant language" of sorts, is exemplified by the manner in which *Quad* renders eternity within a fixed window of time.[414] The frantic *Quad* creates the *experience* of timelessness rather than invoking representative words or symbols. The visual-acoustic pattern in *Quad* moves through twenty-four scenes or variations: there are four series, each of which contains six combinations of players (series one, for example, is: 1, 13, 134, 1342, 342, 32). Even though some combinations occur twice, six scenes repeated over four series yields twenty-four units. *Quad* alludes to the twenty-four time-units in a day, yet gives us the sense that its "day" will repeat forever. Subtle details in Beckett's plan are designed to create a sense of eternal repetition; for instance, when the lights come up for the first time, figure 2 should be seen leaving the stage, to suggest that the fourth and final series has just ended and the piece is beginning again. *Quad II,* furthermore, the impromptu companion piece to *Quad,* and Beckett's commentary on it, contribute to the experience of eternity created by *Quad.* When technicians from Süddeutcher Rundfunk replayed *Quad* in slow motion on a black and white TV monitor, Beckett is said to have remarked, "marvelous, it's 100,000 years later"[415] and christened to piece *Quad II.* This languorous, black and white version—series one only, footsteps softer, no percussion, all four figures in white gowns—visually presents the effects of 100,000 years of cycling: extreme enervation and diminution. The manner in which *Quad* creates rather than describes an experience of timelessness or eternity is exemplary of indirect or "operant" language, which, by expanding the limit of what it is possible to express, recreates the expressive possibilities of "language."[416]

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[413] Fesehnfeld , "Beckett's Late Works," 361.

[414] It is interesting, then that Beckett drastically overestimated *Quad*'s duration, thinking at first that it would last twenty-five minutes. He later revised this estimate to fifteen minutes, but the Stuttgart production lasted just nine minutes. (The duration of *Quad II* was four minutes).

[415] Brater, *Beyond Minimalism,* 107.

[416] *Quad*'s creation of an experience of timelessness, or, in general, its creation of a form that would convey formlessness, is interpreted by Erik Tonning as Beckett's development of an "abstract language." Tonning cautions that "any 'abstract language' must develop specific technical means of achieving *new kinds of expressive force* if it is to be artistically effective after having abandoned the resources of more traditional forms." It seems that this new language, like any language, would have to involve recurring patterns. Such iterability is necessary to computer programming "languages" as well as to the nonverbal "languages" of dance and music that involve codas and *refrains*. In any language, recurring patterns become the background against which variations occur to mark differences. Deleuze's discussion of the importance of the *ritournelle* to the language of images and spaces he finds Beckett's works for television further underscores this point, E, 75. See also Tonning, *Samuel Beckett's Abstract Drama*, 14.

Quad constitutes an expressive language through its restless energy and shifting dimensions, and it dramatizes *passivity,* since the course or circuit of the four players is carefully mapped out in Beckett's notebooks, as is the order in which the players enter and leave. The design of the piece, to move through all possible combinations in series, is logically determined. Dramatic tension develops when the players converge on the center point, "E" (the "danger zone"),[417] but collision is avoided through careful choreography. Each narrowly avoided collision temporarily diffuses tension, but the impossibility of reaching the center becomes a motor, driving the piece to repeat itself eternally, compulsively, as if eventually something could occur that would allow the piece to come to a close. This unceasing build-up and diffusion (not *release,* merely deferral) of tension is part of what makes the piece so hypnotic. Beckett's written directions for *Quad* indicate the compulsive character of the play's repetition, such that the tension it stages will never find resolution or release. In the published version of the text, Beckett calls for "[u]nbroken movement," and specifies that the negotiation of the center point should be "without rupture of rhythm." Early drafts of *Quad* in the Beckett manuscript collection at the University of Reading reveal an emphasis on circularity and repetition in the piece's conception. We find, for instance: "logically at opening 2 should be seen exiting at B."[418] In another early draft, Beckett calls the trajectories of the players "circuits" (instead of "courses," as in the published version). That Beckett conceived of the trajectories as circuits conveys not only the image of a cycle, a looping *ad infinitum,* but also the notion that these bodies, as part of a larger network, are determined by forces other than their own volition to move.[419]

The idea that the figures in *Quad* are compelled or *condemned* to continue their circuits for eternity complicates our reading of *Quad* as an innovative experiment in indirect language. Most interpretations of *Quad,* moreover, associate the piece with passivity, compulsion, punishment and impotence more than with expressivity. Most vividly, perhaps, a parallel between the players in *Quad* and the figures in Dante's *Inferno* underscores the teleplay's dramatization of passivity. The allusion to Dante's *Inferno* in *Quad* is supported by Beckett's explanation of how Dante and Virgil turn to the *left* when they are in hell. (In purgatory, figures turn to the right.)[420] The cowls worn by the figures in *Quad* leads S.E. Gontarski to compare them to the drawings of figures in Dante's hell made by Gustave Doré.[421] The teleplay's allusion to Dante further suggests that the bodies in *Quad* are *condemned* to movement, as Sisyphus and Tantalus are punished by the eternal repetition of the same.

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[417] Beckett writes of "E": "supposed a danger zone. Hence deviation. Manoeuvre established at outset by first solo at first diagonal (CB). E.g. series 1:[then he gives diagram]" Q, 453.

[418] Qua/07 MS 2100 Quadrat Stuttgart, RUL. This instruction is duly followed in the SDR production of the teleplay: figure 2's exit at point B at the opening suggests, as we have discussed, that this cycling has been going on and will continue forever.

[419] MSS Drama/Qua 01 MS 2198, RUL. In this manuscript, we also find the lines "as one organism," which gives us the sense that *Quad*'s four players are consubstantial, and thus, not individual or free.

[420] James Knowlson recounts how Beckett (in a letter to his Polish translator) explained that "Dante and Virgil in Hell always go to the left (the damned direction), and in Purgatory always to the right," Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 592.

[421] Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing,* 179.

The endless cycling of *Quad*'s figures, which are unable to stop or to direct their movements, has also perhaps influenced Brian Wall's more recent suggestion that *Quad* presents an allegory for alienation under late capitalism.[422] Though problematic in some ways—Wall's suggestion of allegory would affix "meaning" to a work that strives to avoid meaning—his interpretation underscores an important relation between repetition, compulsion and passivity in *Quad*. Observing "the ruthless structural logic of repetition, iteration and permutation […] refusing to remain mere form and becoming content itself," Wall argues that *Quad*'s abstraction consists in its substitution of "mere motion" for freedom, "as if giving form to the numbing repetition and identity that characterize life under late capitalism."[423] Wall supports his comparison between the unthinking repetitiveness of mechanical reproduction and *Quad* with his analysis of *Quad II*.[424] *Quad II,* according to Wall, is created precisely *because Quad* cannot end, "for once the system has been set in motion there evidently can be no end to this closed circuit of repetition, duration and identity, with the ever-same persisting, only gradually, even asymptotically, losing energy and losing colour but never stopping."[425] Wall's analysis underscores the *passivity* of the figures relative to the continued movement that drives them. Such eternal compulsion is indeed consonant with the plight of the damned in Dante's *Inferno*.

The mad, the damned, or the oppressed move on pre-determined tracks, not by their own will, but in a manic tarantella that, once in motion, cannot stop. This emphasis on passivity in *Quad*, which comes as much from the fact that its figures follow pre-determined courses as from its inability to stop its serial activity, contributes to our sense of it as a *langage opérant*. Following Frederic Jameson, Wall comments on television's privileging of passivity, in contrast to the simultaneous demands of activity and passivity that drama and film place on their audiences. But, interestingly, Wall argues that the "over-determined passivity" he associates with late capitalism demands that we reconceptualize passivity.[426] Wall's account suggests that there is a kind of passivity endowed with the possibility of inducing *variations* within the very structures responsible for its powerlessness. Wall appropriately describes an experience of "ecstatic though momentary fusion of subject and object" in *Quad*, and, in keeping with his recommended "reconceptualization of passivity," argues that television works to register the "contradictory combination of activity and passivity." Thus, *Quad* seems to break down the rigid dichotomy between active and passive; the players are active insnofar as they navigate the stage, but passive insofar as they move along courses that have been

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[422] Wall hedges his claim, writing: "*Quad* demands to be consumed as something *closer to an* allegory than any other Beckett text." Wall, "*...but the clouds…, Quad, Nacht und Träume,*" 93, my emphasis.

[423] Wall, "*...but the clouds…, Quad, Nacht und Träume,*" 93. Another interesting component of Wall's analysis is his idea that *Quad* represents an eternal present. He finds "the permanence and persistence of the static and the changeless in the present, indeed of the static form of the present," 93.

[424] Wall recounts the story of how Beckett, upon seeing *Quad* projected on monochrome receivers in slow motion, quipped that it was a hundred thousand years later.

[425] Wall, "*...but the clouds…, Quad, Nacht und Träume,*" 94.

[426] Wall's argument follows Frederic Jameson's in suggesting that, for television, the contradictory imperative of activity and passivity on the part of the audience (which obtains for both drama and film) gives way to a privileging of passivity that "demands a new configuration of our conception of it." Wall, "*...but the clouds…, Quad, Nacht und Träume,*" 101.

determined for them in advance. And yet an active passivity may be precisely the means by which alternatives to semantic meaning may be created, in language as well as in "literature."[427]

It seems that *Quad*'s very passivity is what constitutes its creative gesture, insofar as we are prompted to re-imagine what kind of "agency" is at work in creative processes. Deleuze's emphasis on exhaustion may mute some of *Quad*'s energetic polysemy; and we must consider how the hooded figures, which are in some ways *passive* (driven to follow their pre-ordained tracks), do more than exhaust their combinatorial potential. If language operates through the play of repetition and difference, *Quad* is both an entrapment in a habitual loop that is unable to end, *and,* like the *langage créateur* Merleau-Ponty describes, the institution of the possibility of new modes of meaning.[428]

It is precisely *Quad*'s passivity, the eternal looping of its figures along pre-ordained courses, that endows the play with its power to modulate space. Its creative restructuring suggests a model of innovation or of change that I will call "passive agency." The idea of variation *within* an existing structure is similar not only to Merleau-Ponty's conception of *style*, but also to the themes of institution and passivity, which he develops in his lectures at the *Collège de France* in 1954 and 1955. Notes to these lectures show us clearly that, for Merleau-Ponty, the possibility of creative novelty is associated not with rupture, but with the resumption and variation of existing traditions.[429] Merleau-Ponty insists on *in*stitution rather than *con*stitution to emphasize the persistence of the past in "novel" forms of expression. Merleau-Ponty aptly pairs his lectures on institution with those on passivity, for just as institution assumes what is pre-given, maintaining ties to history, passivity entails situation, orientation and formation within a pre-existing "field." The themes adumbrated in these lectures are certainly present in *Quad,* which dramatizes an interdependent relationship between compulsive repetition and expressive possibility.

The compulsion, oppression and passivity—even victimization—we find in *Quad* suggests, paradoxically, the possibility of creativity, as resistance and modulation, through the operation of "passive agency." In this way, the simultaneous passivity and activity in *Quad* can be related to Merleau-Ponty's founding of creative novelty on the model of institution. This is not a valorization of passivity, nor a justification of violence, but an insistence that powerful possibilities for innovation, empowerment and novelty exist in conditions of restricted freedom, where direct activity would be ineffectual or reactionary. In his late television plays, especially *What Where* as well as his dramatic play, *Catastrophe,* Beckett further explores this limit between bodily restriction—even

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[427] In *La Littérature face à elle-même: L'Écriture spéculaire de Samuel Beckett*, (Amsterdam/New York : Rodopi, 2009), Éric Wessler focuses on auto-reference and auto-reflexivity in Beckett so as to investigate how the innovation of Beckett's oeuvre redefines the "literary." This suggests that, like space and language, the *champ littéraire,* can be altered by the movements of particular styles within its bounds.

[428] Another possible response to the "problem" of passivity in *Quad* is to argue that *Quad*'s passivity is *progressive*, and that every *langage créateur,* which, at its inception teems with energetic metaphors, rigidifies over time as its ways of meaning become habitual and clichéd. The wordless navigation we find in *Quad* at *first* it presents a new way of meaning, but then, like any language, hardens into worn circuits that eternally repeat the same.

[429] Merleau-Ponty, *L'institution La passivité: Notes de cours au Collège de France 1954-1955*, ed. Claude Lefort. Paris: Benin, 2002.

incarceration—and the *possibility* of reconfiguring the structures that enable such averse conditions. This is perhaps the significance of the final gesture made by the protagonist of *Catastrophe*, P, who, though he has been poked and prodded and stood on a pedestal, lifts his head to look at the audience in the closing moments of the play.[430]

P's way of looking at the audience achieves a self-reflexivity of the gaze (P shows us that he is aware of being looked at by the audience) that renders him simultaneously subject and object. P's objectivity, his inherence in the "structure" of the play (underscored by the other characters' rough treatment of him) enables the internal reconfiguration or modulation, perhaps, of the structure whereby P is objectified. *Quad* dramatizes the possibility of change as an internal reconfiguration in a more complicated, but more salient manner, since it is a *continual* possibility and does not depend on any one gesture. *Quad* suggests continual modulation and reconfiguration, as we have suggested, by the changes or kaleidoscopic shifts that occur in the closed space of its "playing field,"[431] a site of creative experimentation despite the fact that the bodies are not "going anywhere" (we don't know where they go when they leave the white square, but they always reappear there). The manner in which *Quad* introduces new possibilities for spatial reconfiguration is *not* that of the bold explorer, breaking new ground and charting virgin territory. Rather, the bodies in *Quad* are continuing something pre-ordained and inherited. "Passive agency" derives from the *restriction* of a body's free movement, thus *Quad* might be read as an exploration of the "origins" of language in a mode of spatial articulation that, *because* it is partly determined, is pregnant with possibilities for variation. *Quad* enacts creative novelty as continuation, which revises our ideas about progress and innovation, which must now be alloyed with continuation, reconfiguration and passivity.

The idea that innovative, expressive language is bodily as well as spatial[432] is reinforced by the way in which *Quad* itself resembles an organism or body. The players within the square are kept in "circulation" by a "pulse" that critics have compared to a heartbeat.[433] And Beckett's manuscript notes to *Quad* stipulate that the players execute their movements "as one organism."[434] Though Beckett was aiming for consistency among the players' movements, his reference to *Quad* as like an organism evokes Merleau-Ponty's conception of the flesh as that which subtends the possibility of reconfiguration and reversibility. (Each reversible element, visible-invisible, subject-object, belongs to a common world or being, figured as flesh). The fact that the bodies in *Quad* circulate in the geometric shape of a chiasmus further reinforces the sense that *Quad,* despite its abstraction, is not detached from the common organic tissue (of language, space and being) and achieves expressivity as difference in part by recourse to bodily processes and movements.

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[430] Beckett, "Catastrophe" (1982), *The Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel Beckett,* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 295-303.

[431] MSS Drama/Qua 01 MS 2198, RUL. The published text reads simply: "Area: square."

[432] In an essay on Beckett's early mimes, Jonathan Tadashi Naito argues that mime is crucial to Beckett's development of a "decidedly corporeal aesthetic," which, he later specifies, is an experience of bodily limitations as well as a "reflection" in the absence of words. Tadashi Naito "Writing Silence: Samuel Beckett's Early Mimes," *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 19 (2008), 398.

[433] See, for instance, Bryden, "*Quad*: Dancing Genders," 111.

[434] MSS Drama/Qua 01 MS 219, RUL.

That the *langage créateur* fashioned by *Quad* is *bodily* is further supported by Erik Tonning's analysis of *Quad* in relation to Leibniz's concept of *appétition*. Tonning explains that the figures in *Quad* "appear to be inexorably *driven* creatures, a point which recalls the fact that for Leibniz the life of the monad consists in *"appétition,"* or the unceasing desire to pass from representation to representation without hope of ever finally 'clarifying its own content.'"[435] This slippage of words, by which they fall just short of what they seek to express, and the inability of language to reach the mythic "center" at which something could be said without excess, poverty or inexactitude, is what makes it necessary to keep speaking. It seems that *Quad*, like expressive language, is driven (towards the oblique) by an impossible, tireless desire to say the "thing itself."[436] A connection between appetition, sexual desire and physical appetite, insofar as the latter two are motivating drives for the body, suggests, albeit indirectly, other manners in which the efforts of language may mirror physiological processes. Beckett's gloss of *monad* (in notebooks he kept at Trinity College) as both *active* "in so far as it represents clearly & distinctly" and *passive* "in so far as obscurely & confusedly" and of appetition as an "impulse" that moves from the "latter to the former"[437] links desire to the project of expression, which Merleau-Ponty describes in one instance as the "le travail patient et silencieux du désir," (VI, 187). If *appétition* is an impulse towards clear and distinct representation, the slippage of the figures in Quad around the center point presents a tireless and eternal striving for something that can never be achieved. This dramatizes what Merleau-Ponty calls "le paradoxe de l'expression" (VI, 187) and the challenge of indirect language.[438]

To supplement this reading of *Quad* as a spatial and bodily language, it is worthwhile to consider Anthony Uhlmann's reading of *Quad* in relation to Stoic ontology.[439] Rather than read *Quad* as a language, Uhlmann insists on reading it as an *image*—and, in particular, an image that induces thought. To set up his analysis of *Quad*, Uhlmann explains the Stoic division between coporeals (bodies) and incorporeals (abstract "effects" such as language). He explains the problem, outlined by the Stoics, that occurs when one attempts to understand experience, which is corporeal, insofar as it

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[435] Tonning, *Samuel Beckett's Abstract Drama,* 241. Tonning quotes a passage from the notebooks Beckett kept at Trinity College Dublin, in which he summarizes a passage about Leibniz from Windelband's *A History of Philosophy*: "States of monad are *representations,* & principle of its activity an impulse (*appétition*) to pass over from one representation to another." TCD 10967/191v.192 as cited in Tonning, 208.

[436] Martin Esslin suggests that in *Quad* a desire for intimacy coupled with its impossibility serves as a "motor" that may keep its figures in orbit around the empty center: "the center that the hooded wanderers have so fearfully to avoid is obviously the point at which real communication, a real "encounter," would be potentially possible but inevitably proves—by the very nature of existence itself—impossible." Esslin, "Patterns of Rejection: Sex and Love in Beckett's Universe," *Women in Beckett: Performance and critical perspectives*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1987), 66-7.

[437] TCD 10967/191v.192 as quoted in Tonning, *Samuel Beckett's Abstract Drama,* 208.

[438] Minako Okamuro suggests that the border between madness, repetition and artistic creativity (the possibility of novelty) is blurred by *Quad*'s logic of ritual. The failure to say feeds cycles of repetition, and in so doing, institutes a language and system of meaning through variation. Okamuro describes W.B. Yeats's view of the creative process as a form of alchemy, according to which the artist could become transformed through the art of creation. Okamuro, "Alchemical Dances in Beckett and Yeats," 87-105.

[439] Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*, 134.

happens through the senses, by means of the incorporeal signifiers of (conventional) language.[440] He suggests that it is precisely an attempt to understand the nature of *things* through language alone that led Beckett to the impasse of *L'innommable*, whereas images of bodies such as emerge in Beckett's late works ("ontological images: images of bodies, dispositions, states of affairs") are powerful enough to provoke modulations in body-souls (souls were considered corporeal for the stoics).[441] And yet Uhlmann's idea that the late works, *Quad* among them, produce "ontological images" that have the power to affect the *bodies* of viewers is precisely what is at stake in the suggestion that *Quad* constitutes a new way of meaning that is more spatial and corporeal than a conventional language composed of signifiers and signifieds. An image-body that could act upon our own image-body (as a viewer)—though this idea is couched in different terms—is very similar to the sense that a *langage créateur* such as *Quad* effectively constitutes is an alternative way of producing sensations in the viewer.[442]

As a *langage créateur* that brings language back to its beginnings in the body's relationship to space and to other bodies, *Quad* opens the potential for a reconfiguration of literary space within the closure of its experimental playing field. Its wordless, expressive language dramatizes the body's articulation of space as the foundation of meaning as *sens*, but its emphasis on passivity also underscores the necessity of creative innovation as a process of reconfiguration. If this reconfiguration is possible in a "space" of words—that is, if *Quad*'s "language of space" can be grafted onto a linguistic field, it will be necessary to consider more carefully Merleau-Ponty's ideas about reversibility. This might ground our sense of the manner in which the body's navigation of space might be effectively grafted onto the domain of language.

II. Merleau-Ponty's Late Ontology: Dimensions in the Flesh

If *Quad*'s visual and rhythmic patterns imitate the mechanisms by which meaning develops in language, and if we are to suggest that its experimentations in *space* presage strategies of syntactical reconfiguration in *Worstward Ho*, it is necessary to clarify the conditions under which spatial and linguistic change might be possible. For Merleau-Ponty, a renegotiation of relations between the visible and the invisible (virtual or possible) is *linguistic,* in that it requires new ways of articulating (carving differences within) spaces or languages. It is curious that both Beckett and Merleau-Ponty's works

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[440] According to Chryssipus, *images* are corporeals because they can affect us as sensations, whereas conventional language operates through abstractions. Only corporeals (including images) can modify our *experience*. Uhlmann explains: "If one wishes to truly understand, to understand the real, then one must look for understanding outside language; one must look for understanding through the images of bodies themselves, images which themselves are bodies," *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image,* 134-138.
[441] Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image,* 145.
[442] Here I have emphasized a very particular dimension of Uhlmann's reading. His sense that *Quad* is an "ontological image," more generally, means that it is the image of a certain state or disposition. Uhlmann connects this to habit, arguing that dysfunctional relationships are held in place through the force of habit, thus engendering a need for an ontological image capable of modulating existing images. He writes: "these dysfunctional relationships [where protagonists fail to understand one another] are seen, through habit, to harden into circuits which repeat themselves." *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image,* 130.

tend to replace the linear progression of dialectical movement with strategies for creating and navigating *space.* As we've seen, Beckett sets out to "proceed by aporia" and invents the wordless patterns of *Quad.* Merleau-Ponty, in part through a critique of Sartre, transforms the dialectic into a *reversibility* that he expresses by way of the chiasmus. We have discussed the manner in which space and language intertwine in Merleau-Ponty's thinking. But to view language as the "playing field" of *Worstward Ho* suggests a concrete transformation of the field of language and its possibilities for expression. If Merleau-Ponty's "ontology of the flesh," which theorizes exchange between the visible and the invisible, also subtends Beckettian reconfigurations of language, this would indicate its viability as a model for expressive innovation and literary experimentation.

The late 1950's and early 1960's mark an "ontological turn" in Merleau-Ponty's work.[443] One could say that the manuscript draft and working notes, collected and edited by Claude Lefort, constitute an effort to "express the inexpressible" through a series of extended metaphors, which, Merleau-Ponty warns us, are not *merely* metaphors, since they convey some literal truth. The most dominant "metaphor" pertains to the relation Merleau-Ponty describes between visible and invisible, which Lefort adopts as the work's title. The *visible* refers to those parts of being or aspects that are given to our bodies in partial perspectives or that can be rendered in language. Merleau-Ponty claims that the invisible is the "tissue" of the visible, its underside, membrane, inner structure, or lining: "Entre les couleurs et les visibles prétendus, on retrouverait le tissu qui les double, les soutient, les nourrit, et qui, lui, n'est pas chose, mais possibilité, latence et *chair* des choses" (VI, 73).[444] This image, which culminates in a description of the invisible as the *flesh* of things, assures us that visible and invisible are made of the same substance. Thus visible perspectives are merely different aspects or views of a single, *common* world. Given that there is but one world or being, any chance of change or of innovation develops from a renegotiation of the manner in which the invisible may become visible. And insofar as the passage of the invisible into visibility involves the differentiating movements of a *langage créateur*, the problem of language creation, for Merleau-Ponty as for Beckett, is an *ontological* one, bound up with attempts to explore and to organize being.

From (Hyper)Dialectic to Chiasmus

Merleau-Ponty's ontology culminates in a section Lefort called "L'entrelacs – Le Chiasme," which describes relations of *reversibility* in favor of oppositions between subject and object, visible and invisible, perspective and totality. Merleau-Ponty arrives at his ontology of reversibility by revising, as Beckett did, the Hegelian dialectic of

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[443] Robert Vallier argues that Merleau-Ponty's lectures on institution in 1954 at the *Collège de France* set the tone "for an ontological radicalization of his work, constituting something like a "turn" in his thinking from the period of the *Phenomenology of Perception* to that of *The Visible and the Invisible,* Vallier, "Institution: The Significance of Merleau-Ponty's 1954 Course at the Collège de France" *Chiasmi International* 7, (2005): 281-302, 281.

[444] In a working note from 1960, Merleau-Ponty describes the attributes of the invisible, stipulating that it is not visible but *could be* (*pourrait l'être*) and describing it as the "membrure non-figurative" of the visible, VI, 35.

thesis, antithesis and synthesis.[445] In Chapter 2, we saw that Beckett's grappling with the limits of language (in *Watt, Molloy, L'innommable* and *Godot*) did not involve dialectical overcoming, but "proceeded" by the more devious and spatially generative means of paradox and *aporia*. Insofar as language was driven to the point of *contradiction*, the operation is similar to that of a dialectical move between thesis and antithesis. But, instead of *synthesis*, Beckett's contradictions force open dimensions or spaces in which such contradictions may be thought, or, as was the case with Lucky's speech, prompt us to look for alternatives to semantic meaning in language. Merleau-Ponty's critique of the dialectic operates in similar fashion: he "takes up" the dialectic and re-works it until it becomes a relation of reversibility.

In the second section of *Le visible et l'invisible,* "Interrogation et dialectique," Merleau-Ponty asks if the dialectic is not precisely that which might "open a space." His ensuing description of the dialectic emphasizes those aspects most consonant with the ethos of reversibility he will later develop.[446] In particular, he emphasizes the point that the relationships between terms (A and B) are *plural*, and cannot be rendered in a single proposition. Being, as a "système à plusieurs entrées" encompasses perspectives that are logically incompossible (VI, 121-123). Merleau-Ponty then asks: "La dialectique, à travers ses avatars, n'est-elle pas en tout cas le renversement des rapports, leur solidarité par le renversement, le mouvement intelligible qui n'est pas une somme de positions ou d'énonces tels que l'*être est, le néant n'est pas*, mais qui les distribue sur plusieurs plans, les intègre à un être en profondeur?" (VI, 123). The reversals between incompossibles and their solidarity, since they are part of the same flesh, means that there is no ascension or teleological progression towards a "truth of being." Rather, "dialectical" reversals and exchanges between contradictions may induce a swelling or reconfiguration of the space of being insead of moving beyond it. Merleau-Ponty's version of the dialectic is a method for integrating divergent viewpoints, but instead of *resolving* them into a synthesis, the contradictions *remain* so as to induce *depth*. Perspective emerges, as in a painting. The being with multiple points of entries is also a system of multiple planes or levels in which contradictions retain their differences but engage in relations of reversibility and exchange. This re-interpretation of the dialectic, whereby contradictions prompt the generation and reconfiguration of space, forms the basis of Merleau-Ponty's ontology.[447]

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[445] Hiroshi Kojima convincingly argues that Merleau-Ponty moves from a dialectical position in which subject and object would be fused, to a position of reversibility that characterizes his late ontology. Kojima also points out that Merleau-Ponty's "hyperdialectic" is an early version of the chiasmus, or of reversibility. Kojima, "From Dialectic to Reversibility: A Critical Change of Subject-Object Relation in Merleau-Ponty's Thought," *Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Husserl* ed. Ted Toadvine and Lester Embree, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 95-115.

[446] According to Merleau-Ponty: "la pensée dialectique est celle qui admet des actions réciproques ou interactions, —qui admet donc que le rapport global entre un terme A et un terme B ne peut pas s'exprimer en une seule proposition, qu'il en recouvre plusieurs autres qui ne sont pas superposables, qui sont même opposés, qui définissent autant de points de vue logiquement incompossibles et réellement réunis en lui […] De sorte que l'Être, par l'exigence même de chacune des perspectives, et du point de vue exclusive qui le définit, devient un système à plusieurs entrées," VI, 121.

[447] After giving his description of the work of the dialectic, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes it from the manner in which the dialectic has been described in the "history of philosophy," wondering if he should even use the name "dialectic": "La dialectique est bien tout cela, et c'est, en ce sens, elle que nous cherchons. Si, pourtant, nous n'avons pas jusqu'ici dit le mot, c'est que, dans l'histoire de la philosophie, elle n'a jamais

Merleau-Ponty differentiates his version of the dialectic, which has the capacity to reconfigure space, by naming it the "hyperdialectic,"[448] "the good dialectic or the "dialectic without synthesis." He describes the difference between an ambivalent dialectic (ambivalent being the state in which two opposed, fixed terms are brought into a relation of identity) and a dialectic of *ambiguity*, in which terms continually affect each other, change each other, or sustain each other in their multiple meanings and directions. The reshaping of space is crucial to what Merleau-Ponty calls the "hyperdialectic," in which plural meanings can be mutually sustained in a relation of ambiguity rather than ambivalence.

It is important that Merleau-Ponty associates the "bad dialectic" with language in the conventional sense, for this suggests a connection between the "hyperdialectic" and linguistic innovation. He explains that "la dialectique sans synthèse" is not a lapse into relativism, nor does it imply the reign of the ineffable, but he inists that it should not become a positive statement: "Ce que nous rejetons ou nions, ce n'est pas l'idée du dépassement qui rassemble, c'est l'idée qu'il aboutisse à un nouveau positif, à une nouvelle position" (VI, 127). In other words, as soon as the dialectic attempts to set itself up in theses or significations, "[une] rechute dans l'ambivalence se produit" (VI, 125). A measure of auto-critique is necessary in order to prevent this lapse into ambivalence, hence the necessity of a *hyper*-dialectic—a dialectic that would be able to "shake up" (*secouer*) "les fausses évidences, de dénoncer les significations coupées de l'expérience de l'être, vidées, et de se critiquer elle-même dans la mesure où elle en devient une" (VI 124). Merleau-Ponty warns that "il n'est de bonne dialectique que l'hyperdialectique" (VI, 127). For, when the dialectic sets itself up in theses, or becomes signification, it ceases to be *movement*, and its relation to being dissolves.

If the bad dialectic installs itself in theses that eclipse the polyvalent meanings of things, how might a good dialectic *resist* rendering itself in propositional language? Merleau-Ponty describes the hyperdialectic by contrasting it to the "bad dialectic" as follows:

> La mauvaise dialectique est celle qui croit recomposer l'être par une pensée thétique, par un assemblage d'énoncés, par thèse, anti-thèse et synthèse ; la bonne dialectique est celle qui est consciente de ceci : que toute *thèse* est idéalisation, que l'Être n'est pas fait d'idéalisations comme croyait la vieille logique, mais d'ensembles liés où la signification n'est jamais qu'en tendance, où l'inertie du contenu ne permet jamais de définir un terme comme positif, un autre terme comme négatif, et encore moins un troisième terme comme suppression absolue de celui-ci par lui-même (VI, 127).

This passage indicates that Merleau-Ponty's revision of the dialectic involves an innovative approach to language. He imagines a language that could operate in the absence of absolute statements (*theses*)—a language that could retain the power of ambiguity and of suggestion—and strives to model such a language in his texts, especially in *Le visible et l'invisible*.

été tout cela à l'état pur […] elle n'a jamais pu se formuler en thèse sans se dénaturer, et que, si l'on veut en garder l'esprit, il faut peut-être même ne le pas nommer," VI, 124. Merleau-Ponty contrasts his version of the dialectic, perhaps, against versions of it that are teleological rather than intent upon generating space, creating levels, dimensions and depth.

[448] Renaud Barbaras includes a helpful explanation of the hyperdialectic in *De l'être du phénomène: Sur l'ontologie de Merleau-Ponty*, (Paris: Éditions Jérome Millon, 1991), 161-164.

Hiroshi Kojimi shows that notions of intertwining, chiasm, reversibility and flesh replace the dialectic in Merleau-Ponty's thought.[449] And yet, perhaps out of a feeling of indebtedness to Hegel and Sartre, Merleau-Ponty holds on to the old concept for too long. It isn't until the last section of *Le visible et l'invisible* that the hyperdicalectic gives way to the chiasmus, or to reversible intertwining, and who knows whether the vestigial hyperdialectic would have remained had Merleau-Ponty lived to revise the drafts he composed. But even at the stage when he is still advocating for a version of the dialectic, he eschews the teleological progression described by Hegel, saying that with every "overcoming" (*dépassement*) there is loss as well as gain, such that a hierarchical order (i.e. each synthesis is closer to the "truth") is not viable (VI, 128). Instead, his meditations on the good and bad versions of the dialectic lead him not to a linear progression nor to a stepwise movement higher and higher, but to spatial and linguistic reconfiguration. These inventions within space and language are such that oppositions such as subject and object, active and passive, fact and essence, intertwine and become *reversible* instead of merging into an identity. Merleau-Ponty's attempt to revise the dialectic culminates in his ontology of reversibility, subtended by his theory of the flesh, which, I argue, has implications for the project of literary, linguistic and creative experimentation.

Beckett does not employ words like dialectic, but he experiments, as we have seen, at the limits of logic. We might say that the friction between statement and counterstatement (i.e. It is raining, it is not raining) inducew less a synthesis or identity than an (inter)changing of positions—a plurality of circumstances that would enable both statements to be true (though not for the same person at the same time). As he dramatizes tensions between statement and counterstatement, the possibility of *synthesis* gives way increasingly to something curiously close to reversibility. In *Quad,* we witness players in motion continually exchanging their positions, stepping vigorously around a "danger zone," the scene of their possible collision. Because *Quad* is both endless and wordless, any affirmative "statement" or new position is untenable.[450]

This hyperdialectic, which emphasizes continual reversibility, finds a visual correlate in *Quad*, which, I've argued, suggests the remaking of language. I do not wish to argue that *Quad* is an *illustration* of hyperdialectic, for this would reduce the complexity of *Quad*, but only to emphasize the manner in which Beckett's television play alters a closed space through the pattern of bodies moving through it. Its wordlessness and endlessness, furthermore, work to sustain the co-existence of plural meanings and to suspend unequivocal meaning so as to explore new possibilities for meaning making. The figures in *Quad* move together and apart in the shape of a chiasmus and are intertwined, furthermore, by the fact that their individual instruments, footsteps and colors integrate to make up the rhythm and colorscape of the whole. The play of difference that motors *Quad,* its canon or fugue structure—individual figures build to a unity only to solo once

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[449] In "From Dialectic to Reversibility," Kojima writes that in the late ontology, "the synthesis of subject and object is now undoubtedly denied, with their chiasmatic antithesis in reversibility introduced instead," 112.

[450] Though, as discussed in the previous section, it is possible to read the "hardening" of circuits in *Quad*—its very repetition—as crystallization, a new way of meaning that rigidifies in its turn.

again—presents a reversibility similar to the one described via the hyperdialectic, a figure that leads Merleau-Ponty to develop his curious notion of the flesh.

The Flesh

The "flesh" is not a metaphor, Merleau-Ponty insists, and he discourages us from thinking of it as mere analogy: "ceci n'est pas analogie ou comparaison vague, et doit être prise à la lettre" (VI, 173).[451] Flesh is what subtends relations of reversibility by ensuring the existence of a common world.[452] As the "[m]ilieu formateur de l'objet et du sujet" (VI, 191), flesh undermines the dichotomy between subject and object, enabling us to think them in a relation of reversibility rather than identity. Behind the idea of "passive agency" as a model for creativity in the arts[453] lies the supposition that space and language may be reconfigured because they participate in the structure of flesh. This structure, that of seer-seen, toucher-touched, is modeled on reflexivity, and it will be necessary to ask whether and how such a structure might be mapped, grafted or transferred onto the fields of space and of language.[454]

To say that being is flesh is not anthropomorphism on the part of the philosopher. Merleau-Ponty insists on this point. Rather than a projection of the human onto the world, to say that the world is flesh means only that the human body shares the same substance and structure as the world, is a variant of it, and is, therefore, capable of perceiving it. This is what Merleau-Ponty means when he writes that our gaze (*le regard*) clothes the things we perceive with its flesh (*les habille de sa chair*), (VI, 171). Carnal being (*l'être charnel*) is, furthermore, "un prototype de l'Être, dont notre corps, le sentant sensible, est une variante très remarquable, dont le paradoxe constitutif est déjà dans tout visible : déjà, le cube rassemble en lui les *visibilia* incompossibles, comme mon corps est d'un seul coup corps phénoménal et corps objectif" (VI, 177). The flesh is a paradigm, which

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[451] This line in context appears as follows: "Entre les couleurs et les visibles prétendus, on retrouverait le tissu qui les double, les soutient, les nourrit, et qui, lui, n'est pas chose, mais possibilité, latence et *chair* des choses. Si l'on se retourne sur le voyant, on va constater que ceci n'est pas analogie ou comparaison vague, et doit être prise à la lettre," VI, 173.

[452] Judith Butler describes the flesh as a "web in which one lives," which emphasizes the fact that flesh exceeds any individual, but assures the inherence of individuals in common system in which touch is possible: "The flesh is not something one has, but, rather, the web in which one lives; it is not simply what I touch of the other, or of myself, but the condition of possibility of touch, a tactility that exceeds any given touch, and that *cannot be reducible to a unilateral action performed by a subject*." "Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche," *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty,* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 181, my emphasis.

[453] See Stéphanie Ménasé, *Passivité et creation: Merleau-Ponty et l'art moderne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003), though her emphasis rests more on the visual arts than on literature.

[454] This structure of the flesh and the relationship between flesh and the world leads Renaud Barbaras to claim that the concept of the flesh is unsuccessful. He argues that there are two meanings of the flesh, "which thwart one another." Merleau-Ponty's definition of the "flesh of the world" as consubstantial with our bodies and his elucidation of its structure as sensing-sensible, is, in Barbaras's view, too ambiguous to be viable: "The ontological transfer from my flesh (a body) to the world (as Flesh) would require an ontological shift much more radical than that which Merleau-Ponty makes in *The Visible and the Invisible.*" See Barbaras, "The Ambiguity of the Flesh" *Chiasmi International* 4, *Figures et fonds de la chair,* (2002); 19-27.

the body imitates insofar as it is—incompossibly—both object and subject, sensing and sensed.

But flesh also founds a relation of reversibility and exchange between the body and the world it perceives, making it seem as if there were a pre-established harmony between our bodies and things in the world.[455] The body perceives because it is flesh, because the body, "étant de leur famille [la famille des choses], visible et tangible lui-même, il use de son être comme d'un moyen pour participer au leur, que chacun des deux êtres est pour l'autre archétype, que le corps appartient à l'ordre des choses comme le monde est chair universelle" (VI, 179). This "belonging" of the body to the order of objects, or to the things it sees, is indispensable to the body's capacity for perception. The body's ability to see and to touch is founded on its passivity, its capacity to *be seen* and to *be touched.* This theme can be found in Beckett, whose narrator-characters, especially in the short fiction of the 1940's, tend to be abject, hungry, hurting, or have suffered blows, abuses or other violence prior to their constitution as speakers or story-tellers. This phenomenon is especially prominent in "Premier Amour," "Le Calmant" and "L'éxpulsé," but it exists in other works as well (*Murphy, Godot, Fin de Partie.*)[456]

One of the most important implications of Merleau-Ponty's concept of the flesh is to show us the interrelation or co-constitution of passivity and activity, of subject and object.[457] A "subject" only exists insofar as it belongs to the order of objects. As Merleau-Ponty writes: "Nous disons donc que notre corps est un être à deux feuillets, d'un côté chose parmi les choses et, par ailleurs, celui qui les voit et les touche ; [… notre corps] réunit en lui ces deux propriétés, et sa double appartenance à l'ordre de l' « objet » et à l'ordre de « sujet » nous dévoile entre les deux ordres des relations très inattendues" (VI, 178). Invoking Heraclitus, Merleau-Ponty imagines the "*corps senti*" and the "*corps sentant*" as "deux segments d'un seul parcours circulaire, qui, par en haut, va de gauche à droite, et, par en bas, de droite à gauche, mais qui n'est q'un seul mouvement dans ses deux phases" (VI, 180). If we were to cut the circle in half and flatten out its upper semi-circle (moving from left to right) and its lower semi-circle (moving from right to left), we would see two lines moving in opposite directions. And yet, as part of a circle, they are two phases of the same movement. It is in this way that *flesh* is structured so as to constitute a flexible space in which subjectivity and objectivity, passivity and activity, coexist in a relation of continual reversibility.

[455] "La regard, disions-nous, enveloppe, palpe, épouse les choses visibles. Comme s'il était avec elles dans un rapport d'harmonie préétablie […] je ne regarde pas un chaos, mais des choses, de sorte qu'on ne peut pas dire enfin si c'est lui ou c'est elles qui commandent," VI, 173.

[456] The vulnerability associated with *being seen* is dramatized in *Film,* in which E pursues O. Deleuze touches on this in his essay on *Film*: "Le plus grad film irlandais," *Critique et Clinique,* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1993), 36-39.

[457] The idea that subjectivity is constituted on the basis of a fundamental passivity is explained lucidly in Butler's "Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche." Butler uses Merleau-Ponty's lectures on Malebranche (ten years earlier than *Le visible et l'invisible*) to suggest that one must be touched so as to feel, addressed so as to speak, etcetera. Butler describes "a passivity prior to the emergence of the "I," a relation that is, strictly speaking, nonnarratable by the "I," who can begin to tell its story only after this inauguration has taken place, 190. The passivity of artists might be examined in this context, and, in particular, the thematization of passivity and victimization in Beckett's *Textes pour rien*.

Merleau-Ponty's discovery of a strange adherence between the seer and the visible leads him to develop the structure of the flesh as a reflexive turn or as an overlapping of the visible upon itself. Here we have a more complicated spatial metaphor—a wave, the crest of which is able to peer over itself so as to look at its underside. "Il y a vision, toucher," Merleau-Ponty writes, "quand un certain visible, un certain tangible, se retourne sur tout le visible, tout le tangible dont il fait partie" (VI, 181). Merleau-Ponty further claims that "il y a un narcissisme fondamentale de toute vision," a phenomenon that he describes using the image of two mirrors facing one another as a figure for visibility. He observes that in the series of reflections produced by the two mirrors there is confusion between seer and seen. The second and most profound meaning of narcissism, Mearleau-Ponty tells us, is that "activité est identiquement passivité" (VI, 181).[458]

But within this narcissistic, or reflexive structure of the flesh, Merleau-Ponty describes the relation between the visible body and the body that sees as one of *reversibility*. Between the seeing body and the visible body there is "insertion réciproque et entrelacs de l'un dans l'autre" (VI, 180). This relation of intertwining and reciprocity is possible only because the seeing body and the visible body "belong" to *one* flesh. But their relation is not one of consubstantiality, strictly speaking, because the flesh is not a material substance: "La chair n'est pas matière, n'est pas esprit, n'est pas substance. Il faudrait, pour la désigner, le vieux terme d'« élément », au sens où l'employait pour parler de l'eau, de l'air, de la terre et du feu, c'est-à-dire, au sens d'une *chose générale,* à mi-chemin de l'individu spatio-temporel et de l'idée, sorte de principe incarné qui importe un style d'être partout où il s'en trouve une parcelle" (VI, 182). Flesh, then, is a generality that confers its style of being on particular instances.

Flesh also founds a relation of *reversibility* between visible and invisible, active and passive, subject and object, sensing and sensible; it suggests a way of thinking these extremes together that does not involve a relation of identity, a collapsing of differences, in short, a synthesis. What makes flesh, and the chiasmus that it enables, a successful alternative to the dialectic is this very difference between reversibility and coincidence. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that we should refrain from thinking of the flesh as a union of contradictions, and think of it instead "comme élément, emblème concret d'une manière d'être générale." Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that while reversibility is theoretically always possible, there is a *difference* between the two terms—an independence such that they can never completely coincide.[459] A reversibility that never achieves coincidence is what the thickness or the opacity of the flesh allows. The maintenance of this difference, which is enabled by the reflexive and reversible structure of the flesh, will form the basis of creative reconfiguration according to Merleau-Ponty's ontology.

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[458] The narcissistic structure of the flesh—its ability to fold so as to look back at itself—which founds the ability to sense and to see, also founds the "subjectivities" of others: "si j'ai pu comprendre comment en moi naît cette vague […] à plus forte raison puis-je comprendre qu'ailleurs aussi il se referme sur lui-même, et qu'il y ait d'autres paysages que le mien," VI, 183. According to Merleau-Ponty, we understand other subjectivities insofar as we apply an understanding we have acquired of own capacity for sensation.

[459] "Il est temps de souligner qu'il s'agit d'une réversibilité toujours imminente et jamais réalisée en fait. Ma main gauche est toujours en train de toucher les choses, mais je ne parviens jamais à la coïncidence ; elle s'éclipse au moment de se produire," VI, 191.

Animal Grace and the Circuit of the Mirror

Merleau-Ponty defines the flesh as a reflexive phenomenon, the nature of which we may appreciate more fully by returning to his image of two mirrors facing one another to illustrate its structure.[460] The flesh is as if "sur deux miroirs l'un devant l'autre naissent deux séries indéfinies d'images emboîtées qui n'appartiennent vraiment à aucune des deux surfaces, puisque chacune n'est que la réplique de l'autre, qui font donc couple, un couple plus réel que chacune d'elles. De sorte que le voyant étant pris dans cela qu'il voit, c'est encore lui-même qu'il voit" (VI, 181). A ricocheting of images creates the effect whereby the seer is also the seen. Subject and object are continually reversed, such that the seer *sees* herself as visible, completing the "circuit" of flesh that stimulates sensation. Merleau-Ponty also describes flesh as a coiling or folding of an ontological surface, whereby the body sees itself seeing things: "[La chair] est l'enroulement du visible sur le corps voyant, du tangible sur le corps touchant, qui est attesté notamment quand le corps se voit, se touche *en train de voir et de toucher les choses*" (VI, 189). The requirement that the body be both seer and seen, toucher and touched, creates a *pli* or *cavité* (familiar figures from *Phénoménologie de la perception*). The image of a fold or a cavity—configurations in which two surfaces can face each other—emphasizes the flesh's capacity for reflexivity as well as a kinship between body and world: "ce pli, cette cavité centrale du visible qui est ma vision, ces deux rangées en miroir du voyant et du visible, du touchant et du touché, forment un système bien lié sur lequel je table, définissent une vision général et un style constant de la visibilité" (VI, 189). This "linked system," in which two contiguous surfaces face each other affords both reflexivity and reversibility, a chiasmic exchange between visible and invisible that renders a body sentient.

According to Merleau-Ponty's view, a body that is *merely* visible is not alive. It remains an object, incomplete (*inachevé*). Though a circuit is in place, no live current runs through it. It is only with the reflexivity we have described that the "current" of the visible wakens to course through circuits that have been prepared for it, developing: "d'un visible un voyant et d'un corps un esprit ou, du moins, une chair" (VI, 191). At first one might associate the image of a body animated, as it were, by a "visibility" with residual dualism, but the fact that a body must *see its own visibility* in order to become a sensing body undercuts the strict division between subjectivity and objectivity (body and spirit) on which dualism rests. We remember: "le corps visible, par un travail *sur lui-même*, aménage le creux d'où se fera une vision […] c'est-à-dire sera visible pour lui-même" (VI, 191, my emphasis). It is in such a way that *reflexivity*—an ability to see oneself seeing—defines the concept of flesh.

Far from endowing the flesh with sensation, making it alive, the reflexivity of the mirror, for Beckett, creates a self-consciousness that ruins a natural grace of movement. In 1976, while rehearsing for the filming of *Ghost Trio* in London, Beckett invoked Heinrich Von Kleist's essay, *Über das Marionettentheater,* when discussing movement.[461] Kleist's essay ascribes to puppets a natural grace, symmetry and harmony

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[460] Merleau-Ponty's working notes contain the phrase: "La chair est phénomène de miroir," VI, 303.

[461] See "Beckett and Kleist's essay 'On the Marionette Theatre'" in *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett,* ed. James Knowlson and John Pilling, (London: John Calder, 1979), 277-

unavailable to human dancers or actors, who are dogged with a self-consciousness that throws them "permanently off balance."[462] James Knowlson describes how Beckett, over a glass of Guinness, invoked two examples from Kleist's essay: the marionette and the bear, who is able to defeat a human fencer by parrying all of the fencer's false moves. Knowlson explains that the bear represents a "creature without awareness of self, who, as a result, is able to respond naturally and unselfconsciously to the thrusts of the fencer and not be deceived by what are only false passes." He recounts how Beckett applied these examples (of natural grace achieved by the unselfconscious marionette and bear) to the human figure in *Ghost Trio,* who "moves to the window or the door or looks up from the pallet to the mirror." The protagonist in *Ghost Trio* engages in two kinds of movement: one jerky, self-conscious, and the other "sustained, economical, and flowing." For Beckett, then, auto-reflection is part of what it means to be human, but this glance in the mirror at oneself culminates in awkward movements and loss of balance, instead of completing the circuitry necessary for sensation to arise.

Beckett's fascination with the movements of the bear and with the grace of the marionette notwithstanding, there is an element of reflexivity in Beckett's oeuvre as a whole that makes his relationship to reflexivity more complicated. That Beckett's corpus is somewhat inward-looking and extremely self-referential—"auto-reflexive"—is a point made convincingly by Erik Wessler in *La Littérature Face à elle-même.* Wessler argues that this very "auto-reflexivity" is what enables Beckett's work constitute a radical innovation, and to remake the genre of the literary.[463] This argument resonates with what Catherina Wulf calls Kleist's paradoxical and utopic solution to human self-consciousness: a second-order reflexivity that is available to us through art.[464]

Chiasm: Language and Being

A kind of self-reflexivity of the flesh is, according to Merleau-Ponty, what lends the body sentience. Perception is possible, in other words, because the body may turn back to look at itself looking. This self-reflexive structure of the flesh supports a relation

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287. "One of the parts of the essay which particularly impressed Beckett concerns the advent of self-consciousness and its effects on the natural charm of man […] This discovery of self represents, of course, a Fall. Self-consciousness separates man from the world, even from his own Self since, essentially, the very consciousness of self means that he is perceiving himself as Other. Disunity, disharmony, and fragmentation therefore enter, where once there was natural harmony, symmetry and grace," 278-279.

[462] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame,* 558.

[463] Erik Wessler, *La littérature face à elle-même : L'écriture spéculaire de Samuel Beckett,* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009.

[464] Catherina Wulf attributes another view to Kleist: the utopic suggestion that the only antidote to this loss of innocence is another morsel from the tree of knowledge—a second order reflexivity that we can access through works of art: "À la différence de l'homme, elles [les marionnettes] échappent à la loi de la pesanteur, mais surtout leur comportement n'est pas faussé par la réflexivité à laquelle l'homme est soumis. […] Selon Kleist, la réflexivité et la conscience de soi marquent la perte de l'innocence de l'être humain. […] Pour retrouver notre innocence originelle nous devons nous nourrir à nouveau à l'arbre de la connaissance. Ce geste-là serait, d'après Kleist, le dernier chapitre de l'histoire du monde. L'article de Kleist soulève un point primordial, celui de la valeur sublime de l'art s'opposant à la faillibilité de la conscience humaine," "La voie de la uber-marionnette: l'acteur en marge" *The Savage Eye/L'oeil fauve: New Essays on Samuel Beckett's Television Plays,* 145.

Merleau-Ponty observes between the body and language. More general structures that involve reversibility—the sentient body, language, and being are all described by Merleau-Ponty as flesh—are similar to the reversibility between subject and object (seer and seen). Merleau-Ponty writes: "si l'on explicitait complètement l'architectonique du corps humain, son bâti ontologique, et comment il se voit et s'entend, on verrait que la structure de son monde muet est telle que toutes les possibilités du langage y sont déjà données" (VI, 200). In the last pages of *Le visible et l'invisible,* Merleau-Ponty attempts to describe how the reversible structure of the flesh, extends into the domains of both language and being, where it founds not sentience *per se*, but the possibility of growth, expansion, change and creative novelty. The reflexivity of the flesh then founds the power of art and *words* (*parole*) to re-articulate the domains of language and of being.

In a grammatical chiasmus, two different meanings can be maintained together through a reversal of word order. Citing the examples Taylor Carman gives in his study of Merleau-Ponty, a chiasmus is an "inversion of parallel phrases, such as *When the going gets tough, the tough get going*, or *Working hard or hardly working?*" [465] In such instances, the chiasmus suggests the precariousness of meaning. Minor substitutions or adjustments of word order can create vast divergences of sense. Beckett's *Worstward Ho* exploits this susceptibility of meaning to mutation through continual substitutions, exchanges and reversals of words, with effects that are by turns dispiriting, terrifying and exhilarating.

A typical response to Beckett's late prose "poem" is to describe its language as "unmaking" itself, "undoing" itself or as self-effacing.[466] In effect, *Worstward Ho*'s language is one of self-reference, with each new word or phrase varying one that has come before. In this way, it could be described as mirror images or as a series of *chiasmi*. The next section argues that *Worstward Ho* transforms language into flesh by creating a highly self-referential language: the dense text is woven with reversals, the most obvious of which is the flipping of letters between a negation, *no*, and a continuation, *on*.[467] By acquiring the sentience of a body, language in *Worstward Ho* can alter space; it arrogates to itself a potential for passive agency. We will ask what it means for language to acquire sensitivity and a certain "subjective agency" (though not in the sense of a world-constituting Subject). Is it the role of experimental fiction to confer upon language this capability of touching/sensing and being touched/sensed? The reversibility described by Merleau-Ponty may illumine the means by which Beckett's text operates its alteration of language, its reconfiguration of the landscape of words.

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[465] Taylor Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, (London: Routledge, 2008), 124. He also notes that, though the chiasm figures in the fourth section of *Le visible et l'invisible*, it is only in the working notes that this concept receives full attention.

[466] An L.A. Times review calls the prose "self-dissolving," and S.E. Gontarski's introduction to *Nohow On: Company, Ill seen, ill said, Worstward Ho,* (New York: Grove Press, 1996) describes *Worstward Ho* as attempting to "break free of words" and attributes to it a desire to "worsen language." Carla Locatelli makes similar claims in, *Unwording the world: Samuel Beckett's prose works after the Nobel prize,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

[467] See for instance, Pascale Casanova's *Beckett l'abstracteur,* the first chapter of which is an analysis of *Worstward Ho.* Casanova calls the work a program for disarticulating the English language, though her focus is more en exchanges than on reversals or the chiasmus, 47.

In the last section of *Le visible et l'invisible*, "L'entrelacs – Le chiasme," a transitivity forms between the flesh and the word. Merleau-Ponty speculates about just how the reversibility of the flesh might transfer into the domain of language. Somewhat vaguely, he signals that the "nouvelle réversibilité et l'émergence de la chair comme expression sont le point d'insertion du parler et du penser dans le monde du silence" (VI, 188). The idea that the reversibility of the flesh is the *point of insertion* for speaking and thinking foreshadows his description of the word (and being) as having the structure of flesh. Yet *Worstward Ho*, much more dramatically than Merleau-Ponty's own writing, *performs* a language structured by reversibility and self-reflexivity.

Ideas, thoughts, artistic expression, language and culture are thought to have the same structure as the body that sees itself seeing and touches itself touching. Rhetorically, Merleau-Ponty asks: "par quel miracle notamment à la généralité naturelle de mon corps et du monde vient s'ajouter une généralité créée, une culture, une connaissance qui reprend et rectifie la première" (VI, 197). But Merleau-Ponty provides the solution to his own riddle: No *miracle* is necessary to transition from the generality of the body to that of *culture*, because "[la culture] fuse déjà aux articulations du corps esthésiologique, aux contours des choses sensibles" (VI, 197). Merleau-Ponty draws a fascinating parallel between *signification* and visibility, insofar as the former closes or seals a certain multiplicity of meanings, just as vision comes to close the circuit that creates the sensing or "esthesiological" body: "la signification est ce qui vient sceller, clore, rassembler la multiplicité des moyens physiques, physiologiques, linguistiques de l'élocution, les contracter en un seul acte, comme la vision vient achever le corps esthésiologique" (VI, 199). Language and meaning are already founded upon the reflexive structure of the flesh.

Culture, the "created generality," adds itself to the "natural generality" of the body and of the world, which it can "reprend et rectifie." This power to take up and vary derives from a relation of reversibility between language and the esthesiological body that is subtended by the flesh. In this way, culture "se glisse par des voies qu'elle n'a pas frayées, transfigure des horizons qu'elle n'a pas ouverts" (VI, 198). Culture inserts itself into the world as flesh, transfiguring and altering that which it has not itself created. Merleau-Ponty continues this theme with a most startling metaphor: "C'est comme si la visibilité qui anime le monde sensible émigrait, non pas hors de tout corps, mais dans un autre corps moins lourd, plus transparent, comme si elle changeait de chair, abandonnant celle du corps pour celle du langage, et affranchie par là, mais non délivrée, de toute condition" (VI, 198). The same visibility—the folding within the structure of the visible—takes on another body: a language body. Just as it reconfigures the surface of the visible world so as to create perception, so this "visibility" takes an avatar in the virtual realm or in the malleable surface of language. The consequence of the movement of the visible into language—the consequence of its taking a language-body or avatar in a virtual world of words—is that it is freed (*affranchir*), though not delivered from every condition. This last point is important insofar as it intimates the possibility of variation— not only variation of the possibilities of language achieved by this new body's movement within it, but also of variation of manner in which we can configure the visible world through a re-application of the principle of language-variation.

Merleau-Ponty's clearest explication of the interlacing between language, the body and the visible world is as follows:

> si mes paroles ont un sens, ce n'est pas *parce qu'elles* offrent l'organisation systématique que dévoilera le linguiste, c'est parce que cette organisation, comme le regard, se rapporte à elle-même : la Parole opérante est la région obscure d'où vient la lumière instituée, comme la sourde réflexion du corps sur lui-même est ce que nous appelons lumière naturelle. Comme il y a une réversibilité du voyant et du visible, et comme, au point où se croisent les deux métamorphoses, naît ce qu'on appelle perception, de même, il y a une réversibilité de la parole et de ce qu'elle signifie: la signification est ce qui vient sceller, clore, rassembler, la multiplicité des moyens physiques, physiologiques, linguistiques de l'élocution, les contracter en un seul acte, comme la vision vient achever le corps esthésiologique (VI, 199).

The kernel of sameness uniting sentient flesh and *la Parole opérante* is a reflexivity that leads to reversibility. An organization of words can contort itself to look back at itself; language doubles up over itself just as the visible coils up over the seeing body. Merleau-Ponty's ideas about "visibility" in general are equally pertinent to language, which, according to Merleau-Ponty, must work back on itself, recreate itself, and, in so doing, react back upon and alter world we perceive.

Merleau-Ponty's argument about the self-reflexivity of language and its potential for revivification remains abstract; he tells us that a renegotiation of the manner in which the visible contorts itself so as to intuit the invisible is possible, but he does not enact the strict reversals that would perform what his text describes. Asking the question of how a reversibility between words and what they signify might operate concretely, we turn to the densely formulaic text of *Worstward Ho*. Toward the end of *Le visible et l'invisible*, we find the argument that the relation of intertwining between language and being means that innovation at the level of the word affects being, thus giving the creative transformation of language (in experimental literature, perhaps) philosophical import. The reflexivity of language is described with the same terminology as the reflexivity of being: "nul locuteur ne parle qu'en se faisant par avance allocutaire, *ne serait-ce que de soi-même,* qu'il ferme d'un seule geste le circuit de son rapport à soi et celui de son rapport aux autres et, du même coup, s'institue aussi *délocutaire*, parole dont on parle: il s'offre toute parole à une Parole universelle" (VI, 200). This ontological view of language, or Merleau-Ponty's idea that language itself is a kind of being, moves us to consider Husserl's claim (as paraphrased by Merleau-Ponty): "toute la philosophie consiste à restituer une puissance de signifier" (VI, 201). Once the "horizon" or field of the namable and sayable is opened, the word (la parole) "métamorphose les structures du monde visible." Merleau-Ponty continues: "Et réciproquement, tout le paysage est envahi par les mots comme par une invasion, n'est plus à nos yeux qu'une variante de la parole" (VI, 201). This transformation of the world into language would demand that philosophy investigate the "naissance du sens ou un sens sauvage, une expression de l'expérience par l'expérience, qui éclaire notamment le domaine spéciale de langage" (VI, 201). A second order language would be necessary to fashion expressive ways of saying, moving and being.

For Merleau-Ponty, the possibility of creative novelty is associated less with creation *ex nihilo* than with a *reprise* (repetition and variation) of the structural

articulations by which space, the body and language are organized.[468] Such ideas about innovation find their own reprise in the reflexive structure of *Worstward Ho*, to which the next section of the present text is dedicated. To what extent, we must ask, is *Worstward Ho* a truly "closed space"? In an arid chamber, cut off from the world, did an abstract language configure itself? In his working notes to *Le visible et l'invisible,* Merleau-Ponty describes a world (*un monde*) as an "ensemble organisé, qui est *clos,* qui étrangement, est représentatif de tout le reste, possède les symboles, ses équivalents pour tout ce qui n'est pas lui. La peinture pour l'espace par exemple […] ainsi le tableau est un « monde » par opposition au monde unique et « réel »" (VI, 272). This implies that reconfiguration or rearrangement is possible in a rarefied, representative space, the closure of which permits variation and experimentation. This is part of what Merleau-Ponty is referring to when he lauds the ability of art to "open a dimension." If passing to a new dimension allows previously un-relatable or "incompossible" notions to coexist, then, as we have discussed, the convergence of contradictions may stimulate this opening of a dimension: "Un « monde » a des dimensions. Par définition elles ne sont pas les seules possibles (par passage à une 3e dimension, des êtres spatiaux séparés dans les deux premières peuvent être reliés.) (VI, 272)." Merleau-Ponty goes further, linking the passage between dimensions to the institution of meaning through reorganization: "Le passage à une dimension supérieure=*Urstiftung* d'un sens, réorganisation. En quel sens elle est préparé dans la structure donnée?" (VI, 272). His work implies that the germ of a reorganization that will open dimensions is already to be found in existing structures, and he reiterates the philosophical power of a language that forges new ways of meaning: "le langage se faisant exprime, au moins latéralement, une ontogenèse dont il fait partie" (VI, 137).

III. *Worstward Ho*

Impressions of a language-body

That Beckett is an architect of spaces and that meanings in his work—especially his late work—emerge through descriptions of spatial geography, if not already evident from the works themselves *(the nouvelles, Le dépeupleur* and *Godot* for example), can be confirmed by the tendency of critics to refer to Beckett's works in spatial terms. This trend began with the publication of Eoin O'Brien's *The Beckett Country* (1986)*, a book of photography chronicling places in Ireland of importance to Beckett. Soon after, spatial terminology rapidly proliferated through the discourse of Beckett studies.[469] Drew Milne

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[468] Merleau-Ponty characterizes an exploration of language as an exploration of the world as follows: "[le monde] se fait sous la domination de certaines lois structurales : les événements laissent transparaître des puissances assez générales, telles que le regard ou la parole, qui opèrent selon un style identifiable, selon des rapports de « si…alors… », selon une logique en action [… la philosophie] y discerne des articulations, elle y réveille des rapports réglés de prépossession, de récapitulation, d'enjambement, qui sont comme endormis dans notre paysage ontologique, qui n'y subsistent plus que sous forme des traces, et qui, pourtant, continuent d'y fonctionner, d'y instituer du nouveau," VI, 134-5.

[469] For a treatment of Beckett in relation to Deleuze's "geophilosophy" and "une topologie de « l'art-philosophique »," see Isabelle Ost, *Samuel Beckett et Gilles Deleuze : cartographie de deux parcours d'écriture*, (Bruxelles: Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, 2008).

refers to the "prose-scape" of *Worstward Ho,* while S.E. Gontarski writes that "Beckett has shaped a recognizable country," a "landscape" that is more "amorphous, porous, and mutable" than, say, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County.[470] Gontarski further describes Beckett's fiction as "a land without soil, say, just as the book, the page, or the stage are always only images." This refers to the aberrant quality of Beckettian spaces and the critic's difficulty in "mapping" them,[471] but it also underscores the relation between *language* (in the book and on the page) and landscape, or space.[472] While it is agreed that *Worstward Ho* constitutes the creation of a novel kind of language, whether this is a poetic language of sound-as-sense or an "anti-language" that "assaults the foundations of verbal communication,"[473] what has not been studied is the extent to which the linguistic reconfiguration we find in *Worstward Ho* reconstructs the way in which the body, in order to make sense of a place, must remember its previous *parcours*. In *Worstward Ho,* the "prose-scape," to adapt Milne's term, is a "dim void" where shades fade and reappear, worsening as we adapt to the strange, clipped idiom that distinguishes the text. In *Worstward Ho*, language itself becomes the scene or setting in which internal reconfigurations—cataclysms, perhaps, or folds in a surface—alter the ways in which *sens* can be articulated.

A comprehension of *Worstward Ho* requires that we remember prior instants in the text, in which a rule, code or associative phrase is given. The opening lines, "From now say for be missaid," or lines such as "From now one for the kneeling one"[474] are self-referential insofar as they invite the text to fold back on itself, teaching the reader how it will say and mean (anew). Self-reference in the text is compounded by the fact that the shades that populate the dim void are associated with epithets, as, for example, "the as one plodding twain" (for the shade of an old man and child). This practice, reminiscent of Homeric techniques for sustaining epic meter (i.e. the use of "gray-eyed" for Athena) depends upon associations created through repetition. *Wortward Ho's* "unmakes"[475] usual language in this way, so as to reconfigure a more vital variant.

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[470] S.E. Gontarski, "Introduction: Anywhere and Nowhere: Mapping the Beckett Country" *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett,* ed. C.J. Ackerley and S.E. Gontarski, New York: Grove Press, 2004, ix-xvi.

[471] As regards the difficulty of mapping the Beckett country, Gontarski invokes Jean Baudrillard, comparing Beckettian spaces to "hyperreality," "where signifiers obliterate signified and language becomes less external than self-referential […] In Baudrillard's splendid inversion of causality, 'It is the map which precedes the territory. […] It is the map that engenders the territory.'" Jean Baudrillard, *The Infinite Conversation,* trans. Susan Hanson, as quoted in Gontarski "Introduction: Anywhere and Nowhere," xv.

[472] For heuristic purposes, we might think of "landscape" as *differentiated* space—terrain distinguished by mountains, landmarks and by-ways known to memory—while "space" is more indeterminate, flexible, yet to be marked.

[473] Brian Finney calls this an "anti-language" and an assault on the foundations of verbal communication, while for Enoch Brater, *Worstward Ho* is a self-performing artifact that reduces language "to its most human, tender form." Brater writes that sound itself shapes the piece's meaning: "the sounds in these stanzas is the sense." Finney, "Still to Worstward Ho: Beckett's Prose fiction since the lost ones," *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company*, ed. James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur, (London: Macmillan, 1987), 65-79, 78. Enoch Brater, "Voyelles, Cromlechs and the Special (W)rites of *Worstward Ho*," *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company*, 160-194, 169.

[474] *Worstward Ho* in *Nohow On: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said,* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 98. All further references to *Worstward Ho* are to this addition, (henceforth cited in the text as WH).

[475] Charles Krance comments on the relationship between *Worstward Ho* and Blanchot's concept of *désouvrement* (he explains that this phase literally designates the "unworking" process which is always at

As *Worstward Ho* builds on itself in this self-referential manner, its syntax becomes more and more coded. It is perhaps this "worsening" of words that has led critics to call the text self-diminishing or self-cannibalizing.[476] But if this technique ultimately refashions or re-creates the language-space or "prose-scape" of *Worstward Ho,* by "navigating" in language (rather than using it indexically), we might ask what kind of "body" could achieve such a feat? A physical body of flesh and blood does not live in language—it is not, as in *L'innommable,* "made of words"—and yet, following Merleau-Ponty, we might say that it is necessary to *inhabit* language in order to induce or reconfigure its modalities of meaning. "Essence" is figured by Merleau-Ponty in one instance as a vanishing point (*point de fuite*) indicated by the arrangement of words (*paroles*), which would be "inaccessible, sauf pour qui accepte de vivre d'abord et toujours en elles" (VI, 157). But to live always in words requires a certain kind of "body"—a body that is in fact "made of words"— capable of reconfiguring linguistic space and creating new paths and furrows within it. Might we trace in the syntactical strangeness of *Worstward Ho* the movement of a language-body—a body that, having abandoned its flesh for the flesh of language (VI, 198), has become less heavy, free to move within a different medium? The theorization or imagination of such a body suggests modalities for creative variation of language, based on the idea that, like the physical body in space, an avatar in the space of language re-creates its medium through its movement.

Despite many important themes evoked by *Worstward Ho,* the present study restricts its focus to the text's experimentation with language, which relates to (literary) creative processes more generally. Of principal interest is a transitive relation between space, language and flesh, which informs an interest of crucial importance in Beckett's work (as in Merleau-Ponty's): the relation between language and being.[477] We will first look at the avant-gardism of *Worstward Ho* in relation to incantation and ritual, asking how words "bring things into being," before investigating precisely *how* the language of *Worstward Ho*, on the model of space and flesh, articulates itself in ways other than those we accustomed to. In giving us the vocabulary with which to study the workings of *Worstward Ho* as *langage opérant*, Merleau-Ponty's late ontology helps to elucidate the

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work in the literary act of creating an *oeuvre* and argues that its kinship with the worstwardness of *Worstward Ho* should not go unnoticed). Krance, "Worstward Ho and *On*-words: Writing to(wards) the Point," *Rethinking Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays,* eds. Lance St. John Butler and Robin J. Davis, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 124-140, 140.

[476] See, for instance, S.E. Gontarski, "Introduction," WH, ix-xvi.

[477] Beckett's interest in the relation between language and being is often noted in connection with his first "revolutionary" revision of syntax in the novel, *Comment C'est.* P.J. Murphy calls Beckett's syntactical experimentation in this work an exploration of the relationship between language and being, as well as between author and character and between art and life. It is clear than many of the same preoccupation are addressed in *Worstward Ho,* especially the relation between ontology and language, crucial to Husserl and to Merleau-Ponty. P.J. Murphy, *Reconstructing Beckett: Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); see especially the chapter, "Rituals of Syntax in 'How It Is," 62-75. Murphy further suggests that such an ontological investigation gives Beckett the ability to go "back" in order to go "on"—an ability, he reminds us, that is central to the definition of the *Avant-Garde,* and which suggests an alternative to reading Beckett within a postmodern critical framework. While I share this general approach, I find Murphy's relative neglect of *Worstward Ho*'s surprising (he devotes only a few pages of his book to this piece).

creative power of the word in Beckett work. To suggest that the words that compose *Worstward Ho* are organized by the navigation of a *body,* whose movements pattern the space of its language in novel ways, is to explore a paradigm of linguistic creativity (via reconfiguration) that is neither the activity of a willing subject nor a random mutation, wholly passive. This restructuring of space by a body, so as to create meaning in its surroundings, is familiar from our study of *Quad*. We'll ask whether and how such techniques, explored by Beckett in the composition of *Quad,* are "grafted" onto the domain of language in *Worstward Ho*. A careful reading of *Worstward Ho* supports the idea that the spatial patterning achieved by the movement of bodies is transferable to the domain of language.

Setting and Orientation

The idea for a "language-body" comes, of course, from the pages of *Le visible et l'invisible,* in which the body's movement in space and the activity of *parole* within existing language are compared. And while Merleau-Ponty habitually describes the work of *la parole* as *like* that of the body ("*Comme* mon corps […] de même la parole"), we are told that between the body and the word (*la parole*) there exists, "bien plutôt que parallèle ou qu'analogie, solidarité et entrelacement" (VI, 155-6, my emphasis). There is solidarity between these two terms insofar as *la parole* "étend aux opérations sémantiques, l'appartenance du corps à l'être et la pertinence corporelle de tout être […]" (VI, 156). But what does it mean to say that being is bodily, and that this bodily-ness extends to semantic operations? *La parole,* a "certain région dans l'univers des significations, est aussi organe ou résonateur de toutes les autres" (VI, 155), shares with the body the structure of flesh, which is the reflexive coiling of a medium over itself. Both the body and the word derive their transformative power from inherence in the visible world or in language: "La parole est partie totale des significations comme la chair du visible, comme elle, rapport à l'Être à travers un être, et, comme elle, narcissique, érotisée, douée d'une magie naturelle qui attire dans son réseau les autres significations comme le corps sent le monde en le sentant" (VI, 155-6). The fleshliness of the body and of *la parole* subtends a relation between them, enabling the body to reconfigure not only the domain of space but also that of language.[478]

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[478] In *Le visible et l'invisible,* we find analogies such as: "tout le monde parle, tous vivent et gesticulent dans l'Être, comme je bouge dans mon paysage" (VI, 157), that imply that speaking and writing mirror the movement of a body in its surrounding landscape. Merleau-Ponty gives a more explicit explanation of the relationship between the movement of the perceiving body in space and the effect of *la parole* on language in one of his working notes:

> Le rapport parler-comprendre: le rapport se mouvoir-percevoir le but, i.e. : le but n'est pas posé, mais il est ce dont je manque, ce qui marque un certain écart au cadran du schéma corporel. De même je parle en rejoignant avec appareil linguistique telle modulation de l'espace linguistique— les mots liés à leur sens comme le corps à son but (VI, 241).

This relation between movement and perception on the one hand, and speaking and understanding on the other formulates more clearly Merleau-Ponty's idea of essence or meaning as a "vanishing point": just as it is only by *moving* that the body perceives what it lacks (the ends toward which it must go, its *sens*), so it is only by speaking that we might modulate linguistic *space* to accommodate the demand for different versions of *sens*. In both cases, change happens internally, through reconfigurations of space and language.

A consequence of this relation between language and space, elucidated by a reading of Merleau-Ponty, is that language *means* insofar as it orients a speaking subject in his or her everyday world. Orientation thus joins the twin meanings of *sens*: semantic meaning and spatial direction. For Merleau-Ponty, one can orient oneself in language just as one would in space. But, more surprisingly, orientation within language can facilitate orientation in space. Here we understand why the relationship between language and space must be more than analogical, since linguistic orientation has ontological repercussions (and vice versa). Language can orient the (speaking) subject in the everyday world, enabling us to situate ourselves in space and in time. To say that language *creates* meaning, both semantically and as direction-orientation, is not merely an abstraction: it is, moreover, not arbitrary that one of the mainstays of conventional narrative is to open a novel or play with a description of setting, an orientation of the reader in space and time.

This is a convention that Beckett provocatively problematizes, not only by creating abstract, indeterminate spaces (in *Godot, Fin de partie,* and the television plays, to name a few), but also by dramatizing the difficulties of orientation in the opening of *L'innommable* (a reassuring description of setting is replaced by a battery of questions).[479] In *Worstward Ho*, a desire to know the time in which a story takes place is thwarted by the words: "No once. No once in pastless now" (WH, 110). A reader's expectation, if not her desire for "Once upon a time in a far away land" is acknowledged, but further frustrated by: "No. No place but the one. None but the one where none." We find ourselves "Somehow in. Beyondless. Thenceless there. Thitherless there. Thenceless thitherless there" (WH, 92).[480] We could read the unrelieved tension in *Quad* in a similar vein: figures skirt endlessly around a center point, unable to find their *place*, unable to reach a point on a coordinate grid where space and time would intersect to afford a fixed, intelligible position. Such *disorientation* and risk of permanent exile from a spatial system that is recognizable, familiar and *meaningful* may be an inevitable part of the creative process—a disorientation that links the creation of new languages, perhaps, with madness. There is the danger, in experimental enterprises such as Beckett's, that there will never again be a comfortable stopping point on a Cartesian grid, and that we will trace fixed tracks ad infinitum in search of a meaning that will always elude us.

We might trace in Beckett's work an increasing pre-occupation with spaces. The shrinking of space in the first trilogy—the circular wanderings in *Molloy*, Malone's solitary room, the jar in which the unnamable is contained—is echoed by spatial preoccupations in the *nouvelles*, especially in "L'Éxpulsé," where the protagonist is ejected from his room so as to roam from place to place, finding solace in the enclosed compartment of a cab, and later in a barn, before turning at dawn towards the open

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[479] The famous opening of *L'innommable*, "où maintenant, qui maintenant," is the subject of Blanchot's provocative essay, in which he explains the general problem of orientation in the work. "Où maintenant? Qui maintenant?," *Le livre à venir*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), originally published in *La Nouvelle revue française* (1953).

[480] Carla Locatelli compares the beginning of *Worstward Ho* to Heideggerian *Geworfenheit* or "thrownness," insofar as we, as readers, find ourselves cast into "the onto-logocentric inescapability of our being in the world," *Unwording the world,* 231.

road.[481] The most explicit treatment of space in Beckett's *oeuvre* is the short piece *Le dépeupleur,* in which a cylinder with exact measurements is described as a place in which bodies "vont cherchant chacun son dépeupleur" in a space "[a]ssez vaste pour permettre de chercher en vain. Assez restreint pour que toute fuite soit vaine."[482] The fact that S.E. Gontarski reads *Le dépeupleur* as an outline for the late, closed space fictions suggests that *Worstward Ho* is deeply preoccupied with questions of spatial orientation as it relates to (the remaking of) linguistic meaning.

The ontological question raised by Beckett's innovative treatment of language is one that certain critics have shied away from,[483] but the relationship between language and being is sustained enough so that it is necessary to keep it in mind as we read *Worstward Ho.* Merleau-Ponty eloquently describes the power of language to affect being through its way of articulating: "le langage n'est pas un masque sur l'Être, mais, si l'on sait le ressaisir avec toutes ses racines et toute sa frondaison, le plus valable témoin de l'Être." Vision and thought, he contends, are: "articulation avant la lettre, apparition de quelque chose là où il n'y avait rien ou autre chose" (VI, 165). Insofar as something can be said to happen in *Worstward Ho,* it is precisely this: the appearing of something where there was nothing or where there was something else. In the void, against the background of a "dim light source unknown," shades appear, disappear, and reappear "unchanged,"[484] "worsening" as the text goes on.

If *Worstward Ho* creates a world, like any fiction, in language, its language too is a "world," and by "saying" (not unsaying, but "saying again"), certain questions about the mechanism of creation and representation can be posed and explored. We may understand this best by considering Merleau-Ponty's claim that philosophical questions reiterate themselves in language (because language, too, is a world).[485] To say that

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[481] See especially Isabelle Ost's treatment of the problem of space in the *nouvelles* in "Et rêve d'un espace sans ici ni ailleurs: Parcours en terre beckettienne," *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 19 (2008); 97-106, especially page 99.

[482] *Le dépeupleur,* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1970). For a reading of the space of *The Lost Ones,* see Gontarski "Introduction" *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett.* He writes: "Beckett played the cartographer briefly with an exceptional novel, *The Lost Ones,* mapping a corner of that frozen world […] he calls it an] outline for the late closed space fictions."

[483] Carla Locatelli qualifies her reading of *Worstward Ho* by saying that she does not intend to raise ontological questions. But she claims that Beckett's work demonstrates the role of language in shaping the way we live: "I am not implying that Beckett is opening a discussion on ontology, but I am saying that, without probing into the issue of ultimate reality or primordial being, he is demonstrating the inevitable role of language in the construction of the world in which we live, and upon which we act," *Unwording the world,* 227. It is true that other critics have explicitly thematized ontology in connection with Beckett's work. See Butler, Lance St. John, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being: A Study in Ontological Parable,* (London: Macmillan, 1984), P.J. Murphy, *Reconstructing Beckett* and Charles Krance, "Worstward Ho and *On*-words: Writing to(wards) the Point."

[484] Andrew Renton schematizes the shades as follows: S(hade) 1 The pained body of bones that rises and kneels. S(hade) 2 The combined image of man and child. S(hade) 3 The perceiving head or skull, "Germ of all." Renton, "*Worstward Ho* and the end(s) of representation," *The Ideal Core of the Onion: Reading Beckett archives,* ed. John Pilling and Mary Bryden, (Bristol: The Longdunn Press Ltd, 1992), 99-136, 102.

[485] Merleau-Ponty writes: "[le langage] parle *de* l'être et *du* monde, et redouble donc leur énigme au lieu de la faire disparaître. L'interrogation philosophique sur le monde ne consiste donc pas à se reporter du monde même à ce que nous en disons, puisqu'elle se réitère à l'intérieur du langage," VI, 130. He criticizes a philosophy that would valorize language as they key to being, arguing that language is not any clearer than

language is a "world" is to say that language includes all of the problems we might investigate in the world of things or of visibilities; we might call it a stage, perhaps, in which ontological and philosophical problems can be posed and probed, "doubled" but not resolved. The doubling of philosophical enigmas—their magnification in the "world" of language may remind us of Beckett's, "Ooze on back not to unsay but *say again* the vasts apart" (WH, 108), as if it is only by saying *again* that we have any hope of gaining insight in to philosophical problems that repeat themselves in the domain of language. As Carla Locatelli notes, this constitutes a marked change in Beckett's own relationship to language: rather than trying to *get rid* of language (a desire the young Beckett expresses in the German Letter of 1937), language becomes an arena in which certain problems of creation and representation may be explored.[486]

Incantations in closed space: ritual and Worstward Ho

Even so, to say that *Worstward Ho* merely restages, in the domain of language, certain questions pertaining to being is to underestimate the scope of its exploratory endeavor. The text is a parable of invention, which, like *Quad,* relies on the closure of its playing field (a "closed space") so as to effect internal reconfigurations of language and to muse over the power of words to create images at the limits of fictional invention. Despite the text's content, the "storyline," as it were, which consists of the appearance, disappearance, reappearance and worsening of three "shades" (a woman, a man and child, and a skull, the "so said seat and germ of all"), there is no mere conjuring out of the void (creation *ex nihilo*) when it comes to the invention of the text's peculiar language. Syntactical oddities, invented words and plays on sounds alter the manner in which language means in the text, but *Worstward Ho* is a dense reworking and invocation of scraps of language culled from the English literary canon (most notably *King Lear*) as well as from Beckett's own previous works and repertoire of images. Those critics who have commented on *Worstward Ho* all mention its intertext, and many argue that it is impossible to understand the piece without an intimate knowledge of Beckett's entire oeuvre.[487] It is true that intertextual references are to be found—enough to lead Andrew

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being (such a position would be close to those of Russell and the Vienna positivists, though Merleau-Ponty announces that he is targeting "positivism of language" more generally): "Philosopher, ce n'est pas révoquer en doute les choses au nom des mots, comme si l'univers des choses dites était plus clair que celui des choses brutes, comme si le monde effectif était un canton du langage, la perception une parole confuse et mutilée, la signification des mots, une sphère de positivité parfaitement rassurante," VI, 130.

[486] Locatelli, *Unwording the World,* 227.

[487] This is the thesis of Adriaan van der Weel and Ruud Hisgen, whose *The Silencing of the Sphinx*, (Leiden: private edition, 1998), is the most involved study of *Worstward Ho* to date. It consists of a genetic study of *Worstward Ho* manuscripts followed by hundreds of pages of interpretation. They write: "*Worstward Ho* is hermetic in the very literal sense that it can only properly be understood from a thorough knowledge of Beckett's entire *oeuvre,*" 361. This idea is echoed by Enoch Brater, who writes: "Yet a story that depends for its life on another story, and another one before that, and both by the same hand, is likely to demand a comprehensive knowledge of Beckett that only a few diehards have the time and inclination to possess," "Voyelles, Cromlechs and the Special (W)rites of Worstward Ho." Andrew Renton shares the sense that *Worstward Ho* draws heavily from earlier works, tracing references to *Imagine Dead Imagine*, ("A place, that again. Never another question. A place, then someone in it, that again. Crawl out of the frowsy deathbed and drag it to a place to die in"), *Ohio Impromptu*, *Endgame*, *A Piece of Monologue* and

Renton to argue that *Worstward Ho* constitutes the "rhetorical sublime" of Beckett's *oeuvre*, clarifying all that has come before it. (Adriaan van der Weel and Rund Hisgen similarly call *Worstward Ho* the *tête morte* of Beckett's oeuvre.) While considering the place of *Worstward Ho* relative to the whole of Beckett's corpus is important—especially insofar as it underscores the self-reflexivity of the Beckett canon as a whole—the present focus will be on the text's *internal* scheme of self-reference, or the manner in which it "rides on a grammar of accumulation and afterthought."[488] An approach that is immanent to the text foregrounds a relationship between the self-reflexive structure of flesh, bodily movement, and literary and linguistic "agency" or creativity.

The title, *Worstward Ho,* as is well known, alludes to the Renaissance play by Webster and Dekker, *Westward Hoe* (1607), to Viola's enthusiastic utterance, "westward ho," in *Twelfth Night,* and to Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* (1855), a Victorian novel set in Elizabethan times.[489] In addition to situating the piece within (several) literary traditions and acknowledging its debt to the occidental—or, more specifically, to the *English* literary canon, the title's parody of the rallying cry "westward ho!," which incites movement towards a frontier, or an elsewhere, insists on a staying within. The title's parody calls for immanence; but, at the same time, the idea that we are to move, with this text, in the direction of the worst takes up the idea of meaning as a spatial direction or vector in an unusual way: though its title announces a journey, the text remains stubbornly in the confines of a fixed, imagined space, in a "dim void" both ubiquitous and inescapable: "No place but the one" (WH, 92). And yet, in this "closed space," there are stirrings: "Sudden all far. No move and sudden all far. All least. Three pins. One pinhole. In dimmest dim. Vasts apart. At bounds of boundless void" (WH, 116). The boundary of a boundless void to which the "all" (three pins, one pinhole) scatter, echoes the situation of *L'innommable*, "aux limites du vide illimité," while conjuring to our minds an impossible spatial configuration. The verbal contradiction also questions the stability of a limit or boundary as well the idea of boundlessness, suggesting a co-dependence between the two. At the level of the word, the sentence and the genre, *Worstward Ho* moves within a set of boundaries to create a space of boundlessness—a space in which linguistic permutation and reconfiguration create novel possibilities within language.

In *Worstward Ho*, words are transfigured and collected, meanings reversed and syntax bent to bring into existence *things* (shades) and a world, all of which do not exist outside the text's language:[490] "Say a body. Where none. No mind. Where none. That at

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Ill Seen Ill Said. He compares the position of *Worstward Ho* within Beckett's canon with the Rhetorical sublime: "a position which clarifies all that has gone before it." Renton, "*Worstward Ho* and the end(s) of representation."

[488] I borrow this phrase from Susan Brienza, who writes: "In the syntactic tradition of *Enough* and *Ill Seen Ill Said,* [*Worstward Ho*] rides on a grammar of accumulation and afterthought—"Other examples if needs must. Of pain. Relief from. Change of"—producing not so much sentences as notes for sentences. Syntax in general is lessened toward the speech of an infantile creature, especially through the deletion of articles and prepositions," *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction*, (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987).

[489] Enoch Brater, "Voyelles, Cromlechs and the Special (W)rites of Worstward Ho," 137.

[490] On the question of whether or not the occurrences in *Worstward Ho,* and indeed in all of the works that make up the second trilogy, bear relation Beckett's life, see Gontarski's introduction to the Grove edition:

least. A place. Where none. For the body. To be in" (WH, 89). This early part of the text introduces the power of words to conjure images: it is possible to bring a body into being by "saying" it. One can also "say" a place, thus creating a realm in which the body can move. But words, though they might create worlds, cannot create a mind: "No mind. Where none. That at least." This may be connected to the assertion in the second paragraph of text: "Say for be said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid." If for every "say" that appears in the text we should substitute "missaid," then we undercut the ritual magic we have been celebrating—the power of words to create from nothing, to conjure images and worlds out of a void. The disjoint between words and what is real can be further observed in the following lines, though these are by no means the only examples in the text: "Say bones. No bones but say bones. Say ground. No ground but say ground" (WH, 90).

In place of a traditional narrative opening, the establishment of a setting in time and space, the narrator of *Worstward Ho* "says" a body—or rather the body is "missaid" along with a place for it to be in. As in *Quad*, Beckett creates a delimited area or stage in which his invented body can move. Yet instead of the playing field of *Quad*, we have a "place" to which the body and its movement remain immanent. Gontarski's description of *Worstward Ho* as a "closed space" tale that reduces "narrative time to points of space,"[491] is interesting, especially given the inescapability of the conjured place. The possibility of going beyond, either temporally or spatially, is denied: "A place. Where none. For the body. To be in. Move in. Out of. Back into. No. No out. No back. Only in. Stay in. On in. Still" (WH, 89). The narrator corrects the idea that the body could move "out of" the space, insisting: No. No out. No back. Only in. Stay in. On in. Still." The paradoxical link between a closed space, in which the body must stay (on in), and the possibility for reconfiguration, variation or change is also at work behind Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh, insofar as it subtends the relations of reversibility that underlie the work of re-articulation performed by creative, operant language. It may be that remaining *within* a certain space, whether an invented landscape of words or the common element of flesh, is necessary to variation, for the fantasy of a perpetual (because inaccessible) beyond can only slow our ability to alter our world by inhabiting it.[492] Such change is not willed by a strong subject or agent, but effected by differences and possibilities opened by the movement of the body in space or by reconfigurations in the surface of language.

"But to see […] the "closed space" tales, as purely fictive, imaginative play with no reference beyond itself, to an external world or a narrator's memory, say, is to oversimplify as much as to see them as veiled autobiography, and the narrator cautions against such in what amounts to a summary of the narrative. It is this mingling of memory and imagination, internal and external, fiction and its opposite that causes "confusion" through which the narrative shifts [then he quotes 'How simple all then. If only all could be pure figment. Neither be nor been nor by any shift to be. Gently, gently. On. Careful.' (58)," xxiv.

[491] "With the "closed space" novels Beckett did something new not only with his own fiction but with fiction in general—a reduction of narrative time to points of space." Gontarski, "Introduction" to *Nohow On: Company, Ill seen ill said, Worstward Ho*, xxvi.

[492] It's impossible not to think here of the famous dictum of Pascal: "Tout le malheur des hommes vient du fait qu'ils ne savent pas *rester* au calme dans une chambre." The paradox of change through stasis, through this capacity to rest alone in a room, is one that Beckett explores throughout his late fiction, and we might trace its roots to *Malone Meurt*, alone in his room with his pencil.

The (missaid) "world" *Worstward Ho* invents by saying is not the ubiquitous surface of the visible world, but a constructed, fictional domain. So how can its closure, like the closure afforded by Merleau-Ponty's literal-metaphor of the flesh, support experimentation that would be relevant to *this* world? Surely, the rarefied dim of *Worstward Ho's* wordscape is too far removed for its internal reconfigurations to have repercussions with respect to our experience. Drew Milne's reading of *Worstward Ho* as a "sustained articulation of the dissident imagination" offers one solution, insofar as it suggests that *Worstward Ho* constitutes a determinate negation (in Adorno's sense) of both capitalist ideology and the protestant work ethic. Milne's suggestion that Beckett's work could be read as "an investigation into the ethics of imagination within capitalism" explains the compulsion to "go on" in Beckett as a compulsion to work even without belief in the values sustaining the work in progress.[493] Milne disdains critics who would "reconstruct" Beckett's "stenography abbreviated" sentences: "reconstructions involve a reader in hope for a refuge in meaning which the sentence itself appears to forsake. Beckett's dissidence," he continues, "challenges readers who are used to writing which is on better speaking terms with the resources of fiction."[494] Thus for Milne, the syntax of Beckett' s late prose constitutes *at once* a social critique in the spirit of determinate negation *and* an interrogation of the possibilities of language in relation to a search for meaning.

But more than a mere a stumbling block for capitalist domination or a critique of social and linguistic structures of meaning, the rigorously immanent and strangely resonant hermetic space in *Worstward Ho* permits a continual variation that can be called creative. This is not creation in a wholly positive, affirmative sense, for there are notes of despair in the text: "All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better" (WH, 89). But the momentum of "on" that drives the work generates a series of permutations or variations, projections onto the void, as it supports the emergence of shades and spaces that have but a phantasmogoric half-existence, yet are inescapable. Early in the text, we find an insistence on the ubiquity and singularity of a place said into being:

> A place. Where none. A time when try see. Try say. How small. How vast. How if not boundless bounded. Whence the dim. Not now. Know better now. Unknow better now. Know only out of. No knowing how know only no out of. Into only. Hence another. Another place where none. Whither once whence no return. No. No place but the one. None but the one where none. Whence never once in. Somehow in. Beyondless. Thenceless there. Thitherless there. Thenceless thitherless there" (WH, 92).

The narrator begins by declaring that there was once a time when he (it?) would have tried to describe the place—to see it and to say how small or how vast it is, or to discover from where (whence) the dim light issues. But it seems that "knowing" is possible only from a position outside the place described, and being outside of such a place is

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[493] Drew Milne, "The Dissident Imagination: Beckett's Late Prose Fiction," *An introduction to contemporary fiction: international writing in English since 1970,* ed. Rod Mengham, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 93. Consider also: "in the prose-scape of 'no' and 'on', 'nohow on' plays on the denial of 'know-how' as the 'no' which nevertheless goes 'on'. 'On,' the flip side of 'no', is a command to 'go on' simultaneously imagined as a description of a journey which knows no 'how' to get on with. The exploration of this narrative terrain forms a continuous and reflexively self-canceling oeuvre," 94.
[494] Drew Milne, "The Dissident Imagination: Beckett's Late Prose Fiction," 97.

impossible, implicated as the narrator is in his (its?) creation. Now, the narrator "unknows" better than to describe the place. If a place can be conjured into being, what is to stop other places from being created in similar fashion? And yet the possibility of "Another place where none" is quickly dismissed, for there can be no other place— "None but the one where none"—and this is a place one cannot move out of "only into." It is this restriction of an imagined, inescapable place that permits variations to occur within it, in the skin of its surface.

   Variations distinguish the meanings of identical (or near-identical) phrases and alter or worsen the text's three major images, the shades. In the closed space of the "[t]henceless thitherless there," there are three shades: First there is the solitary female shade, standing or kneeling, who morphs, toward the end of the text, into a stooped gravestone: "On unseen knees. Stooped in loving memory as some old gravestones stoop. In that old graveyard. Names gone and when to when. Stoop mute over the graves of none" (WH, 115). Andrew Renton calls this shade the "pained body of bones that rises and kneels." The second shade is a double shade: an old man and child. Both are white-haired, and they hold hands as they plod on together in the void. The third shade is a "Head sunk on crippled hands" with "Clenched staring eyes" that morphs, as the text goes on, into a skull with staring eyes (WH, 102). An algebra of "say" for "be missaid" and "see" for "be misseen" works to create changes in the meaning of identical lines of text, which pertain to our seeing of the shades:

> *Where then but there see—*
> See for be seen. Misseen. From now see for be misseen.
> *Where then but there see now—*
> First back turned the shade astand. In the dim void see first back turned the shade
> astand. Still.
> *Where then but there see now another.* Bit by bit an old man and child. In the dim void bit by bit
> an old man and child. Any other would do as ill (WH, 97 my emphasis).

The first line of this passage sets the stage or scene for the piece by asking rhetorically: where but *there* would we see what is to be seen? If there is no place but the one, it must be in this place that we will see. The content, the to-be-seen, is not given immediately. It is designated by a dash, but we might infer that this to-be-seen is the trio of shades (the word "another" appears in place of the dash in the final version of the refrain, which might refer to the next of the shades). The designation of the "place" as a *there* creates another spatial puzzle, because *there* implies a *here*. If there is no *here*, then *there* is no place for the narrator (or the reader) to inhabit (we might think again of the endless, even purgatorial wandering of the figures in *Quad*). The second line of text instructs us to make a double substitution: "See for be seen" then "see for be misseen." The first substitution may be simpler: if "be seen" and "see" can be exchanged, it follows that a certain passivity—a *being seen* is essential to our constitution as seers, just as being said or addressed inaugurates a speaker capable of enunciation. The spatial domain of the visible and that of language require a dual belonging to the order of passivity (being said or addressed and being seen, visible) and activity (saying and seeing). Applying the second substitution yields the following phrase (line 3) "Where then but there be misseen now—" and (line 6) "Where then but there be misseen now another." What is productive about shades that are misseen (described in the surrounding lines of text) is that they can be *progressively* misseen, in various ways or according various perspectives.

This is exactly what happens in the visual prosescape of *Worstward Ho:* "They fade. Now the one. Now the twain. Now both. Fade back. Now the one. Now the twain. Now both. Fade? No. Sudden go. Sudden back. Now the one. Now the twain. Now both" (WH, 94). In infantile syntax lacking articles, we imagine a child playing a *fort da* game with shades, blinking his eyes to cause images to disappear and reappear. The coming and going of shades—as well as the question of whether or not the dim and the void can go as well—is supplemented by the variations of the descriptions of the shades: the cutting away of the body of the first shade, the reduction of the third to a skull, the removal of shoes (boots) from the images of the old man and child, and, finally, the removal of their legs, heads and arms: "Topless, baseless hindtrunks. Legless plodding on. Left right unreceding on" (WH, 114). All of the shades undergo variations, as they are missaid and misseen.

While there is no doubt that the text meditates on the politics of representation—the fact that representation is always partly misrepresentation—the text's closure, its hermeticism and self-reference, permit permutations of and variations on an image repertoire of its own creation (the shades kaleidoscopically alter as they "are worsened"). It also enables the development of a curious language within a language, which models an expressive movement in language. One of the best readings of *Worstward Ho* in this respect is Enoch Brater's insistence on resonance and aural communication in the text. He observes that the piece must be read aloud and catalogues the repetition of vowels and sounds within the piece, arguing that its ability to surround its audience in auditory fashion creates an experience more than it conveys a fixed meaning.[495]

The issue of closed or restricted space as a site of experimentation in *Worstward Ho,* has figured into most critical treatments of the piece. Such closure, whether it is the sonorous repetition of sound, restriction of vocabulary, refrain, leitmotif or the imagistic limning of a dim void, serves a purpose similar to that served by the flesh in Merleau-Ponty's thinking. Such a kinship or commonality enables a self-reflexivity to emerge, and it is through self-reflexivity, I argue, that the language of the text becomes wholly strange, but not nonsensical. Aside from describing *Worstward Ho* as a "closed space" tale, Gontarski's reading centers on the shade that becomes the skull, which he identifies as a version of the narrator. The conundrum he identifies is spatial. He takes up the idea that the head (with clenched, staring eyes), is the "germ of all." He explains: "But 'All' contains a paradox that threatens to become a narratological impasse: can the skull be 'Germ of All,' even of itself: 'If of all of it too'? Can it perceive itself if there is, to adapt Jacques Derrida, no outside the skull? From what perspective, from what grounding could such perception take place? If 'All' happens inside the skull is the skull inside the skull as well? Such paradoxes shift the focus to language and its complicity in the act of

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[495] Brater writes: "What is at stake here, especially when Beckett returns to English, is nothing less than an encounter with language that insists on being *heard* new: the sound of words, which has always constituted its appeal to 'literary folk," as well as its primary site of power," Enoch Brater, *The Drama in the Text: Beckett's Late Fiction,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7, and: "The seen is essentially the limitless, unspoken said, 'said nohow on,' where meaning is impossible to divorce from verbal gesture. Mood is relational and subject to the shifting systems of intonation and tonality. The drama here is always in the play of language. Such metonymic adventurism has heretofore been the particular virtue of dialogue spoken in live performance; Beckett brings the drama back into his text," 69.

representation."[496] The problem of situating the perceiver in the perceived world is what Gontarski identifies by emphasizing the problem of a skull that has produced itself. Such a dilemma—that of a narrative that eats its own tail (negates itself)—is one with which we are familiar from *Molloy*. While Gontarski's linkage of this problem to a problem of representation in language is apt, his reading doesn't take into account the ways in which an interdependence between seer and seen emerge in the text to trouble the agony of an artist-creator who would create *ex nihilo*.

Like *Quad*, *Worstward Ho* dramatizes a conflation of active and passive, insofar as the "new" language it institutes is a reconfiguration or variation rather than a rejection of what came before. Accordingly, Pascale Casanova's idea that Beckett's late style constitutes a "literary revolution" and a "break" with the literary space of Ireland oversimplifies the relation of Beckett's work to the national and linguistic pasts that shaped him as a writer.[497] It is important, too, that *Worstward Ho* is a return to English after a period in which Beckett's primary language of literary composition was French.[498] If the Merleau-Pontian notion of flesh designates the manner in which parts of a surface can fold in upon themselves to form sites of sensibility, experimentation or subjectivity, *Worstword Ho* might be read as a folding the "flesh" of language. Its self-reflexivity and reversals constitute a reconfiguration of language—a re-articulation that mirrors the manner in which a body articulates space. Reading the linguistic space of *Worstward Ho* as expressing the structure of the flesh suggests a paradigm of creative innovation that is both active and passive, and which operates through a reconfiguration of the language most weighted, in Beckett's case, with the formative influence of memories.

Reconfigurations

Deleuze's theory of style certainly applies to the strange language that develops in *Worstward Ho.* The language of this text, described variously as infantile, as "midget grammar,"[499] and as exemplary of what Beckett termed a "syntax of weakness,"[500] becomes a language *within* a language as Beckett renders his native English foreign.[501] We might describe the language in *Worstward Ho* as an idiom or dialect that resembles

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[496] S.E. Gontarski, "Worstward Ho" *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett,* ed. C.J. Ackerley and S.E. Gontarski, (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 652-653.

[497] Pascale Casanova calls Beckett's late style a "revolution" in the title of her monograph: *Beckett l'abstracteur: anatomie d'une révolution littéraire*, but, insofar as a revolution implies break and reversal, her designation is inapt.

[498] For a study of the "difficult return" to composing in English, see Chiara Montini "Sinking in the Mud: From an Abandoned Work et le difficile retour à l'anglais," *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 20, *Des elements aux traces/Elements and Traces* (2008); 63-69.

[499] Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction*, 254.

[500] Lawrence Harvey reports Beckett as saying: "'Being' […] has been excluded from writing in the past. The attempt to expand the sphere of literature to include it, which means eliminating the artificial forms and techniques that hide and violate it, is the adventure of modern art. Someday someone will find an adequate form, a 'syntax of weakness.'" Lawrence E. Harvey, "Beckett on Life and Art," *Samuel Beckett, Poet and Critic,* Princeton, 1970), 249.

[501] See Deleuze: "la littérature opère une décomposition ou une déconstruction de la langue maternelle, mais aussi l'invention d'une nouvelle langue dans la langue, par création de syntaxe," "La Littérature et la vie," *Critique et Clinique*, (Les Éditions Minuit: Paris, 1993), 16.

English while differing from it in significant ways: the conspicuous absence of clarifying articles, the clipped, cryptic rhythm of the prose and the absence of the first person pronoun. Enoch Brater remarks that the prose resembles an archaic form of English, citing the appearance of expressions such as "pox," "ooze," and "vasts atween" as a "high modernist attempt to reinvent a forgotten but still muscular Jacobean theater vocabulary."[502] Echoes from *King Lear* resonate clearly throughout the text as well.[503] But the overriding feature of the strange, yet not wholly foreign language is the manner in which its self-reflexivity initiates readers to its style. It is not true to say that *Worstward Ho* gets easier once a reader gets used to the strangeness of the dialect (as happens with most dialects), for something curious happens: with the habituation of the reader to the new dialect, the dialect itself becomes more complex, more turned in on itself. We are forced to rely on what the text itself has told us about its substitutions. And so we rely on our past experiences of this text to understand what is in front of us. The text, like a landscape, opens to us as we map our way within it, learning from past experience. In this way, the self-reflexive, alternative logic of the text mimics the manner in which the perceiving body orients itself in space. Just as the body relies on its past experiences, recognizing a street because of a landmark on the corner seen somehow before, so the reader of *Worstward Ho* relies on signals in the text that recur more minimally later on, as the prose becomes increasingly cryptic. The idea of a "language-body," then, is not merely an *analogy* between the body and language, but a way of locating agency in the text.

The most cogent example of this occurs in a numeric catalogue of the shades. The designation of each shade or scene by a certain number (one, two or three) exemplifies the manner in which the text creates a self-referential language that refers "from now" to the code it lays out. The following lines show the text's struggle to mean and to re-mean: "Something not wrong with one. Meaning—meaning!—meaning the kneeling one. As from now two for the twain. The as one plodding twain. As from now three for the head. The head as first said missaid. So from now. For to gain time. Time to lose. Gain time to lose. As the soul once. The world once" (WH, 98). The text begins to refer to the first shade, but, as if it cannot find the referent—"Meaning—meaning!"—, it resolves to lay out a system by which it will refer, in the future, to the shades: from now "one" will refer to the kneeling figure. This saves time, for it will not be necessary to conjure anew the image of the figure of a woman, to describe her pain and her various oscillations between standing and kneeling. But most interesting is the manner in which this small section creates a system of reference that weaves its way into the language of the text. On the next page, when we read, "First back on to three," we know that three is the head (sunk on crippled hands). Thus we familiarize ourselves with a manner of meaning and reference that has been "invented" within the pages of the text itself. The idea of gaining time to lose lodges a critique of such efficient, indexical forms of reference, but the text

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[502] "The 'pox,' 'ooze,' and 'gnawing' of *Worstward Ho*, as well as its archaic 'twain' and 'vast atween,' are a high modernist attempt to reinvent a forgotten but still muscular Jacobean theater vocabulary," Brater, *The Drama in the Text,* 137.

[503] Renton includes an epigraph from *King Lear*: "The lamentable change is from the best;/The worst returns to laughter./Who is't can say 'I am the worst'?/...the worst is not/So long as we can say 'This is the worst'" *King Lear*, Act IV, scene 1, as quoted in Renton, "*Worstward Ho* and the end(s) of representation."

nevertheless creates a variant of this kind of language by assigning numbers to shades. We have the chance to experience the cryptic economy such designations allow when, a few pages later, we read: "One can go not for good. Two too. Three no if not for good" (WH, 103). This passage deliberates about whether or not the dim, the void, and the three shades can "go," or disappear from the stage of saying, a topic that is taken up again at other points in the text.[504]

Thus we are initiated into strange modes of meaning, which, nevertheless make sense to us given the context we have acquired (multiple readings, as well as listening to the text, facilitates the "learning" of this strange tongue, opaque at first to our eyes and ears). This making of "sense" (*sens*) is, more precisely, a reconfiguration of language that develops from the text's insistent self-reference, which is possible because of the "closed" context of the text. As in a piece of music, refrains return (as *leitmotifs* or *ritournelles*) that we readily associate with each of the three shades. Appropriately, the refrains, key words, phrases or "epithets" associated with one shade or another undergo variations as the three shades worsen. But though they vary and mutate, the refrains are always variations (worsened) of their earlier versions, which allows the reader to trace the decline of each of the shades. For instance, we know that the "Three pins. One pinhole. In the dimmost dim" at the close of the text was once a woman, a man and child (the pins) and the skull (the pinhole) (WH, 115-116). By learning to associate refrains with each of the shades, we can negotiate the strange, quick-changing terrain of the text, much in the same way that our body navigates its surrounding space: through recognition against a background of variation.

The first shade is associated in the early parts of the text with bones: "Say yes that the bones may pain till no choice but stand," (WH, 90) (the first shade is also associated with pain, and with "remains of mind"). The association with bones permits the text to return to treat the first shade somewhat later by announcing: "First the bones. On back to them," (WH, 96). But this association with bones is replaced or layered with the notion of kneeling: "Forever kneeling. Better forever kneeling. Better worse forever kneeling. Say

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[504] A dense paragraph about the "dim" provides a cogent illustration of the manner in which *Worstward Ho*'s syntax re-*articulates* of the field of language. A sentence such as "First on back to unsay dim can go" doesn't make sense without earlier moments in the prose poem that teach us how to read it. To make sense of this line, we must know to treat dim as a substantive, and we must know that it has been wondered whether the dim is capable of disappearing, and, if it can go, whether it goes for good (forever)? Consider the following:

> First on back to unsay dim can go. Somehow on back. Dim cannot go. Dim to go must go for good. True then dim can go. If but for good. One can go not for good. Two too. Three no if not for good. With dim gone for good. Void no if not for good. With all gone for good. Dim can worsen. Somehow worsen. Go no. If not for good (WH, 102-103).

This compressed paragraph summarizes rules about the politics of existing in the invented space of the text. Which of the elements that "people" the void can go and reappear? And what are the conditions of possibility of this "world"? Certain elements can go only if they go for good: the dim, the void and the skull (the third shade, "inletting all, outletting all")? But in order to glean this information from the paragraph reproduced above, it has been necessary to insert unusual demarcations into the sentence fragments. *"First on back to unsay dim can go"*(my emphasis) requires that we understand "dim can go" as that which we are going to unsay. Similarly, "Three no if not for good*," requires that we understand *Three no* to mean something like: The third shade (skull) cannot disappear (unless it disappears forever). This institution of a new grammar effectively modulates existing ways of meaning in language, but it maintains a consistency that enables us to understand its different way of moving in the linguistic field and its reconfiguration of it.

from now forever kneeling," (WH, 96). By the time we reach the cataloguing of the shades, we have: "From now one for the kneeling one" (WH, 98). The first shade is then worsened as follows: "Bow it down. Be bowed down. Deep down. Head in hat gone. More back gone. Greatcoat cut off higher. Nothing from pelvis down. Nothing but bowed back. Topless baseless hindtrunk. Dim black. On unseen knees" (WH, 99). The "bowed back" of shade one is what is taken up in the next variation: "Somehow again on back to the bowed back alone. Nothing to show a woman's and yet a woman's. Oozed from softening soft the word woman's. The words old woman's" (WH, 108). Before shade one turns to a mere pin in the dim void (WH, 116), it reappears as a "woman" on "unseen knees" who likened to a stooping gravestone with its name and dates worn away: "Nothing and yet a woman. Old and yet old. On unseen knees. Stooped as in loving memory some old gravestones stoop. In that old graveyard. Names gone and when to when. Stoop mute over the graves of none" (WH, 115). Thus, in the case of the first shade, the abstraction of *Worstward Ho* abides by a rigorous logic of association. Leitmotifs vary and recur so that the reader recognizes the shade in all its variations (bones, kneeling, old woman, stooped gravestone, pin).

Such associative recognition, a short-hand via *leitmotif*, is not restricted to the shades. The "dim" is introduced next, with its own refrain: "dim light source unknown." The dim is persistently linked with an inability to know, as in "Know minimum" (WH, 91) and later "The dim. Far and wide the same. High and low. Unchanging, Say now unchanging. Whence no knowing" (WH, 96). A further variation, "Dim whence unknown. At all costs unknown" (WH, 101), leaves out some words but nevertheless recalls the earlier "dim light source unknown." The "dim" and its variations, "dimly seen," "dimming," "dimmost dim," and "undimmed worser still" recur throughout the text like a regular drum beat to cast a darkish color over the images conjured with words. That words have a dimming effect links language with unknowing through the associative logic of the text: "Stare by words dimmed. Shades dimmed. Void dimmed. Dim dimmed. All there as when no words. As when nohow. Only all dimmed. Till blank again. No words again. Nohow again. Then all undimmed. Stare undimmed. That words had dimmed" (WH, 111). The words and the dim are associatively linked in their obscuring effects, their inability to yield knowledge. Importantly, they are both *settings,* places in which the shades appear. The fact that the dim "cannot go" renders it the background against which the shades appear; similarly words "say" everything in the text into being, and there is "Nothing save they. What they say." The short refrain, "At all costs unknown" also serves to link words with dim, as it is used in connection with "dim" and with words: "Worsening words whose unknown. Whence unknown. At all costs unknown. Now for to say as worst they may only they only they. Dim void shades all they." Nothing save what they say. Nothing save they. What they say" (WH, 104). This passage dies away like the echo of sound against the walls of an empty room, with *say they say* repeating the sound of an A, creating an effect or play of sound that worries us, insofar as we are led to suspect that there is nothing beyond words, whose source, like that of the dim, is unknown, and who might spin around each other playfully, refusing to point to anything beyond themselves.

Refrains belonging to one of the shades (or to "dim," "void," or "words") also occur to link the appearance of the shades with a privileged shade, the third shade, which

is introduced as the "Seat of all. Germ of all" and which worsens into a "Black hole agape on all. Inletting all. Outletting all," (WH, 115). We realize early on that everything described in the text is perceived by the third shade, which, like the other shades and the void, is "said" into being: "Another. Say another. Head sunk on crippled hands. Vertex vertical. Eyes clenched. Seat of all. Germ of all" (WH, 91). "Crippled" and "clenched" as well as "seat of all," "germ of all," and "staring" become the major epithets for this third shade, who watches the first shade stand in the void: "It stands. See in the dim void how at last it stands. In the dim light source unknown. Before the downcast eyes. Clenched eyes. Staring eyes. Clenched staring eyes" (WH, 92). These downcast, clenched, staring eyes *before which* the first shade stands are, of course, those of the first shade, whose stare encompasses all the shades as well as the dim and the void: "Itself. The dim. The void. All at once in that stare. Clenched eyes clamped to all" (WH, 100).[505]

The descriptive phrases "head sunk" and "vertex vertical," which are associated principally with the third shade are used in one instance to describe the first shade: "First sudden gone the one […] Back turned. Head sunk. Vertex vertical in hat. Cocked back of black brim alone. Back of black greatcoat cut off midthigh. Kneeling" (WH, 95). The cross-application of distinctive phrases blurs the borders between the shades, making it difficult to distinguish one from the other and reminding us of their common origin in words. Furthermore, the "germ of all" must be the germ of itself too, and therefore cannot be totally separate from that which it perceives and creates. The text asks: "Germ of all. All? If of all of it too. Where if not there it too? There in the sunken head the sunken head. The hands. The eyes. Shades with the other shades in the same dim. The same narrow void. Before the staring eyes" (WH, 97). This can lead either to an infinite regression, a condition of impossibility that negates the narrative, as Gontarski argues,[506] or it can lead to a curious doubling, since the head exists *as itself* and *as its perception of itself*: "That head in that head. Clenched eyes clamped to it alone. Alone? No. Too. To it too. The sunken skull. The crippled hands. Clenched staring eyes. Clenched eyes clamped to clenched staring eyes" (WH, 100). This is a salient instance of self-reflexivity on the part of the perceiving shade, the head-turned-skull with staring eyes. Such a self-reflexive structure is also to be found in the language, which, in addition to conjuring the shades, the dim and the void, must conjure itself too. This is perhaps what leads Enoch Brater to identify the *dramatis persona* of *Worstward Ho* as the *word*, which, he points out, conforms to the lineage of Beckett protagonists with names beginning with M or W.[507] Shade three is the "so-*said* seat and germ of all" (WH, 99, my emphasis), and like the dim, it is associated with *words* by means of a transferred refrain: "That near true ring!" which, seven paragraphs earlier, described words: "How almost true they sometimes almost ring!" (WH, 99).

The so-said seat and germ of all is worsened as follows: "No hands. No face. Skull and stare alone. Scene and seer of all" (WH, 101). Much has made of the phonological similarity of scene (seen) and seer, but it is worth drawing attention to this

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[505] Consider also: "Somehow and all in stare again. All at once as once," WH, 115.

[506] Gontarksi, "Worstward Ho," *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett,* 652-653.

[507] "And every Beckett reader will find satisfaction in the recognition of that in *Worstward Ho,* where the Word has become the ultimate dramatis persona, 'it' too has a name that falls in with the long line of Ms and Ws marching triumphantly through the repertory," Brater, *The Drama in the Text,* 137.

homophony once again because it emphasizes the reversibility between seer and seen (also scene as place, stage or setting). It is this reversibility that, according to Merleau-Ponty, transforms the object-body into a body capable of sensing and perceiving (the esthesiological body). In this way, the skull is not the *origin*, but a seer-seen, as well as the space (scene) of reconfiguration. This reflexivity between seer and seen is further emphasized as follows: "In the skull all save the skull gone. The stare. Alone in the dim void. Alone to be seen. Dimly seen. In the skull the skull alone to be seen. The staring eyes. Dimly seen. By the staring eyes" (WH, 102). The image of a skull looking at itself in the void turns into the image of lidless eyes: "All pupil. Dim black holes. Unwavering gaping" (WH, 103). The line "Skull and lidless stare" then recurs (WH, 103, 105). Finally, "Two black holes in foreskull" are "better still worse one. One dim black hole mid-foreskull. Into the hell of all. Out from the hell of all" (WH, 115). It is the fact that the black hole cannot exists as a remainder—"What were skull to go? As good as go? Into what black hole? From out what then?"—that keeps everything else from going for good, so the shades and the void exist: "All gnawing to be naught. Never to be naught" (WH, 115).[508]

There are many other examples we could use to show the recurrence of words and phrases—recurrences that make the text a texture folded back on itself—a process that creates variations that reconfigure not only the text's own linguistic landscape, but that of literature and language more generally. We've discussed sonorous linkages of association in Lucky's speech, and *Worstward Ho* could certainly be read as a continuation of that kind of glossolalic, linguistic invention (there is also the curious recurrence of the skull in both texts). But we'll close with two more examples: the recurring refrains that describe the second shade (the "plodding twain") and the verbal simulacrum that structures itself around the sound of the "l" in a quasi-hysterical passage themed around "longing."

The old man and child together compose the second shade, which is the last of the shades to be introduced. The shade comes to be associated with hands, especially holding hands, with plodding, and also with soft, alliterative b and p sounds: "Hand in hand with equal plod they go," "Backs turned both bowed with equal plod they go. The child hand raised to reach the holding hand. Hold the old holding hand. Hold and be held. Plod on and never recede" (WH, 93). The play of sounds in this passage aptly mimics the intertwining of the hands that are both holding and held, which, in the domain of touch, reminds us of the requirement that a seer must also be seen. The repetition of the sound *old* in h*old*, *old*, and h*old*ing binds the words together through phonic association, and we have a sense of endless reversibility as we shuttle back and forth between the child's hand as *holding* and as *being held* (touching and being touched).

In a later passage, certain rhythms evoke the experience of walking or plodding: "Bootheels. Now the two right. Now the two left. As on with equal plod they go. No ground. Plod as on void. Dim hands. Dim white. Two free and two as one. So sudden gone sudden back unchanged as one dark shade plod unreceding on" (WH, 95). As with the other shades, the "two" are conjured again in the text, varied and worsened via

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[508] The impossibility of the skull's disappearance leads Carla Locatelli to read *Worstward Ho* as a kind of Husserlian reduction, where the skull or hole becomes the becomes the "unnullable" remainder. But the persistence of a transcendental ego after the reduction reinstalls the idea that the skull is a kind of origin, separate from the shades it sees. Locatelli, *Unwording the World, 231-2.*

associable refrains. One such refrain invokes the rhythm of their walking in step with one another: "Now the two right. Now the two left. Left right left right on. Barefoot unreceding on" (WH, 100). The "plodding twain," the "old man and child" or the "Left right left right barefoot unreceding on" (WH, 105) are worsened as follows: "Gone held holding hands they plod apart. Left right barefoot unreceding on" (WH, 107). It is clear that the man and child are worsened by their separation "Two once so one. From now rift a vast. Vast of void atween. With equal plod still unreceding on" (WH, 112). The refrains that described their "plod" remain even as the shade of the two is further worsened: "Topless baseless hindtrunks. Legless plodding on. Left right unreceeding on" (WH, 114). "Left right unreceding on" (and its variations) recurs to signal the second shade, but also creates an echo by repeating the text's motor word, "on." This recurrence contributes to the text's self-reference, or its self-reflexive texture woven with repetition and variation. The radical linguistic and generic innovation in *Worstward Ho* is not a *break* with what came before, but a continuation—an *"on"* achieved by saying and saying again, as the last lines of the text indicate: "Said nohow on."

In his essay on *Worstward Ho,* Charles Krance invokes Foucault's description of a language which, heading toward a death that would stop it, possess a single power: that of "giving birth to its own image in a play of mirrors that has no limits." I have sought to show that the reflexivity of *Worstward Ho,* to adapt Krance's words "constitutes an attempted project whereby the signifier, left to its abandoned resources, strikes out to charter a new passage through—and indeed—on the other side of language."[509] This path-breaking or space-making in language operates through a system of self-reflexive association that works throughout the text. But there are also passages, in which we find this phenomenon manifesting itself locally:

> Longing the so-said mind long lost to longing. The so-missaid. So far so-missaid. Dint of long longing lost to longing. Long vain longing. And longing still. Faintly longing still. Faintly vainly longing still. For fainter still. For faintest. Faintly vainly longing for the last of longing. Unlessenable least of longing. Unstillable vain last of longing still.

Words in this passage fold up over themselves, creating a texture of phonic self-reference that frustrates semantic meaning, forcing the reader to attend to the rhythm and the cadence of the prose. The point of the passage, the inescapability of the final remainder – a longing or a desire (to end perhaps) that cannot be satisfied, refers the words back to each other in an endless loop sustained by the repetition of the lulling "l" sound. The pressure of a body here, reconfiguring, remaking pathways through the dense texture of words operates through the repetition of this "l" sound, mirroring itself in an attempt to alter strategies of "meaning" in the text. The fact that repetitive *movement* of this kind—a space-making—figures in the composition of *Worstward Ho* is suggested by the diagrams of *Quad* sketched on the last page of its manuscript. Though these drawings are found on a page in which the notes are not explicitly related to *Worstward Ho*, it is likely that similar preoccupations with the affinities between navigating in space and reconfiguring the field of language animated these roughly contemporaneous works.

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[509] "'Headed toward death', writes Foucault, 'language turns back upon itself; it encounters something like a mirror; and to stop this death which would stop it, it possesses but a single power: that of giving birth to its own image in a play of mirrors that has no limits,'" Foucault, "Language to Infinity," as quoted in Krance, "Worstward Ho and *On*-words: Writing to(wards) the Point," 128.

If language, as flesh, coils up on itself to open dimensions and bring (linguistic and non-linguistic) spaces into being, it seems that the body's techniques for reconfiguring its surrounding space can be "grafted" onto language, as an experimental text such as *Worstward Ho* serves to show. The fleshly, self-reflexive structure of language, and the idea of an avatar, or a body that can reconfigure the space of words, strongly implicates the navigation and orientation of the body in space as the movement fundamental to meaning-production. The relationship between *Quad* and *Worstward Ho* shows that this mapping of a field, or re-articulation of it, operates in language through its reconfiguration. In *Quad,* a visual chiasmus is traced and retraced as figures move in X patterns across the diagonal of a square playing field. We've argued that *Quad* dramatizes the construction of *sens* (meaning and direction): articulations of the white square emerge as the *parcours* of the players divide the space. *Quad*'s visual invocation of the chiasmus and its ethos of reversibility dramatize the necessity of a closed space in which variations can occur. S.E. Gontarski, in his introduction to *Nohow On: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho,* christens these three late prose works "closed space" tales.[510] He observes a restriction of space that occurs in Beckett's late work and an emphasis on internal reconfiguration (rather than the endless journeying we find in earlier novels such as *Molloy*).[511] A closure of space enables relations of reversibility and self-reflexivity to develop, in a way not unlike Merleau-Ponty's description of flesh, since "closed space" implies a common world, place or "element" in which reconfiguration can occur.

I have sought to show that *Quad* and *Worstward Ho* are intertwined and reversible, so that the manner in which the body articulates space to produce meaning (as dramatized in *Quad*) could be *grafted* into the domain of language, so as to produce a genre of experimental literature capable of reconfiguring the way language can mean. Thus *Worstward Ho* can be read as a dense tapestry of self-reference that imports the body's organization, structuring and magnetizing of space into language. Invoking Merleau-Ponty's linkage of language, space, the body and being through his notion of the flesh, such experimental reconfigurations of language have the power to indirectly explore the structures of being, making experimental literature a potent form of philosophy.

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[510] Gontarski, "Introduction," *Nowhow on: Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, *Worstward Ho,* vii.

[511] Gontarski, "Introduction," *Nowhow on: Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, *Worstward Ho,* xxvi.

Conclusion

Écrire ce qu'on a vu est en réalité le façonner.

Merleau-Ponty, *notes de cours sur Claude Simon*

[…] il s'agit de produire un système de signes qui restitue par son agencement interne le paysage d'une expérience, il faut que les reliefs, les lignes de force de ce paysage induisent une syntaxe profonde, un mode de composition et de récit, qui défont et refont le monde et le langage usuels.

Merleau-Ponty, *Résumés de cours: Collège de France 1952-1960*

What brings Merleau-Ponty and Beckett together is the manner in which their works find the rudiments of expressivity in language in the physical body's orientation of *space*. Beckett's literary experiments—especially those minimalist works associated with his *dernière esthétique*—far from condemning language and proclaiming the reign of meaninglessness, are engaged in a process of reconfiguring the modes and manners in which literary language (which is not necessarily verbal, given *Quad*) can mean.

The body enters the field of pre-existing linguistic significations, pressuring them until they render, *"par un agencement interne,"* what Merleau-Ponty calls the *landscape (paysage)* of an experience. This understanding of literary meaning requires a notion of the body as that which spans the intersecting, or intertwining, domains of space and language. If physical space and linguistic space were merely *parallel,* as Merleau-Ponty's earlier work suggests (by positing an *analogy* between the manner in which the body orients space and the manner in which linguistic signification develops from the articulating pressure of speech), then there would have to be two versions of the body: a physical, fleshly body and a language-body (*la parole*). But the parallel between space and language collapses, not least with the entrance of the physical, fleshly body into the domain of language in *Quad* and *Worstward Ho.* A more intimate relation between language and space leads us to claim that the body's manner of meaning (by moving, thereby altering its spatial landscape) is *grafted* onto language. Beckett's late work performs the belonging of the body to language and achieves the indirect language that Merleau-Ponty could—albeit eloquently—merely propose in his image-laden philosophical writing. For Merleau-Ponty, indirect language (which communicates by appealing to the body's possibilities for movement as well as to its spatial, positional memory) moves with great agility between the intertwining domains of space and language, tracing, we could say, the shape of a chiasmus. For both Beckett and Merleau-Ponty, the body's movements and perspectives transform its surrounding space, and this spatial "logic" of meaning is grafted onto the domain of language.

But what does this strange intimacy between the body, language and space mean for the project of experimental literature, which, broadly understood, occupies itself with testing and transforming the mechanisms of meaning-production? Does a certain kind of experimental writing, from Beckett onwards, become the project of endowing language with sentience—making it a subject *and* object, like a sensing, esthesiological body?

Merleau-Ponty inherited from Bergson the mistrust of a "homogenous," static language of propositions that could fix itself into theses. With Bergson, both Merleau-Ponty and Beckett ask, in very different ways and using different vocabularies: how can a world in which signification is always latent, implied, contingent and ever-changing be explored by means of a static language with fixed and stable conventions of meaning? A language must be reinvented, especially if phenomenology is to be re-conceived as *style*.

Beckett's strategy is different. And yet Bergson's—and to some extent, Husserl's—frustrations with the existing ways of doing philosophy are not wholly dissimilar to the frustrations with existing language and literary form that mark much of Beckett's early and mid-career work, especially *Watt* and the trilogy that culminates in *L'innommable*. But while Beckett, like Merleau-Ponty and Bergson, sees the necessity of reviving language, his approach, I argue, is more radical. The limits of language become space-generating paradoxes in Beckett's work from the 1940's, or paradoxes that spur alternative modes of meaning that refer to the body's relation to space. Beckett crashes up against the limits of language, but ends by reworking it from the inside, in prose that dances across the limit between sense and nonsense (the croaking of frogs in *Watt,* Lucky's manic glossolalia, *L'innommable*'s involuntary torrents of words). After *L'innommable,* in the French *nouvelles* ("L'expulsé," "Le calmant," and "La fin")*,* we detect an increasing preoccupation with the body's movement into and out of *spaces*. Like the oxymoronic resolution to "proceed by *aporia*" in the opening pages of L'*innommable,* an emphasis on enclosures that partition space an enable movement suggest that Beckettian linguistic innovation is a spatial phenomenon, bound up with a body's ability to orient and organize its space.

The question of how a body's movements in space articulate meaning necessitates a consideration of Merleau-Ponty's account of the body-subject, which we find in the *Phénoménologie de la perception.* But in his explanation of the spatial foundation of linguistic significance, Merleau-Ponty seems to imply that the body has a more direct role in linguistic meaning than a parallel or even a homological relation between the fields of language and space would suggest. A careful consideration of the body-subject leads us to ask: what kind of relation exists between the body and language?

In part, it is Merleau-Ponty's refusal to answer this question that leads him to develop a theory of style. Style spans physical and linguistic space, and is necessary, according to Merleau-Ponty, to the creative alteration (through variation) of pre-existing structures or fields such as language and space. Merleau-Ponty's structuralism leads him to suppose that the body-subject is shaped by surrounding cultural, linguistic and spatial contexts, thus style must emerge as a kind of passive agency, simultaneously subject and object (like the body), capable of transforming or modifying structures such as space or language from within. Although the style of Merleau-Ponty's prose might expand the dimensions of philosophy as a genre, his prose does not achieve the kind of reconfiguration of language we find in Beckett's works from the 1980's—works that "unmake" and "remake" the world (of language).

Quad and *Worstward Ho* enact an indirect style that communicates by involving the body and its orientation of space. The fact that physical bodies design the space of *Quad* and that language in *Worstward Ho* surprisingly manifests the structure of flesh so as to produce reconfigurations in its surrounding wordscape, leads us to invoke and

explore the figure of the graft as a way of describing the transposition of spatial and bodily orientation (*sens* as direction) into the field of language (where *sens* becomes a form of "meaning). *Le visible et l'invisible* continues to describe language and space as homological, as sharing a structure, but it implies that language, like space (or *as* space), affords a landscape (*paysage*) for experience. Articulations, then, would flow between the fields of language and space; the divisions and explorations of the body become grafted in language, and the grammatical and syntactical divisions of language come to determine the relation of the subject to its surrounding space (i.e. the subject-predicate structure of a sentence conveys a spatial relation of separation between the subject and its actions in the world). Migrations, transgressions and exchanges flow between space and language (insofar as they are maintained as separate domains), according to Merleau-Ponty, because they belong to a common (elemental) "flesh." As the basis of Merleau-Ponty's ontology, flesh also shares its structure of self-reflexivity (the mechanism behind sentience) with being.

We might keep this structure of being in mind when we ask what implications the grafting of the body-in-space into language might have for both experimental literature and for bodily experience. Beckett's involvement of the body's possibilities for meaning and its capacity to expand its surrounding space in his experimental fiction may, in keeping with a chiasmatic relation between language and being, introduce novel possibilities for shaping, orienting, understanding and moving in our surroundings. To write what one sees, we could say, paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty, is, in reality, to fashion it. A convergence of the body and language, moreover, endows reorientations or reconfigurations in language with the power to extend back into space, expanding, perhaps, our range of bodily experience.

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