

Beautiful Annoyance: Reading the Subject

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of
Romance Studies in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the pair subject-subjectivity embedded in the problematic of the end of art, as it is figured in exemplary fashion by film and literature. The analysis examines critically the problem of the subject vis-à-vis subjectivity by opening a dialogue that allows the necessary *double* terms of this discussion to emerge in the first place from the encounter with selected filmic and literary texts: Jacques Rivette's *La belle noiseuse* and Samuel Beckett's *Film*, *The Unnamable* and *The Lost Ones*. These texts are analyzed on an equal footing with the thought of Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Gianni Vattimo, Giorgio Agamben, and Gilles Deleuze who have written on both subjectivity and art. The study thus proposes a real movement – in terms and through art – that treats the metaphor of *anamorphosis* on the level of *praxis*: the image of subjectivity appears on the screen that is the filmic or literary text as the result of a passage in terms. The subject that emerges at the end of the analysis puts in perspective a certain practice of metonymic reading as renewed political potential of subjectivity.

Dedication

To Florian and Valentin, my two “unnamables” who name me

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Chapter 1: “D’Un sujet l’autre”

0: *The Frame*

The aim of this dissertation is to examine the problem of the pair subject-subjectivity embedded in the problematic of the end of art and figured with it in an exemplary fashion by film and literature. Looking at subjectivity figured in art necessitates a focused and productive encounter with the work of philosophers who have written on both subjectivity and art, and who include Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Gianni Vattimo, Giorgio Agamben, and Gilles Deleuze. The proposed study examines critically the problem of the subject vis-à-vis subjectivity, not by proposing the terms of discussion of human subjectivity and then turning to art for verification or illustration, but rather by opening a dialogue that allows the necessary *double* terms of this discussion to emerge in the first place from the encounter with the films and literature under discussion. In particular, it is Samuel Beckett’s *Film* (1965) that in a cogent and concrete manner displays the dying subject indissociable from the dying medium of the cinematic art, as I show in the next section (Frame I) of the introductory chapter. This initial analysis of *Film* becomes the occasion for the emergence of the terms of discussion of the subject – split subject, witness, dystopia – that are embedded in the problematic of the death of art. The latter discourse gives rise to its own terms proposed by Gianni Vattimo in his 1985 study *The End of Modernity: kitsch, silence and utopia*. It is therefore not only possible but necessary to consider the terms as resonating with one another, as double terms in a complex relation that resembles and unfolds the pair subject/subjectivity staged by Beckett’s *Film*.

In other words, the passage through the filter or prism of art of the initial terms of discussion, those dealing with the death of art, puts us in a position not so much to ‘distill’ new terms for opening a new perspective on subjectivity, as it allows us to unfold pairs of terms that emerge simultaneously in a relation that deserves careful analysis. The study thus proposes a real movement – in terms and through art – that treats the metaphor of *anamorphosis* on the level of *praxis*: the problem of subjectivity emerges or appears on the screen that is the filmic or literary text as the result of a passage in terms deterritorialized from one discourse – the end of art – and relocated, or resituated, in another discourse, that of subjectivity figured in the text being analyzed as an exemplar.

This project arises out of reading writers like Foucault, Barthes, Beckett, Agamben and Vattimo, and out of a constellation of interests and ideas loosely categorized as questions of art’s being and its function today, questions of modernity and post-modernity, the question concerning truth in discursivity, the political engagement of literature, ethics, the crisis of the democratic model and, perhaps most centrally and yet elliptically, indirectly, the question of the pair subject/subjectivity. It coalesces around a kernel-idea: that the human subject is what subtends many of these inquiries and discussions, rendering them opaque but promising elucidation should that enigmatic duo, subject and subjectivity, be pursued. It became clear to me that what was emerging out of these often-disparate discussions was the human subject in the form of a pressing, persistent, recurring question.

Furthermore, my suspicions about literature have been confirmed – the literary text deserves to be treated not as an illustration, but as what it patently is: a direct

engagement with the philosophical and political ideas of its time. This insight has shaped the methodology of my project, which is to listen to what the literary text – or more broadly the work of art understood as including texts like plays, novels, and films – has to say in and on its own terms. In other words, to treat texts as serious meditations on, critiques of, and engagements with philosophical ideas that do not reside exclusively behind the artificial borders of the “text of philosophy” any more than texts necessarily respect categorization imposed from above. Indeed, I propose to treat the texts under discussion – Samuel Beckett’s *Film*, Jacques Rivette’s *The Beautiful Annoyance* (*La belle noiseuse*), and Beckett’s *Unnamable* (*L’Innomable*) and *The Lost Ones* (*Le dépeupleur*) – as exemplars that produce philosophical ideas rather than examples of such ideas produced elsewhere. There is no “elsewhere” to the continuous network of discourse. To reiterate, the role of selected art works is crucial in my project, as these exemplary works of art perform the work of a critical apparatus on the recent theories of subjectivity under discussion, rather than being illustrations, especially given the goal of this dissertation, elucidating the less apparent aspects of the theories under discussion and signaling their limits, and *thus* allowing a better grasp of what is at stake in the debate regarding subjectivity.

Rather than expanding in abstract terms on the procedure of the analysis to be undertaken here, as well as on the provenance of the two sets of terms and how and why it is justified to consider them together, looking at a specific and exemplary case of their arising together in Beckett’s *Film* makes good on the promises made above. It also makes explicit just what the method of this analysis will be by performing it –showing it in

movement – and not just stating it in the abstract. To put it in more concrete terms that only the procedure of analysis that follows is able to bear out, in the following frames, I look at two discourses that have merged, to speak in filmic terms, jumped one another's axis: the staging of the split subject in *Film* happens on the stage of the death of film, the 'eye' of the other problematic (the death of art), while the discussion of the death of art in *The End of Modernity* sets the stage for the death of the subject, the "I" of the other problematic (the death of the subject).

Frame I: The Eye of the Other

Eye-medium-I. Extreme close-up followed by medium long-shot panning out to return upon itself. These three terms, in a genuine filmic gesture, emerge from *Film* and land in the hands – that space *hors cadre*¹ of *Film* yet posited by it – of this active reader/viewer of Beckett. Beckett's *Film* is the first exemplary work of art from which not only the very terms of analysis emerge, but also the method of this dissertation. What I propose resembles the very gesture suggested by Beckett's filmic text in the first place: the gesture of unfolding, the panning sideways or out and up, then back to starting position. This dissertation thus proposes to forgo traditional dialectical approach in favor of an exhaustive analytical "panning" over certain critical terms in their specific terrain as suggested by the Beckettian landscape, not as an empty exercise, but as a movement of transposition to a new terrain. For the starting position to which one returns in Beckett, if

¹ While *hors champ* refers to the diegetic space that is off camera, or out of the field of vision (and that could potentially enter the field of vision at any moment), *hors cadre* refers to the space of the cinematic apparatus itself, the film crew or the camera equipment. Here, I understand *hors cadre* as a kind of *hors cadre* of the *hors cadre* staged in *Film*, that is, the other implied *hors cadre* that is the viewer's space- a third space, that of the camera and the *auteur*, the implied filmic author.

we examine it closely, does not resemble the starting position before the exercise, before the panning has taken place. The passage of time, the active perception or reading of terms, returns the perceiver or reader to a critical place that is non-identical to the same. Similarly, I propose a careful unfolding through a critical “panning” movement over terms suggested by *Film* to return them to their proper critical place, or, to borrow another concept from Giorgio Agamben, to profane them.² The terms arise from the staging of the subject/subjectivity that *Film* records: split subject, witness and dystopia. Further, the terms, like the eye/I couple in *Film*, find an affinity with terms used to discuss the death of art that I borrow from Gianni Vattimo – kitsch, silence and utopia.³ The method is to repeat the signature filmic gesture of *Film*: start from the term couple suggested by the piece under discussion and perform an analysis that is a passage *between one and the other*, with the three passages referring back to the overarching problematic of the subject.

In the expansive Beckett oeuvre that spans novels, novellas, poems, texts, and theater, there is but one filmic production, aptly entitled *Film* (1965), made during Beckett’s only visit to the New World. Filmed in Brooklyn, the film begins with an extreme close-up of an aged eye, then follows an dark-clad figure viewed only from the back and running away along a wall to take cover in a room in a typical brownstone apartment building. Under circumstances deserving careful attention, only later does it become clear that this is an aged Buster Keaton playing an anonymous, yet obviously

² See Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, New York: Zone Books, 2007. A careful reading of *Profanations* in the context of another Beckett text, *The Lost Ones*, is found in chapter four.

³ See esp. chapter 2 of Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.

recognizable figure (himself) in several sequences in which one sees him almost exclusively from behind or the side, back resolutely turned and face often shrouded, hidden from view. Along the way to the brownstone apartment building, the dark figure runs into a couple. Slapstick is suggested by the sheer kinetic energy of the unexpected, unsolicited encounter. The black clad man begins to say something but is shushed by the white-clad woman, in what is the only instance of sound in the entire film. Upon beholding the face of the dark figure, the couple avert their gazes as if his were the face of some unspeakable horror. Then, in the threshold space of the staircase, he bumps into a smiling old woman carrying a basket of flowers. She looks at his face and falls down, presumably dead. He repeatedly checks his own pulse, as if he were dying himself. He then reaches and unlocks the door to a room, his abode, which is remarkable for its emptiness (there is almost no furniture, apart from a rocking chair, a table and a mirror) and its decrepitude (light-colored walls with deep scratches in the plaster, a torn window shade with many holes, old space in need of renovation). Nevertheless, it is an abode whose domesticity is suggested by the presence of two animal couples, a cat and a dog sitting together in a basket-bed, and a parrot and fish, each in its respective cage or bowl standing side-by-side on the table. The figure then proceeds to carefully cover the mirror and pull down the shade, each time taking care not to be seen or observed and following an arc along the wall, to put the cat and the dog out of the room, and to cover the parrot and fish. The repeated attempts to let the dog out while the cat runs back into the room, and to put the cat out while the dog comes back in, also have an air of slapstick about them. The figure then sits down in the rocking chair to look at old photographs that

chronicle his life, and which he has brought with him in an old briefcase. He looks at the pictures one by one, lingering lovingly on one of them, presumably the image of his own child, and then proceeds to tear them up one by one. He settles in as if to sleep and is surprised by the intrusion, apparently of the other whom he has so carefully avoided up to now. The intruder is none other than himself, his doppelganger, seen in a point of view shot that the film carefully establishes in the preceding sequences. However, at that same moment, it becomes clear that the non-point of view shots, the seemingly neutral, non-attributable perspectives, are indeed attributable to the other, the intruder sneaking up on the protagonist, the fly-on-the-wall perspective. Only now does the audience realize that the figure is played by the seventy year old Buster Keaton in his trademark hat. This shock of recognition is doubled by a self-referential moment because it is here that the camera has become an active participant, possessing the trappings of a character in the film whose perspective the camera renders, without for that reason being more than the camera, a perceiving thing. Once caught by the gaze of this intrusive camera, the viewer sees the protagonist cover his face with his hands while the camera lingers on him for a moment, before a cut transports him or her back to the opening image of the film, the old monstrous eye. The last image in the film thus harkens back to the very first image of the eye that the viewer has already seen, landing back where he or she started. And yet, he or she is in another space altogether, this being the eye of the other, the intruding doppelganger.

From the first image, an aged eye, Beckett's deceptively simple *Film* presents the viewer with more than meets the eye, with what necessarily eludes it. The eye is clearly

human, and yet the close-up shot renders it alien and animal in its abstraction. The human/inhuman eye: the curtain raiser for a short but exhaustive meditation on vision and the medium of film, which puts in the open the other preoccupation of this film: the human/inhuman “I.” The first image is also the last, such that the homonymic eye/I pair that the image evokes functions as a book-end for the film. It remains to be seen whether what transpires between the two bookends leads to nowhere, seemingly a viable conclusion for the passive viewer, or whether something else is at stake given the palpable impression of the passage of time rendered by the film – literally, the duration of the film, and thematically, the passage of time as ravaging old age. There is a shock experienced by the viewer remembering the young, agile, stony-faced and impassive Buster Keaton of his early silent films, versus the aged, horrified Buster Keaton of *Film*, a film that is silent, except for the above-mentioned “shhh.” The question is whether we disavow the shock, or analyze it. Does the viewer engage in the equivalent of tearing up the images, as the protagonist does, or does she accept and affirm the memory image alongside the current *image actuelle*, the two images, the one *and* its unavowable double?

Eye-medium-I. In the first sequence after the image of the eye the camera settles on a static shot of a wall that resembles the textured, folded, crevice-marked surface of the eye and the folds of skin around it, then pans along the wall in a sweeping movement that, more accurately, registers an arc upward while showing the apartment building and a bit of the Brooklyn skyline where *Film* was filmed, to return to the wall, which then becomes the backdrop for the entry of the protagonist of the film, what looks like the figure of a man with his face shrouded with a piece of cloth, hurrying along the wall with

stumbling step. This human-like movement, the gesture of the camera away in upward arc, is the very gesture of analysis sweeping away from the eye and upward toward the second term, the medium, and then back to the first, seen as something else: the “I.”

In a sense, if watched passively, *Film* has led the viewer nowhere. There is no resolution, no moral, no edifying story. On that account, *Film* strikes one as empty. Maybe it is this emptiness that brought relatively little scholarly attention to this piece, especially considering that *Film* was the reason for Samuel Beckett’s only visit to the United States and his only venture into the medium of cinema. Or, rather, it seems that few scholars have engaged *Film* on its own terms, the medium of film, even though they acknowledge the self-referential title. The script posits the film’s topic as the “the agony of perceivedness” citing Bishop Berkeley, “*Esse est percipi*” as motto. The title in itself has multiple meanings, as Sylvie Debevec Henning points out: “A film is also a haze or mist, or any translucent material like the lens-gauze itself, that partially veils, making a direct view or contact impossible.”⁴ Notably, the point of view of the figure is rendered in a hazy manner, suggesting the cataract that darkens the main character’s eye. The film also harks back to Beckett’s knowledge of Henri Bergson’s works, as Anthony Uhlmann discovers: “Bergson in his essay on Berkeley has identified an image of matter as a ‘thin transparent film’ situated between God and man [...]” “the ‘thin transparent film,’ might

⁴ Sylvie Debevec Henning, “Film’: a dialogue between Beckett and Berkeley,” *Journal of Beckett Studies*, no. 7, Spring 1982 (<http://www.english.fsu.edu/jobs/num07/Num7Henning.htm>).

also be seen to stand between the split self O and E and the viewer who is able to perceive the agony inherent in a consciousness of being (through being perceived).”⁵

Following Beckett’s script, the two main characters are referred to in criticism as “E” and “O,” that is, the “Eye” of the camera and the “Object” of its gaze: “In order to be figured in this situation the protagonist is sundered into object (O) and eye (E), the former in flight, the latter in pursuit.”⁶ While the script might be an important intertext, Beckett’s film is not just a filmic adaptation of a Beckett play. I have therefore not adopted this convention for several reasons that deserve careful explication as they touch on key problems addressed in the dissertation and constitute a return to the frame of reading announced at the end of the current chapter. These points are addressed below.

First, *Film* the film is what is under consideration, not the book *Film by Samuel Beckett: complete scenario/illustrations/production shots*. The latter is not a simple handbook for the former. The book is not the film and should not be consulted as if they were one and the same, as scholars tend to do. The book must not be treated like an article or piece of criticism that informs one’s viewing by presenting the opinions and findings of other scholars. Nor is it a question of adaptation of a novel, which presents its own difficulties and obstacles for the critic writing about the film. Given that the film book is not just another piece of criticism, nor the piece adapted to screen, but constitutes a kind of supplement to it, it also stands in as the non-identical *double* of the film. The book presents the original project for *Film*, therefore its relation to *Film* is somewhat like

⁵ Anthony Uhlmann, “Image and Intuition in Beckett’s Film,” *Substance: A Review of Theory & Literary Criticism*, 2004, Vol. 33 Issue 2: 97 and 98.

⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Film by Samuel Beckett: complete scenario/illustrations/production shots*, New York: Grove Press, 1969: 11.

the relation between the two paintings in Rivette's *La belle noiseuse* (discussed in the next chapter), which hold the same title but are not the same, are *two* paintings. This may well have been the provocative intention of Beckett the (implied) author/*auteur*. Rather than systematically unfolding these probably programmatic doubles, book and film, which is not the purpose of this viewer/critic, I am preserving the difference between book and film and letting the difference between them work in programmatic fashion in my analysis. The book might add to understanding the film, but it should not obscure the cinematic vision of the viewer watching the film unfold *on its own*. To put it in stronger terms, I adhere to the principle of not taking the word of even the implied author (Beckett "speaking" in the film book) for his implied work, but rather letting the work do its own talking. The disclaimer that heads the book is significant in this regard and I attempt to respect it: "This is the original project for *Film*. No attempt has been made to bring it into line with the finished work."⁷ Rivette's Frenhofer could not have said it better, except that he performs the same gesture that separates one from the other while maintaining a hidden link. Like him, and until some unknown point in time, I am walling up the book to watch the film.

In an early article, Enoch Brater points out that the film, according to Beckett's screenplay, is set in 1929.⁸ However, a car from the fifties can clearly be seen when the figure enters the apartment building. While Brater is correct in pointing out that *Film* engages other films (a point I will address below), it does not posit simple references to films from around 1929. The intertextual, even intermedial engagement with the medium

⁷ Beckett, *Film by Samuel Beckett*, 10.

⁸ Enoch Brater, "The Thinking Eye In Beckett's Film," *Modern Language Quarterly*, Jun 1975, Vol. 36 Issue 2: 166.

surpasses the level of a simple nod to other films. In Brater's reading, the film is reduced to the order of perception and self-perception: "O's attempt to remove all perception ultimately fails because he cannot escape self-perception."⁹ In this regard, Ruth Perlmutter goes much further when she underlines that *Film* is in a constant dialogue with older forms of representation, such as photographs and mirrors, a system that is comprised of looks: "We recognize quickly that O's flight from perceivedness is really a flight from being entrapped by cinema, specifically, the system of looks and responses on which cinema is based [...]."¹⁰ This, however, does not account for the fact that the medium of film becomes a way to think through another problem that does not belong exclusively to cinema, nor is the medium simply a "system of looks" in my analysis. To return to the preserving of difference that I uphold by not following the conventional naming of the split protagonist and his pursuer "O" and "E," which is Beckett's convention in the film book, it must be kept in mind that adopting the convention of calling the split protagonist O and E from the outset in *Film*, as the book does, takes away from the palpable shock of discovery that comes through the film viewing. It is through attention to the *medium itself* (camera angles, point of view shots) that the viewer discovers that the protagonist and the neutral camera pursuer are *one and the same*. Significantly, this is something that a viewing untutored by the book does not realize until later in the film. In not following this convention, I perhaps appear to disobey the implied author/*auteur* who has put the book forth, by following instead the protagonist's model act of disobedience against the *Esse est percipi* dictum. He is trying to flee from

⁹ Brater, "Thinking Eye," 170.

¹⁰ Ruth Perlmutter, "Beckett's *Film* and Beckett and Film," *Journal of Modern Literature*, Feb 1977, Vol. 6 Issue 1: 86.

what is a monstrous law of reification, according to which being seen is being seen *as an object*. He is cornered in the end, but this failure to escape staged and captured on film presents a paradoxical victory. As the film shows, the kernel of *esse* that is being pursued in order to be made manifest – the split subjectivity of the protagonist – is precisely and paradoxically what cannot be shown, made fully manifest. It is made manifest in its *invisibility*. He is only *half* cornered, the other half virtually visible, that is, visible as the invisible space of the *hors cadre*. In *Film*, there is one unseen, which is the *hors cadre*, precisely where the split subject protagonist's other half resides, where the neutral yet personified camera is the other pole of the subject. Subjectivity remains weighed down by a sovereign law, but it also remains firmly planted in the *hors cadre*, despite the tragic-comical allure of the protagonist seen. The latter is *doubly reified*, but it is this double reification that releases *unseen* his subjective frame that exceeds anything that can be shown. The split subject, then, can be said to straddle both *hors cadre*, *hors champ* and the on-screen space.

While Perlmutter's engaging article culminates in an allegorical reading of Beckett's film,¹¹ she touches on an interesting point that no other commentator makes:

Film is about absence – the absence of the subject from the viewer and the means of production (God or any external authority that produces meaning; the technical processes of the cinematic apparatus; direct experience) and, obversely, the absence of the viewer from the means of production and the subject.¹²

While this liminal space where the apparatus of cinema appears could be called the *hors cadre*, Perlmutter analysis falls short, just as any analysis must fall short that finds a firm

¹¹ Perlmutter, "Beckett's *Film*," 94: "In *Film*, he creates a cinematic allegory of the spatial and temporal configurations that mirror the workings of the psyche."

¹² Perlmutter, "Beckett's *Film*," 88.

ground. The film is not “about” absence; the film stages absence without reifying or representing it. Perlmutter’s analysis also does not account for the reader, who is not so much absent or present, as she is directly interpellated by the medium of film in a way that is beyond representation, not only because it is unrepresentable, but also because Beckett’s film does not function in the paradigm of representation.¹³ To take another example of critical responses to *Film*, Simon Critchley writes that “the camera *is* subjectivity, or is one side of an essentially divided subjectivity.”¹⁴ The problem is that subjectivity *is* always already split in the *hors cadre*, what one might call the space where the ineluctable law resides along with it. This, however, remains to be read, not seen, in chapter four, where the ineluctable space of the cylinder comes to figure the *hors cadre* of the subject, all skin, living under another monstrous law figured as a sovereign biopower that does not simply resemble, but unfolds the sovereign law whose effects were felt during the twentieth century and continue to be felt in more subtle fashion today.

As mentioned above, I read the film against the grain of Berkeley’s principle stated by Beckett at the beginning of the film book. One should not understand “*Esse est percipi*,” as the principle of reading being advocated by Beckett, as that would constitute a gross and naïve misreading of the role of the implied author in the film book, not to mention a grave injustice to the talent of Beckett. “*Esse est percipi*,” is the principle being *staged*. It is the equivalent of the monstrous law of the cylinder in *The Lost Ones*,

¹³ In chapter four I return to the issue of representation, understanding which becomes crucial in Beckett’s *The Lost Ones*.

¹⁴ Simon Critchley, “To be or not to be is not the question – On Beckett’s *Film*,” *Film-Philosophy*, Volume 11, Issue No. 2, 2007: 110.

which I analyze in chapter four. It is the monstrous law that makes the protagonist a split actor in the first place. Being the law, it cannot be shown alongside the split protagonist like another actor. It is the law that he is fleeing. The reader might adopt the same tactic and flee as well, which is another way of saying that she should read against the grain of this law, which she does in chapter four.

In *Film*, there is an exercise of the medium of film that seemingly refuses dialectical progression – the first image is the last, patently unchanged. In that regard, *Film* is no different from Beckett's literary output. Like Beckett's literary creations, *Film* does not put emphasis on plot or on any edifying realism in the traditional sense. It is not that plot and narrative have been subordinated to something else; to understand just what this exercise in film is, one must treat plot, narrative and filmic device in the special relation that is operative in the film. *Film*, like Beckett's literary creations, does not subordinate the filmic medium or narrative device to the plot, but rather gives equal attention to filmic device, form and self-reflexive approach to what it means to create in the first place. Just as one finds, embedded in a complex and self-reflexive narrative, the *mise-en-scène* of the writer speaking in the case of Beckett's literary productions, the film voices paradoxically an emphasis on speaking even as it hushes the impulse to speak. The white-clad woman shushes the black-clad man who wants to protest after the rushing figures runs into him and knocks off his hat. Here, in *Film*, the narrative has been transposed or translated into the visual medium of a (nearly entirely) silent film. *Film* has a narrative complexity that needs to be examined in terms that are specific to the medium of film. The self-reflexivity of Beckett's literature is here transposed to the very act of

filming, or more precisely, the basic fact of a recording perception. The narrative is thus part and parcel of the filming process, being indissoluble from it, such that what happens to the protagonist, his own fatal encounter with his other, his doppelganger, can only be rendered through the medium of film, as I argue here.

One might say that in that image of the eye is laid bare a threefold questioning that undergoes the procedure of the filming of the film. This procedure is a movement that resembles and repeats the first camera movement in the opening sequence: one considers the eye and vision, but it becomes clear that more precisely it is the medium of film, which first becomes evident or palpable in the process, that is being put into question, and that this in turn serves more specifically to render subjectivity or “the I.” To put it in language that resembles Beckett’s prose, what is at play in *Film* is *eye-medium-I*. The entire apparatus of film – *mise-en-scène*, cutting, editing, camera angles and movement – is harnessed to showcase “eye-medium-I,” as if to remind the viewer that this secular trinity, which one might also call subjectivity, can only be brought into the field of vision, or understanding, through an exemplary filmic exercise. To put it in other words, the tripartite composition that makes film – the vision through a camera eye of a particular person or subject, whom we might call the *auteur* – is not just a metaphor, but a literalized rendition of subjectivity: the simple yet complex and ineluctable process of non-identity to self of the split subject. And, as seen in *Film*, it is the signature gesture of film that accomplishes this: that return to the first image of the eye, seen as something else, completes the return to starting position at the end of the panning away in an arc upward, making *Film* itself a repetition of the signature camera gesture of the film. This

subjective panning movement is the signature of the entirety of *Film*, and perhaps of film in general.

In film worth its analytical salt, the camera is deployed with *auteurial* mastery, and in *Film* in particular, the camera becomes a device that takes part in the action. To make clear just how and what the camera work becomes in *Film*, and what commentary *Film* might be said to make regarding the *auteurial* mastery just invoked, a careful analysis of the filmic process as deployed by *Film* is in order. As mentioned above, the camera is used not simply as an impersonal recording device that registers the action from which it is removed, although it does that as well. The crucial moment of this discovery is when the camera peers around at the sleeping figure and swings back when he nearly awakens, moving stealthily as if trying to sneak up on the sleeper. As I have already said, the film carefully establishes point of view shots as the protagonist's point of view in the preceding sequences, in which all point of view shots are blurry, rendering the fading, cataract-inflected vision of the aging figure. At the moment of the intrusion, however, the camera, which exhibits subjective-like flourishes— panning suggestive of head movement – from the beginning of the film, is revealed to indeed be an active participant attempting to surprise the protagonist, and not just a neutral recording device. It is thus revealed that the entire film is shot in point of view, not just the scenes that are initially established as such. It then becomes clear what the logic of camera deployment in *Film* is: the neutral camera is the point of view of the intruding other.

The filmic exercise is thus not empty as it accomplishes something crucial. What appeared to be a neutral, impersonal perspective interspersed with one subjective

perspective rendered in point-of-view shots, now appears in a very different, dizzying light. There are in fact two subjective perspectives, but they belong to one entity, or in fact there is one perspective unfolded as composite belonging to two figures who are one and the same. This is the question posed by *Film*: whose perspective is this? “Who sees?” to invoke a much-quoted question from Beckett transposed to the field of vision in its multiplicity and paradox.¹⁵ Because the neutral perspective is shown to belong to another character or protagonist, the seemingly neutral perspective suddenly, in a chiasmic shift, is drawn into the subjective sphere. This other, however, is none other than the protagonist who has been eluding him(self). The neutral perspective of the camera is the perspective of this intrusive other, the consequence being that the camera is personalized – it is like a character – while the intrusive other is rendered impersonal – he is like a camera, an impersonal apparatus. This *mise-en-abime* device is far from being a gratuitous effect or embellishment, functioning rather to show that neutrality and subjectivity are indissociable from one another. If the intruder is like a filming apparatus, he does not because of that become purely impersonal, but resembles the protagonist (to the point of sameness); similarly, if the camera is like a character, it does not for that reason cease being an alien, inhuman, intrusive apparatus, resembling itself (to the point of sameness).

One can conclude several things from this state of affairs, especially as concerns the picture of the subject/subjectivity that is being rendered in *Film*. First, neutrality and subjectivity are not only indissociable from one another; neutrality and subjectivity feed

¹⁵ I invoke this same quote in chapter three, where I analyze Foucault’s programmatic use of “who speaks?”

off one another. They are on one level distinct, but on another *the same* in a composite, variegated fashion. The couple camera-intruder thus possesses a paradoxical neutrality-subjectivity that renders the double nature of the “I,” split over two figures, where one comes unwillingly into the field of vision but is avoiding being seen and attempting to remain *hors champ* – that is, outside the field of vision but within the same filmic space – while the other, *hors cadre* – belonging to a radically different space than the space seen on screen, which is commonly referred to as the space of the auteur director, and which was never meant to be seen, being a scandalous obscene – intrudes into the field of vision. To repeat this in a slightly different way, the empty exercise that is not empty renders the complexly double nature of the “I,” split over two figures, the protagonist and the camera-intruder, of which the latter is unfolded by Film and shown to be itself already composite and split, in order to show that the former, the protagonist, considered identical to himself, should be considered constitutively split. In other words, it is the medium that can be said to bear out the problematic stated in very schematic terms at the outset of this analysis, showing it in a concrete, nuanced “moving image” that is film.

If the film presents the viewer with more than meets the eye as I have already stated, it does so without ever obscuring anything, even the act of obscuring itself. We see the protagonist with a covered face, as if avoiding recognition, run for cover in an anonymous, decrepit apartment building. Once he gains what seems to be his abode, he begins obscuring the mirror – covering it with one of the dark coats he is wearing – , the window – pulling down the torn black shade – and the bird cage and fish bowl with a large piece of black fabric. There is nothing hidden from view, not even the hiding from

view that the protagonist, in a manner that recalls the comical slapstick of Buster Keaton's early days in cinema, is trying to accomplish. He covers or obscures anything that might be looking at him or perceiving him, and the more he does this, the more faces with eyes proliferate in the bare room. One can read this as a send-up of existentialism, of being toward death and the dissolution at the gaze of the other that constitutes and simultaneously threatens to destroy, and where, in rather slapstick fashion, death tries to surprise the unwitting subject through the furtive movements of the camera, a sort of personalization of death possessing radical and requisite impersonality. This would fit with the slapstick quality asymptotically approached by the film and never quite given free rein, but the paranoia displayed is something more than the stuff of ironic send-up. Neither are the references to death a simple fetishization of death or of "coming to an end" for its own sake. The protagonist is avoiding being seen, something that is patently visible all along, so there is no need to "read into" the film.

There is something else transpiring that is not simply a display of the depersonalizing effect of death. The protagonist is avoiding being seen as such, but everyone and everything seem to be gazing at him. Even inanimate objects, such as the carving on the back of the rocking chair and the file folder that contains pictures begin to stare at the protagonist with inhuman eyes. The disk closures connected with string, when rotated a certain way, begin to resemble eyes. The back of the chair assumes a demonic countenance under the gaze of the protagonist. Since the proliferation happens as a result of the gaze of the protagonist, his gaze returned, one can justifiably comprehend the paranoia being invoked as akin to the nauseating experience of interpellation by the other,

where the other can be either another subject, or “I,” as in the Sartrean scheme, or an object, as in Lacan’s famous instance in which he recounts being interpellated by a floating sardine can in the water.¹⁶ There is thus an unfolding of the existentialist problematic, pushing it in another critical direction. The interpellation by objects that the protagonist has seemingly facialized in paranoid fashion recalls the concept of “facialization” in Deleuze and Guattari’s *Thousand Plateaus*, where being facialized or faciality becomes a quality that is abstracted and abstractable from, precisely, the face that possesses the quality, although not exclusively as Deleuze and Guattari would have it.¹⁷

The interpellation by object-eyes might be said to perform a similar abstraction of “eyeness” from the eye: inanimate objects, not just eyes proper, which also abound, possess the constitutive quality of being eye. This functions to recall the old folded eye that “opens” and “closes” the film and stands in for ineluctable vision, yet also a constitutive blindness of that vision. This also functions to unleash a proliferation of the “eye,” of eyeness, which takes over the entire film. The eye does not dominate; it proliferates in a multitude of eyes that hide, in plain view, their homonym: the “I.” There

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, New York: Norton, 1978, 95.

¹⁷ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987: 167-191. It is worth noting that Deleuze and Guattari also employ the language of cinema already at the outset of the chapter in question entitled “Year Zero: Faciality,” which is all about subjectification. As they put it: “The face constructs the wall that the signifier needs in order to bounce off of; it constitutes the wall of the signifier, the frame or screen. The face digs the whole that subjectification needs in order to break through; it constitutes the black whole of subjectivity as consciousness or passion, the camera, the third eye” (168). As if taking impulses from Beckett, Deleuze and Guattari’s essay is an attempt to break down the cliché of the “horror story” of the face (168).

is thus an unleashing of subjectivity, which instead of dominating the medium and the discussion it receives in it, is proliferated, repeated, *profaned*.¹⁸

The particular use of camera in *Film* cannot be divorced from what is represented, from the story told by that camera, seen in the context of other films. Therefore the latter also need to be explored and to undergo a close reading. *Film*, especially as it is a silent film made almost four decades after the invention of sound film, and in spite of the “shh” of the white clad woman from the opening sequence that serves as an injunction to let speech fall away in favor of watching in silence, must also be seen as being in dialogue with film viewed as the compendium of recorded images, something with which Beckett must have been familiar. Indeed, his first biographer, Deidre Bair, reminds us that the young Samuel Beckett was fascinated by film and applied for an unpaid internship with Sergei Eisenstein in 1935.¹⁹ The question arises how *Film* is related to the history of cinema, and how this relation in turn impacts Beckett’s own film project, and therefore my own proposed analysis, which I have stated takes its cues from *Film*. To answer this multivalent question, one must turn one’s attention to some key figures and sequences with a view to understanding the filmic technique in context of film history.

One such example can – again – be found in the opening sequence, in which the Buster Keaton figure bumps into an unsuspecting couple who are not otherwise involved, but beginning already with the eye encased in folds of flesh. With no establishing shots

¹⁸ I return in chapter three to the concept of profanation borrowed from Agamben in order to explain it and show its pertinence to my analysis.

¹⁹ Deidre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978 (204): “He read books by and about Pudovkin, Arnheim and Eisenstein, and as many issues of the journal *Close-Up* as he could find. [...] [H]e actually wrote to Eisenstein and suggested to come to Moscow at his own expense and live there for a year as the master’s unpaid apprentice, doing whatever Eisenstein wanted him to do. Eisenstein did not reply [...]”

that would convey to the viewer who they or the running figure are, and what they might be to one another, we see a random encounter reminiscent of the slapstick of Keaton's early days. In a slapstick film, the inherently funny chance encounter, and the physical shock of bumping into very proper people, would then most likely be followed by class difference being highlighted and made fun of. In Film, however, any nascent humor in that chance encounter is not so much proscribed or even curtailed, as it is made parenthetical, as if to say that the humor that normally attends slapstick is not a constitutive part of slapstick but is concomitant with the affective response of the viewer, should the latter be given free rein to his or her emotion. The latter is quickly shifted into another register of emotion, that of the horror recorded on the faces of the couple. In that regard, the couple is vaguely reminiscent of the faces one sees in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). The woman wears white and wire-rimmed glasses, while the man wears black and a *pince-nez* that he removes in a repeated gesture. The repetition of the man's gesture is patently useless, except to the extent that the viewer is invited to consider this patent, superficial resemblance to what is considered one of the most important films in the history of cinema. If one remembers, however, that, significantly, in Eisenstein's film, the viewer only sees reaction shots after the Cossacks begin to shoot, with no establishing footage or psychological depth to the faces represented, then the resemblance appears more like a motivated invitation to consider the similarity and the difference between the films and the very different forms of logic underpinning them. Eisenstein's film has been and continues to be a primer for students of film on dialectical montage. It constitutes a

concrete example of handling montage in the way theorized by Eisenstein in his famous piece.²⁰

One can understand this playful yet serious allusion or “bumping into” Eisenstein in *Film* on the basis of the gesture of the black-clad man, who removes his *pince-nez* only to put it back on in a continuous sweep away and then back after a pause: Beckett is jostling the idea of the dialectical montage that Eisenstein theorized and practiced in *Battleship Potemkin*, suggesting that the dialectic does not reside between images, as Eisenstein’s theory has been understood, and that instead a radical continuity of takes and sequences should be seriously considered. With that returning gesture of the man performed twice, Beckett proposes a return toward the same to reach otherness, rather than the dialectical move toward the other, which results in an encounter with the same. To uphold an in-between of images is a view that sets up a false notion of inside/outside of the image, which for Beckett, on the basis of *Film*, is flat and folded, and possesses neither inside nor outside. What Beckett suggests is more radical than any traditional notion of dialectics: there is no between images, but rather the unbreakable, ineluctable continuity that cinema only seemingly breaks up in a utopian fantasy. If there is anything like the progression desired in the will to dialectic, for Beckett it would reside in the various forms of return or repetition, in the repeated gesture of the black-clad man, in the repeated camera pans along the exterior then interior walls that find answer in a return to starting position, in the repeated gestures of the protagonist in his room. What still remains to be analyzed is what opens this sequence, and which for reasons that I explain

²⁰ I am referring to Sergei Eisenstein’s essay “Dramaturgy of Film Form,” which appears in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, Ed. & Trans. Jay Leyda, New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Inc., 1949.

in what follows can only be analyzed out of order, that is, after the sequence which it precedes: the eye.

To consider the eye – that is, to return to the eye – it too is in dialogue with an iconic film, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un chien andalou* (1929), which famously and notably opens with the slicing open of a human eye, metaphorically repeated by a cloud moving over the moon in an evocation of the slicing of the knife over the eye. In a sense, the allusion is superficial, another jostling of film history that is echoed by the bumping into Eisenstein. On the other hand, its very superficiality constitutes the very thing to which one might, somewhat reluctantly, refer as that which in the allusion possesses depth or analytical substance. Just as in the case of the allusion to Eisenstein Beckett calls into question the idea of inside/outside of the image, with this allusion Beckett is calling into question the idea of depth of the image. Again, there is an invitation to consider the similarity (superficial) in order to return to the difference being invoked. It is helpful to remember the textbook notion of surrealism as a movement that tries to overcome reason and logic in favor of another reality, the one that matters and which has its underpinnings in the unconscious. The surrealists slice open the eye, which stands in for reason/the conscious/apparatus of vision, in an effort to destroy it in favor of a new vision, a new logic, a liberation of being. For the surrealists, the process of analysis requires cutting, literalized on screen. The way to analyze the eye/I for them is to cut it open and see its inside, thereby securing its demise in favor of something else, of a doubled being that we see also literalized on screen in the lifeless dummy, and the

redoubling of figures in the dream sequences that stage Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalytic theory of subjectivity in a way that can only be invoked in passing here.

Beckett, notably, refuses to slice open the eye, which looks at the viewer with inscrutable and alien but intact intensity, and proposes an approach different from cutting, because the required evisceration and analysis of the innards of the eye presupposes that the eye possesses depth, an inside and an outside, which is something that Beckett does not espouse. The eye is resolutely flat, encased in folds that cover the old skin and find resonance with the exterior wall that is pock-marked with vegetation, and the interior wall that is visibly abraded, having jagged holes and scratches. The eye is surface without depth or inside to cut into. In other words, Beckett insists that it is a surface that refuses breaking up just as the sequence that follows the close-up of the eye refuses being assumed into dialectical movement.

The conclusions that one can draw regarding the eye, however, appear founded only after careful consideration of the sequence with the couple borrowed from Eisenstein. It makes sense to say what I have said about the eye only after one has spoken of the sequence that follows, without which it would seem far-fetched to conduct an analysis of the eye that places it in dialogue with the surrealists. This, it must be noted, is not accidental, but rather programmed by Beckett's filmic text itself, for the return to the eye is the same gesture, that very return, suggested and in keeping with the camera movement suggested by *Film* itself. To read *Film* this way is, in other words, to take cues from *Film*, where the signature Beckett camera movement – point of view pan sideways or away, then back to starting position – is first recorded in that opening sequence, later

to be repeated in the following sequences. In other words, film is the privileged medium for *Film*, hence the generic title for a piece that is as much about its own process of filming as it is about anything represented. To put it in stronger terms, there is a conflation of form and content, or more precisely, a refusal to begin with to see them as separate, because the pursuit of the medium of film is the same as the pursuit of the split subject that one sees rendered or recorded in *Film*. The “I” is a medium, the medium on which attention is turned here. In a kind of conceptual Möbius strip, *Film* is a filmic production that proclaims that the filmic medium is a metaphor for subjectivity, while subjectivity is a metaphor for the filmic medium, and neither really stands alone.

Eye-medium-I. This is the trio of terms that emerges from the very first camera gestures in Beckett’s *Film*, a first and last exercise of the filmic medium. Extreme close-up followed by medium long-shot that pans out to return upon itself. In one repeated camera movement – one repeated panning gesture that is like the movement of a perceiving head – *Film* states the definitive gesture of film and thus inaugurates the end or death of film as a medium and art form, and along with it, the death of the subject, who is of the medium. And yet, the death of the medium and of the subject is never definitive, never finished. The gesture settles again on the blinking eye of the other, who is very much alive rather than dead, as is feared by the protagonist, his double, who repeatedly checks his pulse. Even if the protagonist were dead by now, the other is not. However, the protagonist must be alive to see or register the blinking, living eye of the other, his other. This settling on the eye of the other might be restated as a settling on the homonymic “I,” that non-identical double who is only seemingly the same but is not the

same: subjectivity. In other words, the terms “subject” and “subjectivity” are like the protagonist and the intruder: the same, yet not identical, constituting a sort of couple in need of a procedure analyzing its dysfunction, its junctions and disjunctions, its passage and the passage of its constituent terms into one another, but also into other terrains.

Frame II: The “I” of the Other

In *The End of Modernity*, Gianni Vattimo analyzes the much-vaunted death of art, by which is meant the moment when art loses its ground and manifests itself in what he and other critics have called the aestheticization of all areas of experience, whether pertaining to politics or everyday life. The generalized aestheticization of experience comes about as a result of the impact of technology on art, as well as the general weakening of metaphysical notions about art. Reproducibility, as theorized by Walter Benjamin in his famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility,” and taken up by Vattimo, blurs the formerly rigid boundaries of art held up by the notions of originality, genius and art’s historical and political meaning. Even the boundary between user and producer becomes blurred. Vattimo, arguing for a *weakening* rather than a heroic overcoming of metaphysics in all its manifestations, including that of art, sees also the necessity of a weakening of our notion of the death of art. For Vattimo, the death of art is imbued with a certain ardor that we seemingly unconsciously share with the avant-gardes, namely, the utopian sense of the death of art according to which ‘death of art’ designates “the end of art as a specific fact, separate

from the rest of experience, thanks to the renewal and reintegration of existence.”²¹ The job of art is the reintegration of existence first of all, and once that is accomplished, art is supposed to dissolve into this existence. The lingering utopianism for Vattimo is not, however, on the side of art, which has moved on and survived erasure, even self-erasure, as evidenced by its suicidal tendencies in certain avant-garde movements. The lingering utopianism is to be found on the side of art’s critics, who continue to see art as nothing but a self-negation. The existence of art works in the public sphere is for Vattimo a phenomenon that is irreducible to art as primarily or only self-negating. Furthermore, to continue to talk about the death of art perpetuates this and actually defers this supposedly longed-for death.

Vattimo identifies three aspects of the death, or better, *decline*, of art as being the constitutive elements of this crisis – *Kitsch*, silence and utopia – and which name related, intertwining problematics that make up the conceptual and historical event known as the death of art. Vital art works, Vattimo contends, are the space where the three aspects of the decline of art are brought together in a “complex system of relations”²² that has yet to be studied in depth. Art is, in fact, a space where an engagement with philosophical concepts is central if we adopt a suitable perspective, one that does not immediately throw overboard traditional aesthetics in its analysis of concepts, but rather works through them. Or better still, to take Vattimo’s insistence on *Verwindung* a step further, works them through the work of art.

²¹ Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 56.

²² Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 58.

It is precisely such a study in depth of the matrix of complex relations among the aspects of the decline of art that is proposed here, but with an important difference, as the study is to be conducted with a view to the productive potential of these relations to shed light on subjectivity as it is staged, figured, conceptualized in art. Taking seriously Vattimo's claim that art is not only or predominantly concerned with its own death or self-negation of its status – something that gives theory an alibi to avoid confronting the problem, its consequences, as well as artistic phenomena that discredit it – the study proposes to move in a direction different from the one envisioned by Vattimo when he calls for a complete philosophical description of the interplay of the aspects of the decline of art, namely, Kitsch, silence and utopia.²³ Or, to put it in other words, the aim of this study is to follow not so much the consequences of the decline of art as it impacts subjectivity, but rather how art in its decline, against the expectations of a certain type of criticism, untiringly figures the subject and poses questions regarding the subject's well-being that perhaps are not posed elsewhere or with the same critical acuity.

Vattimo's three terms – *Kitsch*, silence, and utopia – name different aspects of the decline of art as these aspects are brought into play in a complex system of relations *in art works*.²⁴ The terms seem to represent for Vattimo points of tension in art works that keep coming back as discursive 'hinges' in the threshold space of the decline of art, as I would call them, or as points of entry into the art work that resonate with other terms and allow us the flexibility necessary to pass on to other problematics. 'Kitsch' relays art's confrontation with the possibility that all that was art progressively dissolves into kitsch

²³ Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 58.

²⁴ Vattimo calls the relation that art has with these manifestations "constitutive." See *The End of Modernity*, 58.

when it is mass mediatized culture that sets the standards of taste and builds community, and with the dissolution of long-esteemed values such as originality in art. ‘Silence’ relays the attitude adopted by art when faced by *Kitsch*, and when confronted by the perversion of utopia, in an effort to not play the game of ‘overcoming metaphysics’ since the latter cannot be overcome. ‘Utopia’ relays art’s working through the role in a utopian future that art was held to play by the avant-gardes and in favor of which it was to disappear. In part, these terms have been deployed by the ‘bad’ sort of criticism that Vattimo invokes and which harps on the death of art, at once fetishizing and preventing that death. In that sense, the terms are tainted by their origin in the discourse of the death of art. One could say that utopia is art’s past that continues to haunt it, kitsch is the danger it faces in the flattened out present of its decline, and silence is its future under the sign of a question mark.

However, the value of these discursive *hinges* lies in that they underwrite the recent conceptualization of the past, present and future of art. These terms provide a way in to talking about art in its effort at *Verwindung*, to use Vattimo’s language, since art continues to digest them, to divest itself of them, and even to embrace them programmatically in an effort to move on. And, significantly for this study, they are the terms upon which the swinging door of subjectivity, door to the subject is hinged: *the split, the witness and dystopia*.

Frame III: Return: The Eye of the Other

Eye-medium-I. The stakes of this analysis of *Film* can be clearly and forcefully stated only at this point. As I show in the preceding analysis, the use of camera and filmic

device in *Film* is not only an apt curtain raiser for this dissertation. It is of course “apt,” but not for being accidentally or even fortuitously suggestive. Beckett’s *Film* is what “bumps” into the active writer of this dissertation (who is also a reader), the way the protagonist runs into the couple at the start of the film, and in a profound jostling, hands over the very terms of analysis that are to be employed and the method to conduct the analysis not just of *Film*, but of the entire dissertation.

To reiterate, what I propose here are several passages or chapters that do not produce a synthesis of terms. The passages, modeled here in this chapter, resemble the very gesture suggested by Beckett’s filmic text in the first place: the gesture of unfolding, the panning sideways, out and up, and back to starting position. The active reading of terms that arises as a result of and is *concomitant with* the passage returns the reader to a critical place that is non-identical to the same, to the beginning. Furthermore, the passages are not from one term to another, but rather *between one and the other*, with the three passages effectively modeling *subjectivization* understood as this reading practice. At the end, there is still a split subject, but different, unfolded, more and less like itself - *D’un sujet l’autre...* The allusion being made here is, of course, to Céline’s *D’Un château l’autre*, a book that chronicles in its own way the dystopia of the subject. I make the allusion at the risk of appearing to espouse Céline’s approach, or excuse his notoriously troubled and troubling political past, which I do not. His book performs the dystopia of the subject but ultimately fetishizes this dystopic quality and thus fails to effect a real passage from one perspective on the subject to another. That is, a passage *between* the terms “subject” and “subjectivity” and over the skin or anamorphic mirror of

the text of which they are the support upon which the image of the subject can appear. If the encounter with Beckett leaves the writer of this dissertation profoundly altered, and hands over the very terms of analysis that are to be employed and the method to conduct the analysis, as I announced earlier, this does not mean that I propose a kind of solipsism *à deux* with Beckett, a false closedness of the text onto itself, sealed off from the network of relation with historical context and other writers. In order to return the terms to their proper place in a sort of profanation, as stated above, it is necessary to put the terms in dialogue with other writers in a sequence of multiple panning which are necessary passages in terms. Only in the end is it possible to return to the first image, the first question of the dissertation, which considers the “I,” lurking in open view behind the “eye.” The approach here suggests a passage in terms for precisely the opposite reason: the subtending belief in the continuity of texts, in a continuity that cannot be cut because of an openness of the discursive network, and which not even cinematic cutting can undo. What cinematic cutting can, however, accomplish, is a cutting that is a scissioning,²⁵ a throwing together of seemingly disparate elements. In similar fashion, this dissertation writer proposes a scissioning of Beckett’s filmic and other texts with other writers and another filmmaker as I perform the proposed passage, the analytical gesture.

The first of those writers is Gianni Vattimo. The dissertation traces a trajectory that takes as its point of departure a critical borrowing of Gianni Vattimo’s three aspects or terms in the discussion of the death of art: *Kitsch*, silence and utopia. In the central chapters of the dissertation, the bringing to bear of art works upon philosophical

²⁵ In chapter three, I discuss the provenance of this term in Foucault and develop it for the purposes of this dissertation.

paradigms serves to refine and transform Vattimo's terms, and leads finally, in the last chapter, to a new vantage point from which the analysis of subjectivity can be appreciated and understood. Although Vattimo's work is present at the outset to set the terms of my investigation, it is increasingly less so as I engage with different philosophers in the course of the dissertation. By the end, I will have moved well beyond his framework, having transferred the discussion from the terms *Kitsch*, silence and utopia to the split subject, the witness and dystopia.

Finally, I am thus adopting this kind of unfolding gesture, the signature point of view panning, as the definitive method of my dissertation. This is important because it represents an interpretative engagement with the filmic or literary text that is suggested by that text, rather than brought in from the outside. Indeed, the very idea of bringing criteria of critique in from the outside strikes one as a double fallacy, simultaneously buying into the idea that a text, image, film sequence, whatever the item under consideration, possesses an inside whose depths are to be probed and whose secrets revealed, and that there is a radical break in continuity between the gesture of interpretation and the gesture of creation. I depart with the conviction that the "other" writers are already in a sense "contained" in Beckett's filmic and other texts, because the text, rather than being a container, is radically a device for active reading, for active perception, in a network with other such devices. In that sense, Beckett's text is the metaphor and stand-in for subjectivity, the instance of an active agent who perceives, reads and witnesses in a gesture that instantiates and unfolds the very act of perception, of reading, of witnessing.

Frame IV: Return: The “I” of the Other (The terms...and their doubles)

As already stated, my project concerns itself with exemplary cases of subjectivity emerging from or situated on the shared terrain between two related discourses, the end of art and the end of subjectivity. The goal is to arrive at a new vantage point from which come into view the consequences for the discussion of subjectivity arising on this different terrain. Part of the novelty of this undertaking lies in the coming to light of the fact that subjectivity has always resided on or very close to this terrain. What the exemplary reading of *Film* shows is the striking and not accidental concomitant arising of two problematics – the death of art, specifically figured by the seventh art of cinema – and the death of the subject. My goal is to take impulses from this concomitance of the two, indicating points of scission between the two discourses, and between or even within thinkers, a procedure that yields an image of subjectivity and the subject needing a new ‘exposure.’

While Beckett’s *Film* stages the split subject, the latter is not set in a vacuum. In the *hors champ* of *Film* can be found the pressing, lurking issue of art, especially the cinematic art. Reanimated debates regarding the status and nature of the work of art, and the continuing debate regarding subjectivity, testify to the renewed timeliness, pertinence and centrality of certain questions. The question is not how might one begin to think both art and the subject beyond the essences which their metaphysical conceptions deployed all-too successfully, and whose avatars still haunt us today. The both in this instance is not “both,” but one and the same in that complex way in which the protagonist and his double in *Film* are one and the same. If one thinks along the lines of logic of *Film*

with respect to the two problematics, the *hors cadre* of one is the *hors champ* of the other. That means that posing questions regarding art necessarily puts in question the subject, be this subject the creating subject, or the generic subject.²⁶ What is the work of art? What does art do? Does art need aesthetics? Is it *à propos* today to speak of an *origin* of art? What is “the human” and what does it desire from art? Do certain conceptions of art fuel notions of human subjectivity that close off the very avenue of liberation that art was supposed to open up? Is the problem of the precarious future of politics linked to art and the political role it is purported to play? And if so, how might we look afresh at the ‘engagement’ of art? The afore-mentioned questions – central to the Nietzschean and Heideggerian critiques, but certainly not limited to them – are thus still very much with us, rather than behind us, and it is in pursuing figures who belong to these two traditions (Foucault, Agamben), constituting their contemporary forms, as well as certain figures who clearly depart from them (Barthes, Deleuze), that one can keep the debate alive.

What unites recent approaches to subjectivity, such as those of Foucault and Agamben, is not only the desire to articulate an ontological ground for the human subject, but to account for a human politics and secure its uncertain future in the wake of a troubled century. These debates in which subjectivity plays an important role have been conducted using the term “biopower,” coined by Foucault to name the new type of totalitarian – but not only – political power wielded, not on the glorious humanist human subject, but on a more degraded, often stateless being on whose very body power is exercised by state as well as newer institutions of the global empire. While the term

²⁶ In chapter three, the creating subject certainly begins to look like the double of the generic subject tout court

biopower reflects a needed change in the conception of power vis-à-vis subjectivity, of the new power and political paradigm under which it lives, it, along with subjectivity, could stand a critical reexamination or reiteration. In other words, the terms need *separation* or an unfolding of one from the other, just as the terms of the split subject receive in Beckett's *Film*.

The study that I undertake here examines the tension between the terms subject and subjectivity in the age of biopower, on the terrain of the death of art, generating critical insight into the notion of biopower and the possibility of a political future for the subject. Indeed, the debate stands to benefit from a close examination of the predicament of art and the artist, because what animates the latter predicament is the more broadly encompassing problem of subjectivity. Subjectivity, first embroiled with the problem of the death of art, be it the author-subject as painter or writer, draws attention to the artist who becomes the figure through which a more generalized problem of subjectivity emerges. Examining this predicament as it arises from the context of aesthetics gives the critic a unique chance to put into relief the clear and the obscure of human subjectivity, and to operate an incisive critique of this term and its continued usefulness. This is to transpose the discussion not so much to another plane, as to the plane where subjectivity can best be addressed because it appears there in a snapshot, in a telling negative image. While such a negative image might also appear elsewhere, it does not leave the same kind of imprint or residue that the field of the death of captures, manifesting itself as a unique kind of 'developing mechanism' for the problem of subjectivity. The latter is thus not so much an imported term in the field of aesthetics as one situated squarely on a plane where

its stakes become visible and appreciable, emphasized with greater resolution than in other contexts. The death of art, as my dissertation will make clear, *precipitates* the problem of subjectivity the way certain chemical mixtures yield a residue. To put it more precisely, posing the problem of subjectivity in the terms of the problem of art and the artist, rather than compounding problems, fragments a composite problem into its components, diffracting an unwieldy problematic into its separate strands, the terms that emerge within the analysis proposed here: *the split, the witness and dystopia*.

The split subject, the witness and dystopia are also the terms that emerge from *Film*, as my analysis shows. Beckett's film so convincingly shows a subject split into two terms, what one now might call "subject" and "subjectivity," by staging the same as non-identical actors (Buster Keaton and the camera). There is redoubling of one, of a singularity, of an element into two: a composite, imperfect substance. The subject is split into two non-identical terms, subjectivity and subject, the names for these entities that are sometimes used interchangeably, but whose sameness is not identical to itself. In chapter two, I consider how, through the problematic of *Kitsch* in art as staged by Rivette's film, the splitting of the work of art also poses the problem of a split subject who produces it, the painter. In chapter three, I read Beckett's *The Unnamable* as standing in a relation of intertextuality to Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, the *porte-parole* of the formulator of the modern subject who speaks, and show how Beckett's figuration of the subject who speaks is indissociable from the author, making the latter the test case of subjectivity *tout court*. Also in that chapter, I read Beckett's *The Unnamable* on an equal footing with Foucault and Barthes, a procedure that yields another result: the authorial-function, as

one can call the split subject at that point, is the *witness* to the remnant of speculative subjectivity: the subject. Thus, the split is spread over *three* terms.

The witness is a term that one finds arising in *Film*: perception, the neutral registering of the camera, who is one of the elements of the split subject; the registered horror that is witnessed, seen as the horror on the faces of the couple; as well as the horror of the face of the other abstracted by the medium, unwitnessed because unwitnessable perception or registering as such, and yet witnessed as abstraction. In a return upon itself, the sheer, inhuman quality of the impossible, subjective camera renders itself. In other words, this is the horror of subjectivity without the subject. It is a proliferation of subjectivity akin to the proliferation of the eye, eyeness without the eye. The death of the subject appears under a specific angle: The horror is that the hallmark of the human should be something as inhuman as subjectivity, the capacity to witness, pure, impossible perception to the bitter end. In other words, what “eyeness” is to the eye, subjectivity is to the subject. In chapter three, these identical/non-identical terms, speculative subjectivity and the subject remnant, are viewed from above by the author-function, himself witness and remnant. However, it is only in chapter four that the reader can grasp the full meaning of the author-function understood as remnant.

The third term, dystopia, also arises in *Film* through the dysfunction of the two elements of the split subject, the protagonist and the intruding camera other. The condition of the subject, the speaking “I” or subject split over two terms, subject and subjectivity, is dystopic. To pan back to the utopian horizon of art, which promised community and freedom to the subject, one sees that the death of the subject is a death

because the instantiation of subjectivity is with the medium such that the subject lives and dies with its fetishizing, reifying gaze turned upon itself. This filmic death is also the obverse of death, being a dystopic new life for the subject, who is capable of fetishizing everything except his own subjectivity if he is to remain a subject. Not my eye/I, but I assume it as mine in its foreignness to be an I/eye. In chapter four, it is the dystopian situation of utterly reified subject remnant which comes under consideration as it is figured in Beckett's *The Lost Ones*, whose reading is informed by the reading of *The Unnamable* (informed by the reading of *Film*, as I have already said). As I show, the dystopia lies not so much in the fact of the subject without subjectivity or almost as it is subjected to a monstrous law of the cylinder. The dystopia lies in the fact that this subject is *none other than*, in essence *no different from*, its obverse, the speaking subjectivity that seems to have been absented from it. The passive ex-searcher is only that from a certain perspective, the same one, as I show, that refuses to grant total equality, *interchangeability*, to the randomly assigned positions of author and creation, the narrator (or author-function) of *The Unnamable* attempting to speak himself and his double/creation Malone. The same gesture that reifies the defeated ex-searcher is the one that refuses the equality of the author-function and the *reader*, that extra-diegetic entity situated *hors cadre* space of the *auteur*. This is a truly dystopian and revolutionary proposition which can only arise in the guise of a neutral text like *The Lost Ones*, where the sheer inseparability of subject from subjectivity is put forth in plain view, and a choice is handed off to the reader: She may either continue to reify the ex-searcher as a foreign being, as a representation of something else. Or she may acknowledge that he is

not a representation at all and recognize herself in that dystopian, anamorphic mirror of split subjectivity that is the textual ex-searcher.

Frame V: Timeliness of the Project

The question arises why one should return to these particular discourses at this time, and why a reader should be interested in a dissertation pursuing the problem of subjectivity, which arguably has been addressed *ad nauseam*. Before proceeding in the following sections to outline the main chapters of this dissertation that constitute, and perform, the passage in terms proposed and introduced here, a few introductory words are necessary regarding the timeliness of the project. Indeed, the pre-supposition driving this dissertation is that the topic – human subjectivity vis-à-vis the subject – is not only timely, but deserves, even necessitates, a close analysis whose “originality” – if I might be allowed to employ half seriously and half ironically this loaded, troublesome term denigrated by the very tradition I propose to examine – lies in the methodological design of my project. The following are reasons one *should* return to – not revive – the theorists of the late twentieth century and look closely at how they understand subjectivity as it arises from the discourse on art, specifically the end of the author and the genius creator, while one looks also at concrete examples within literary and filmic texts of such “demoted” subjectivities.

First, it needs to be made clear that what is being proposed here is *not* a revival of French theory, that is, a wholesale and naive acceptance of all its claims as unassailable. What is being proposed is a degree of lucidity in considering the state of affairs. With post-feminism came also the era of life after theory in French and other departments, of

an endeavor that represents efforts to think in new and different terms about political subjectivity “after the subject.” After an era of philosophical jargon that, the criticism goes, arguably even those who wielded it no longer understood but continued to speak it because they were established and canonized, there is the perceived need to return to sound, positive-sounding concepts such as “the author,” “the work,” and even “the subject,” taken to be understood in a non-problematic way by the users of these terms. It is the return to a kind of common academic sense approach with a view to moving forward rather than remaining stuck in deconstructive and poststructuralist approaches, seen as too idealistic in their eschatological fervor, even as on another level they denied the very possibility of revolution, whether literary or political.

Examining what is to blame in this state of affairs – bad theory or bad faith on the part of both practitioners and critics – is not my purpose here. Suffice it to say that unfortunately, such efforts often lapse in retrograde fashion into life *pre*-theory, as if the insights of the French thinkers had never come to light or will simply go away if ignored long enough. And what use have these disputes been to advancing politics or turning around the fate of depoliticized subjects, the saying goes. We should stop turning in theoretical circles in favor of renewing academic consensus, smooth progression and the usefulness of such disputes to political and everyday life. However, one could, and should, insist that there is no going back to life *pre*-theory, and that pretending that the author is alive and well is possible only in the postmodern critical landscape where intellectual fidelity has been reduced to something akin to crude consumer choice, whereby one chooses simply to pretend that the author and the subject are thriving the

way one might choose a can of Pepsi rather than a can of Coke. Further, when undertaken as a matter of convenience, this academic version of consensus-seeking is in some instances the equivalent of stream-lining measures applied to academic departments seen as under-productive and under-performing. Renouncing fidelity to thinkers – even, or *especially*, to those thinkers like Foucault and Barthes who continue to perturb our thinking – is to ignore not only the valid and indisputable points that they make, but to renounce on one’s desire to actively disagree with them. It is the latter that is the real loss for today’s discourse: seeing clearly the limits of their discourses constitutes a more solid foundation for remaining loyal to them – or, which is another form of fidelity, finding the grounds for moving on to something else – than simply making the highly-equivocal, consumerist choice to leave them behind.

To reiterate, what I propose is not a “revival” of these thinkers and of a problematic seen as outdated and handled as such. The term “revival” suggests a religious turning to worship at the canonical altar that still exists in some academic quarters today, enshrining these figures and turning them into monuments that have little to say to us, or are made only to speak in unintelligible, jargon-filled “tongues” whose fervor feels warmed-over. In that sense, such a revival makes these figures of French theory neither accessible for another generation of readers, nor does it do anything to engage their legitimate critics to rehabilitate them from a state of oblivion. What I propose is a *return* understood as a gesture of *re-turning* to these initiators of discourse – instances in the discursive network that initiate a certain way of speaking about the author and the subject – in order to reactualize their discourses rather than revive them. The gesture of

reactualization should be understood in its strictly Deleuzian usage and sense: to reactualize an image or discourse according to Deleuze is to tap into its virtual potential to thrive in a context different from its original context and therefore to grasp it in a new, contemporary context and not necessarily as identical to itself. Such a reactualization thus does not simply revive that image as an eternal thing, but rather depends on the eternal or inexhaustible potential of that image or discourse to be reactualized, sometimes in unexpected ways, in the future. I thus propose to reactualize certain chapters of French theory as they appear to a critic in the era of life after theory – that is to say, after certain criticisms have been made and the militant moment of the initial saying has passed – by peering into its virtual, unexplored corners – their *hors cadre*, as I call it in chapter three – and by bringing it into communication with those who, like Giorgio Agamben today, represent an active link with these thinkers. By active link, I mean not so much a continuation of their thought, which implies a slavish fidelity that can be limiting rather than enriching. In the words of Agamben, a *profanation* of them is in order. It is through reactualization of their discourses in the mode of profanation – which for Agamben means a return to critical use, as I explain in chapter four – that I propose to engage these pivotal figures of French thought. And indeed, it is through a reactualization of these discourses that the subject, and its double, subjectivity, might be returned to the sphere of use.

The question of what is to be gained from such a profaning reactualization of Foucault and Barthes arises at this point and is best addressed by reiterating the specificity of the methodology vis-à-vis the topic of this dissertation: subjectivity. By

looking at exemplary instances of subjectivity in a filmic text by Rivette and literary texts by Beckett, my aim is to show not only the limits of theoretical iterations of subjectivity, but to clarify a theoretical slippage between the terms subject and subjectivity having discursive currency and used to talk about the figurations. As I read them, there is a lack of definition of the terms “subject” and “subjectivity” already in Foucault and Barthes that permits such a slippage and contributes to the lack of sharpness regarding what I hope to show is a productive distinction between them. This study, on a basic level, hopes to precipitate, through the proposed passage in terms, a clearer image of the subject on the one hand, and subjectivity on the other, two terms that at the outset might seem redundant or simply lacking in clear definition on my part. By the end of the study, it will have become clear that in dealing with the human subject, or subjectivity as a loaded term of discourse, one must consider *subjectivity* proper – a speculative subject-function or witness – and what exceeds it, the *subject* as remnant seemingly devoid, or split off from, its speculative function. Considered textually, the two – subjectivity and subject – become legible in different but not uncomplimentary modes, yielding a double image of the subject.

Putting in focus such a slippage entails embracing a certain methodology of the project, which deserves another, clearer statement here. Deleuze’s and Guattari’s book, *What is Philosophy?*, is invoked in chapter four but it is useful to mention it briefly here, as it is of particular interest to my project. Deleuze and Guattari’s book attempts to answer the question of its title and tries to carve spheres of operation for science, philosophy and art in an age in which concept making is not strictly within the exclusive

purview of philosophy. Deleuze and Guattari thus treat art not simply as a sociological or cultural phenomenon, but as a player in the eminently human endeavor to create concepts, giving art a unique role not reducible or subject to the role of philosophy. This is a fresh rendering of an immanentized ontology of art, of its *raison d'être*, linked to activity that is constitutive of the human, if not exactly of the human subjectivity that we are accustomed to hearing invoked. What is unique in Deleuze and Guattari's account is the autonomy they ascribe to the sphere of art vis-à-vis science and philosophy, while simultaneously identifying it as a human endeavor that is no less than constitutive of humanity, and to which they give no less than the task of production of concepts. In this they part ways with traditional aesthetics, where art does not seem to hold such importance of place. For Kant, art pictures that which "exceeds" concepts, and which thus also exceeds the purview of philosophy which has primacy of place in human cognition and concept formation, and which, one might add, nevertheless returns in the form of aesthetics to judge art and its productions. For Deleuze and Guattari, art is not the space of excess, but rather an autonomous space of concept production that must be accorded the same weight as one accords a philosophical work, and the same degree of sensitivity when judging it on its own terms. It is the latter insight that fundamentally informs my own approach to the works of art under discussion here. They cannot be simple illustrations because they are conceptual apparatuses operating within the network of discourse to which Foucault, Barthes and Agamben belong.

Chapter Outlines

The following are outlines of chapters two, three and four, the loci of the passage in terms whose timeliness, methodology and aim I have laid out here in a rather abstract manner, and which I now “flesh out” by giving their basic contours.

Chapter II: From the Notion of *Kitsch* to the 'Split' Subjectivity

In this chapter, Jacques Rivette’s *La belle noiseuse* becomes the locus of a discussion of *kitsch*, the term that is the point of departure for the successive passage in terms from the discourse on the end of art to the discourse on subjectivity. As such, it becomes the moment to discuss Giorgio Agamben’s *Man Without Content*, as well as texts by Badiou and Vattimo.

Jacques Rivette’s *La belle noiseuse* exemplifies the problem of art as that of kitsch. The term “kitsch” functions as an obscuring screen in the discourse on the death of art. The analysis traces the movement to a properly nihilistic term – nihilistic in the sense inherited from Nietzsche and in which Vattimo uses it – that facilitates the discussion of subjectivity because it acknowledges its decline, its paradigm shift: the “split” subject. The masterpiece unveiled at the end of this film is, at least on the surface, a hastily-executed piece of kitsch intended as a means of re-entry into circulation on the art market for its artist maker. The piece is yet another element in the easy and generalized aestheticization of experience in which, it seems, the force of the field of art has been co-opted by reigning market forces. The film registers the fluidity of boundaries, such that art worthy of the name no longer has a place and becomes itself

kitsch, and thereby it alerts us to a concomitant problem: the human subject, as receiver of the art work and, more centrally, as the artist producer, is profoundly split.

Working against received the restrictive notions of an outdated paradigm that are supposed to order art reception and that reify a certain kind of artist subject – the sovereign subject of metaphysics and humanism – the film, when viewed a certain way, produces a critical examination of that sovereign subject. The film shows that art is not simply concerned with its own status. The problem of art’s originality – its status in a secularized age – arises seamlessly bound to the problem of the status of the artist subject and, taking subjectivity as a concept, shows the troubled relation of this concept to its own origin. The film does not claim to instantiate a different, recuperated subjectivity; rather, its figuration of the predicament of the split subject has much to add to the discussion in that the subject is maintained as constitutively split.

In this chapter, I make reference to, among others, Agamben’s *The Man without Content* for his discussion of traditional aesthetic theory, where the question of the origin and originality of art is central, as well as to Vattimo’s *Nihilism and Emancipation* for his concept of weak ontology. Taking inspiration from Vattimo, “weak” originality becomes a concept that allows us to carry on the discussion of art’s difference, and more importantly for this dissertation, for the discussion of the status of the human subject, without reifying either one into an essence. I also reference the *Cinema* books of Deleuze, whose movement-image and time-image become a way to understand the figuration of the painter-*auteur* and the split subject.

Chapter III: From Silence to the Witness

This chapter is based in a close reading of Samuel Beckett's novel, *The Unnamable*. My close reading of two key passages takes as its departure point not only that silence must be understood in a nuanced way with regard to Beckett, but that indeed, these passage constitute a *conversation* that the narrator is having with René Descartes and with Michel Foucault. Descartes is understood here as being in a relation of intertextuality with Beckett. As I show in this chapter, the "virtual" Descartes is directly linked to what I call the *speculative* author-function, the latter being Foucault's author-function seen at its limit and in a critical image that is made visible only in the encounter with Beckett. In the process, a new figure of subjectivity emerges, suggested by another text by Beckett. It is the emptiness of this figure that raises the spectral image of the missing subject in the scheme, the figure witnessing to what exceeds its power of figuration: the subject-remnant. Further, in a return to Michel Foucault via Agamben, the need to profane the subject arises.

The fluid boundaries between art and kitsch, as well as the self-annihilating turn that art is said to have taken – the mode of suicide in the protracted death of art faced with its situation of not having a secure originality or status – have led critics to pronounce an art of silence. Beckett is held to be the pre-eminent example of this, notably in the criticism of Adorno. Although undoubtedly silence remains a rich valence of Beckett's work, it ought not to be ignored that this silence is not purely in the mode of a refusal to speak, or of a refusal of intelligibility. The critic must be careful in considering what is being silenced and what is, precisely, given the forum to speak and be heard by the reader. It would certainly be a mistake to conclude that silence becomes the last resort

of a reactive gesture on Beckett's part, because this ignores the dimension of active witnessing to the larger context of the quest for silence. Further, it would be to ignore the irony, or better, paradoxical nature, of an authorial gesture on the part of Beckett that considers the speech of the *author-function*. In this chapter, Foucault's term "author-function" finds a conceptual home in Beckett's text and is thereby transformed into an instance of split *subjectivity*. In other words, Beckett's art in the mode of silence or silencing must be distinguished from art that is simply or necessarily the privileged space of its own query after (its own) difference or essence (if such an art ever existed). The latter model of art posits art as *the* solipsistic object par excellence, one that in turn asserts a solipsistic human subject. The methodology proposed by this dissertation is precisely such an attempt to not only differentiate between the closed art-object and what might be called an art of subjectivity, but also to respect the modalities of the latter as it is being analyzed, as its speech is heard or read.

In sum, this chapter presents a trajectory that takes as its point of departure 'silence' to arrive at the term 'witness,' a term that marks an important splitting off that emerges in the course of this chapter: subjectivity split from the subject.

Chapter IV: From Utopia to Dystopia

In this chapter, a reading of Beckett's *The Lost Ones* becomes an occasion to return to *The Unnamable*, which must be read first separately, then together in order to seize the fully dystopic image of the subject. What I call *speculative* author-function in chapter three re-emerges in this chapter as the scriptor-witness. The reexamination takes the following form: a return to Michel Foucault and an engagement with Roland Barthes.

The term “scriptor-witness” emerges via an analysis of Foucault’s author-function and Barthes’ scriptor. In what is essentially a gesture of profanation, or return to use of the subject, the reading performed in this chapter unfolds concomitantly with the understanding of the gesture of reading in the strong sense and produces a *subjectivized* reader. Only then are we justified to return to *The Lost Ones* to read the text from a fresh perspective through which the concept of witnessing acquires a conceptual sharpening, while Agamben’s concepts of biopower, bare life and the state of exception fall into relief as *figured* by Beckett and not represented. In this chapter, I again make use of the filmic terms employed in chapter one, in pursuing the sustained gesture of reading that repeats the gesture suggested by *Film*. Art, rather than being absent or silent, persists and bears witness to subjects living under biopower,

It is only through such a sustained reading that the full ethical dimension of the scriptor-witness or active reader becomes visible and makes much more intelligible the distinction between the (speculative) subject-*witness* and the troubling, persisting subject-*remnant* that emerges as an enigma in chapter three. On the other hand, as a result of the engagement with Barthes, one can envision a mode of readership suitable to rendering the image of subjectivity, *hors cadre* and all, speculative witness *and* subject-remnant.

Another way to put this is to say that this aspect of the passage effected in the chapter underwrites the shift from the traditional reading of Beckett as an ironist of utopia to a *writerly* reading-witnessing that emphasizes – and is better equipped to appreciate and draw conclusions from – the dystopic proportions of the subject-remnant. Through a shift in perspective that echoes the one in *Film*, the latter appears dystopic because

essentially stripped of subjective markers, and yet clearly their remnant, such that one must consider the remnant a *subject*.

This passage thus entails no less than a chiasmic shift and concludes the gesture of passing of the baton, or *témoin* (the French word for witness), from the writer to the reader initiated already in *Film*. The move is also from one kind of “witness” understood simply as speculative subject-witness trying to move to a mode of silence and anonymity through writing, essentially witnessing to itself, to “witness” understood as a mode of readership performed (through a neutral writing) where the reader-witness accounts for an exhausted, but inexhaustible, subject-remnant. It is thus that another recording becomes possible, a neutral, ethical reading or witnessing to subjects who are barely legible and bear none, or almost none, of the marks of speculative subjectivity tied to the author function.

Chapter five: Conclusion

A properly philosophical engagement with subjectivity can now take place. The concluding chapter looks at subjectivity in the terms yielded by the previous chapters to consider what it means to think of subjectivity vis-à-vis the subject, that is, in terms of the split, the witness, and dystopia. The newly-drawn contours of the split subject – understood as speculative-witness and as subject-remnant in all its dystopic proportions – puts us in the very outpost of thinking the subject, a space that opens up with all the more currency today, in the age of ‘politics without the subject.’ For the reader who emerges in the course of the analysis is none other than the instance of a *subjectivized* reader, a concept that only now acquires intelligible contours. It is precisely the *subjectivized*

reader who is the subject of politics who has gone missing, or who is proving increasingly ungovernable. We are thus at a good vantage point from which to see that subjectivity seen in this new context is neither an ‘ornamental subjectivity’ – a correlative of art as ornament – nor a useless concept. It is that beautiful point of “origin,” the only one, from which a real political gesture can arise – be it annoyance or disobedience – to maintain its others, its lost ones, as subjects.

Excursus Eye I: Un-framing the Reader

Film, as well as Rivette's film and the Beckett passages that open the chapters to come, present a certain challenge to the reader, requiring her to perform seemingly opposed, yet simultaneously not exclusive gestures. The reader must at once abnegate her critical "subjectivity" that would objectify the text to draw conclusions about it, *and* she must decide absolutely and unequivocally – that is to say, without proof or foundation – simply to approach the text, be it linguistic or visual. The reader must make a conscious decision regarding the approach he or she is to take to the text, but for whom the path does not thereby become a smooth, linear one. The reader must consciously put aside prejudices and "received ideas" – as Flaubert famously calls them – regarding the text, authorship and subjectivity, given that he or she is faced with texts whose problematic is those very things. She must resist applying those ideas to a text that can be said to devour both the ideas and the method of application that would master it. These texts speak a kind of foreign, "minor" language – to borrow in turn a concept from Deleuze and Guattari developed in their book on Kafka – in which the reader must immerse herself as in any foreign language. Instead of staying in the safe zone of a familiar critical island, the reader must instead plunge into the thick of the text's pronounced movement, abandoning herself to it without hope of seeing critical "land" again. He or she must in a sense abnegate individual subjectivity, to continue the metaphor of the safe subjective island, in order to perform – experience even – subjectivity in its full force and potential. That is to say, as far critical practice is concerned, she must "adhere" to or simply approach the "thick" of the text's virtual, marginal surface that allows no entry because it abolishes false divisions such as inside/outside, form/content, subject/object, etc. The reader does not interpret systematically; he or she gains

insight in a flash into what the narrator of the passage is saying, or what the protagonist is seen doing and who he is, after repeated approaches to an implacable constellation of words.

The reader's insight needs careful elaboration through a series of repeated approaches to the text that never end up in the critical promised land of a neat explanation or interpretation of the text unfolded in a linear fashion. Instead, the critic must diligently, and with the patience of Job, sustain the paradoxes that are at the heart of— that is to say, *on the anamorphic surface of*— the text. That is, this critical practice does not hold up the opposition between inside and outside, which posits a hidden secret meaning of the text, but instead sees only a surface on which a play of effects is discernible according to the perspective one adapts. It thus takes the plunge into the depth of perspective, which is pure effect rather than substance, and not into a deep pool with a murky bottom. Having shown a concrete example of such an approach in the preceding “frames,” this reader proposes to carry out her critical duty explicitly in just this fashion in the chapters to come: by unfolding a multi-step reading as a non-linear series of asymptotic approaches to the passage in a series of non-exclusive repetitions. It must be stated categorically and hence the heading for this section: the “ground zero” of this interpretation is a meta-frame that renounces streamlining, integration, and cleaning-up of the “approaches” into a well-ordered, traditional, synthesis, because such a method is ultimately counterproductive. Refusing to take such a dialectical approach – where the terms and the outcome of the game are known before the game even begins – the critical practice here is to integrate and mix the seemingly disparate sections of chapters and to repeat the points to be made at each moment of encounter with the text. Granted, this is asking much from fellow readers. The objections of the latter that the critic must first prove that such an approach works rather than state categorically that it does will, however, have been tempered by the preceding analysis of Beckett's *Film*.

What remains to be unfolded in the following chapters is the idea of passage from traditional interpretation (application of theory to subject under scrutiny) to a perspectivalism of the text. The end of each chapter returns to the moment of interpretation where one stands at the precipice of the abyss or breach that is the text. In chapter three, this return considers how the moment of reading reproduces the very moment under question “in” the text, that of Cartesian subjectivity arising as “finished” product. That finished product is an absolutist interpretation of a scene that gives itself to sustained reading if one chooses to do that, and to “conclusions” very different from those associated with the cliché of René Descartes. The latter is one of the intertexts that I address in chapter three. As I show, the chosen passage from Beckett’s *Unnamable* holds up an anamorphic mirror to Descartes, and the critic is in a position to refuse a certain practice in favor of a different one. The categorical decision mentioned in the first paragraph of this section is thus defensible on the grounds that in this decisive moment of abnegation, the critic refuses the finality of one or even several interpretations, and thus by extension this is his or her categorical refusal to fall into the waiting Cartesian trap. It is an absolute inexhaustibility in reading, absolute by its refusal to come to and stop at all-too-easy conclusions that “suggest themselves,” and not by any absolutism of conclusion drawn. In terms of the critical practice, the point that Beckett is making is so subtle as to be sustainable only by unceasing *reading*, and not interpretation. The latter attempts to “capture” something in the reading, flipping into a dangerous region of relativism that ought to be avoided. Interpretation marks an arbitrary choice that forecloses the reading and produces an objectified interpretation that has none of the vibrancy of the virtually animated text under scrutiny. Plunging to the depths of the text, interpretation of this sort misreads, getting lost in the distortions inherent to the “thickness” of the medium, and finding itself unable to take the measure of the text in question,

declares itself “just” an interpretation. Unceasing reading refuses to reify the text, and instead respects both the text as pure surface anamorphic mirror and screen and the reader-subject, a glimpse of whom is afforded by the act of reading itself. The outcome of the procedure is finding a truth “in the perspective” rather than “in the thing itself” that is the text, as Deleuze puts it in his book *The Fold*.

The task of the critic is thus to perform a reading that toes the line between the region of sustained reading and this other region to be avoided, and to do so one must be firm and resolute. One must not hope to “overcome” Cartesian pitfalls by proceeding with a systematic method of proof that avoids pitfalls by uncovering a deep, hidden core of the text inaccessible to the Cartesian paradox. To uncover such a thing is to be swallowed alive by that which one wanted to avoid. One must instead decide in a decision that deals a hammer blow to myths of textual “depth” in favor of the *superficiality* of the text, of its anamorphic screen/mirror-like property. To put it in slightly different terms, instead of a *série linéaire* of interpretations, one must produce a reading that has something of a *scierie*: steady, repetitive movement of passage and encounter, where “wood” and “saw” are two iterations of the same thing, where reader and the read are two terms of mutual encounter but not necessarily assignable to opposed positions. They are like two specialized *images*, to use a term in the Deleuzian sense, which, through their encounter, become subjectivized *appareil de lecture*.

Chapter two takes the perspectival approach without consciously reflecting on its own approach, while chapter three, as outlined above, is crucial for the development of this shadow, *other* problematic of the dissertation. Chapter four presents another exemplary reading Beckett’s *The Lost Ones*, a text that constitutes a unique point in the Beckett constellation. In a manner of speaking, this text consciously reflects efforts on the part of the critic to interpret it, to find

deeper meaning in the form of allegory, symbol, or commentary. As I show in chapter four, its sentences are pure surface, folded *skin* covering nothing at all and, in a mode of hyper-superficiality, put the reader in the position of the subjects under scrutiny in the cylinder experiment depicted in the text. Here, meaning is not forsaken, but becomes possible only through the perspectival approach, and only through something like an inscription directly on the subjectivity of the reader. In chapter five, in a return to the *eye-medium-I* terms, reading is announced to be the *other* other of this dissertation: reading understood as different from and yet the same as the split subject.

Chapter Two: From Kitsch to the Split Subject

1. *The Weak Origin of the Work of Art*

Jacques Rivette, a founding member of the French New Wave, began his career as a critic for the *Cahiers du cinéma*. It is no surprise, then, that when he eventually picked up the camera, Rivette turned the exercise of filmmaking into a critical inquiry concerning the nature and meaning of art. Perhaps in no other film by Rivette do we find as complete a meditation on the artist and his or her artistic labor as that in *La Belle Noiseuse* (1991). In this chapter I explore the question of what becomes of originality in art, and of the origin of the work of art, when the art work is constructed or conceptualized as split with a view to understanding a problematic that arises in Rivette's film: the split subject rendered specifically by the medium of film. Reading Rivette's *La Belle Noiseuse* on an equal footing with Giorgio Agamben, Gianni Vattimo and Alain Badiou, I endeavor to understand whether in Rivette's film the Heideggerian notion of the origin of the work of art is sustained, or whether it is transfigured or resurrected in a "weak" mode. The analysis becomes the occasion for a passage, via the problematic of *Kitsch*, from the problematic of the split art work to another, related problematic, that of the split *subject*. In the consideration whether art is transfigured or resurrected in a "weak" mode as a result of this splitting arises the figure of a weak, doubled or spit subject. Considering the spit subject at the end becomes the occasion to discuss the specificity of cinema, of the medium of film through which the split subject arises. And, in all its painterly beauty, Rivette's film is a consummate meditation on cinema proper vis-à-vis painting, highlighting the qualitative difference at play between the two. It is this question of the specificity of cinema, and of the *auteur* that Rivette raises. For Rivette, the stand-alone question regarding the painterly author and the origin of the work of art is programmatic for making a statement about its cinematic counterpart, the *auteur*.

In his perspective on the cinematic art at the end of the twentieth century, Rivette is attuned to the pervasive problem of Kitsch, to the fact that all art, whether painterly or cinematic, is now indistinguishable from, and threatened to be consigned to the status of, Kitsch.

The art that Agamben wants to disentangle from the aesthetic tradition is the art that Jacques Rivette showcases in his film, *La Belle Noiseuse*, based on a 1831 novella by Balzac (*Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu*). The film follows the progress of an established artist, Édouard Frenhofer (Michel Piccoli), inactive and disillusioned, but pushed into making a comeback by an art dealer and friend, Porbus (Gilles Arbona). With sensitivity and patience, Rivette shows the work of the artist and his muse, Marianne (Emmanuelle Béart), the girlfriend of a young painter, Nicolas (David Bursztein), whom Porbus has introduced to Frenhofer. The film unfolds the process of painting and the human drama of that process with great subtlety, and that unfolding constitutes an astute analysis of art and art theory. In the course of the film, we learn that Frenhofer and his wife, Liz (Jane Birkin), are having relationship problems, as are Marianne and Nicolas; that Frenhofer has abandoned a painting called *La Belle Noiseuse*, which was to be his masterpiece, and which he takes out of storage to rework; that Nicolas has promised, without her permission, the “service” of Marianne as model for the “new” masterpiece, a service that entails posing nude, and which she accepts out of spite for Nicolas and something like respect for Frenhofer; that Frenhofer defaces and then, using brick and mortar, literally walls in the “original” painting, producing another one that he then unveils to the world at the end of the film. We see Frenhofer and Marianne at work in the studio through long posing sessions, and a multitude of sketches. I will consider whether Frenhofer, by walling up the art work, affirms it as *for him only* and yet *not his* in a Heideggerian sense that privileges the Greek understanding of art as *poesis*. Such an art work does not sit well with a predatory art market (embodied by Porbus), nor is it destined for

the aesthetic judgment of the spectator, from whom it seems to withhold itself to the end. I will consider whether Rivette is affirming a status for art out of the reach of both the art industry and of aesthetic judgment. I will also analyze whether preserving the originality of art, understood (with Heidegger) as proximity to its origin and its work of revealing is still a tenable proposition in Frenhofer's (and Rivette's) day and age, which is not so far removed from our own.

While *La Belle Noiseuse* has garnered much praise for its sheer beauty and unconventional length (236 minutes), relatively little scholarship exists on the topic of this film. It would seem that critical interest ought to address the filmic thinking through of questions regarding art that is facilitated by Rivette's uncomplicated *mise en scène* and – apart from some shot-countershot filming – static camerawork remarkable for being unremarkable. The shot where the camera pans back slowly from a close-up to tightly encompass the characters in an academic, painterly frame (the film was shot in a 1.37: 1 ratio) signals that Rivette's film is an exploration of the origins of cinema, found in the other arts in a “weak” mode. The scholarly articles that have been written regard the film, perhaps understandably and certainly predictably, as a (Hegelian) quest for the absolute. Critics have likewise remarked upon its basis in, or intertext with, Balzac. Michel Estève sees the film as a more or less faithful transposition of Balzac's problematic of artistic creation. However, as if unwilling to let go of the primal origin of the film that Balzac's story represents for them, scholars do not remark on the curious fact that there are *two* paintings in the film, and not one as in Balzac's story.¹ Even if more nuanced in its reading of the film vis-à-vis Balzac, Dominique Chateau's article nevertheless regards the artist as master, and his *atelier* as a space of dialectically won mastery and artistic autonomy which

¹ Estève writes: “Donnant à son film le titre poétique et énigmatique du “Chef-d'œuvre inconnu”, *La Belle Noiseuse*, il transpose, d'un langage à l'autre, très exactement l'esprit de l'œuvre originale: une remarquable interrogation sur la création artistique et la recherche de l'absolu”. “*La Belle Noiseuse* ou la recherche de l'absolu”, *Études cinématographiques*, 63 (1998), 117-125 (p. 118).

breaks with the outside world, only to have the latter return because practical conditions (the social, conditions of work) reintroduce it.² Thomas Elsaesser, in an illuminating book chapter on *La Belle Noiseuse*, situates the film in the history of cinema and in “the contest between cinema and painting over ‘representation’.”³ Among many insightful statements, he makes the following claim regarding the problematic of the original and the question of authenticity:

What at first sight is curiously old-fashioned if not naïve about *La Belle Noiseuse* is its belief in authenticity and the original throughout most of the movie, until Frenhofer, coolly and methodically, fakes himself by hiding the “Belle Noiseuse” forever, while passing off a painting quickly daubed during one late night session as the fruit of ten years’ creative agony. Apart from the three women in the know (who do not speak out), nobody so much as suspects the fraud and the substitution.⁴

Elsaesser acknowledges that the film seems to espouse, but only superficially, an old-fashioned notion of authenticity and the original. However, he never returns to this problem in his study of the film, treating the second painting as a “fraud” and a “substitution”, and thus himself retaining a traditional notion of authenticity and the original that the film, on his own account, does *not* espouse. Elsaesser reads the film as if after all the two *Belles Noiseuses* represented only one unified facet of the film, thus remaining on one level of the film, whereas one can read it on another level that acknowledges the split nature of art. In sum, some film critics remain blind to the philosophical side of Rivette's film, seeing only an *auteur* making a film about a genius with a “painter's block,” thus reductively seeing in it a mere transposition of Balzac's story, whereas Rivette translates Balzac (story about a painter, problem of the relationship of artist and creation seen in the modern paradigm of authenticity of art and its genius maker) into the medium of film, thus addressing the *split* nature of the work of art and of its postmodern maker.

² Dominique Chateau, “La visite de l’atelier dans *La Belle Noiseuse*,” *Études cinématographiques*, 63 (1998), 127-140 (esp. pp. 128-129).

³ Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005): 173.

⁴ Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, 172-173.

My treatment of the film insists on regarding the artist outside the frame of mastery or traditional authorship and on giving equal weight to the *two* paintings in the film. Taking seriously the *double* nature of the work allows the film viewer to draw unexpected conclusions about the split artist subject. Talking about the Platonic ideals entertained by Frenhofer or his pursuit of mastery misses the real frame of his predicament. It misunderstands as failure his movement to another paradigm of artistic subjectivity after a long, arduous ordeal of artistic labor that changes him irrevocably. Rather than falling into resentment as a result of losing his ideals and finding that mastery cannot be had, Frenhofer readjusts his perspective on his situation. With Rivette's Frenhofer, my interpretation refuses the idealism that implicitly establishes the two worlds, visible and invisible, with which the painter supposedly struggles, adopting instead a Nietzschean perspective where the world is not set up in opposition to a transcendence, but rather is itself internally split. As I argue, Frenhofer makes the passage from the idealist perspective to a Nietzschean praxis: from the original painting, there is a shift to two paintings reflective of an art that is split in a split world, and where one is an "origin" of the other only in the sense that one speaks of a non-essential, retrospective "origin" of a given species in a Darwinian turn, or in a "weak" sense that picks up the impulse of Gianni Vattimo's "weak ontology" to talk about art.

2. Rivette and Agamben: Poiesis

In his book *The Man Without Content*, Giorgio Agamben focuses on the prolonged moment in the development of modern aesthetics that coincides with the moment of technological revolution because, as he sees it, it is then that art experiences a profound shock.⁵

⁵ Agamben is not in the habit of developing systematic explanations of the arguments of thinkers with whom he is engaging, and *The Man Without Content* (trans. Georgia Albert, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) is no exception. It is not my intention to retrace the steps of such an engagement by spelling out the positions of these figures and reminding the reader of

It is also at this moment that aesthetics, in Agamben's account, is invented to come to the rescue of art. Vis-à-vis the perturbation of art, aesthetics intervenes and tries to instate a secure status for art. Agamben considers a series of splits – between the artist and the spectator, and between genius and taste – that, in combination with the threat of technology – the *reproducibility* of art and the division of labor – culminate in the tradition of what he calls “modern aesthetics”, and which in his view is radically split from, incommensurate with, the practices of art.⁶ For Agamben this tradition awakens in art a nihilistic drive that can hardly be contained, while aesthetics comes to be perceived as that which is either holding art back or is incommensurate with art's project.

Agamben shows us, however, to what extent aesthetics *continues* to be commensurate with art because it has been so thoroughly internalised by art. The bad boy of art is an ever-obedient pupil. But although modern art practice is born together with its tradition of aesthetic theory, that does not prevent the latter from disavowing to a great extent the shock that art has experienced. To put it succinctly, the aesthetic tradition responds to the threat posed to art by unconsciously *disavowing* the shock of modernity, a shock that manifests itself in two forms addressed by Agamben, reproducibility and the division of labour. The “survival of a condition in which manual and intellectual labor are not yet divided,” and the “survival” of art's relationship of proximity to its origin – its *originality* – constitute the completely “artificial” interpretations of the situation of art made by aesthetic theory. The denial and the “artificiality” of the aesthetic interpretation of the underpinnings of art is exemplified by the rigid

what they say. Along with Adorno and Kant, who are mentioned by Agamben, stand other noteworthy figures: Benjamin, Kracauer, Marx, Nietzsche.

⁶ For Agamben, this modern aesthetics is not the same as Modernism, which it predates and whose antecedent it seems to be.

characterization of art as having to respond to classical ideals, but it is best exemplified by the supreme invention of this aesthetic theory: the doctrine of originality. Aesthetics thus defends a paradoxical thing at best, and one that turns art itself into a religion where the origin of art is at once sacred and unattainable, and yet the very thing to which art aspires. The place of God is taken by an “artificial” god, the author or artist. A unitary status for art, its continuity and thus, precisely, its *reproducibility*, becomes the very thing desired and yet made impossible by the doctrine of originality.

Rivette’s *La Belle Noiseuse* showcases an exemplary artist, Frenhofer, who is represented in a very personal struggle as just such a godlike artist suffering from lack of inspiration, or painter’s block, but the artificiality of this position becomes increasingly apparent to him and to the viewer. The viewer must read the film on another level, where the traditional notion of the artist is contested rather than fetishized, or rather, to understand that the fetishization of the genius artist is exactly what is being put into question by the film. The viewer must see that his problem is precisely that he is wedged between the old paradigm of the artist and something else that can only emerge if he picks up the brush and practices art despite a profound sense of alienation. For what is alienating him from his work is not so much himself, as the perspective handed down from above according to which he must be the genius artist, a whole subject. When Frenhofer gets back to work and ceases fetishizing the “original” *Belle Noiseuse*, he represents the waning of an idol, the artist, and the birth of a figure that has much in common with an *auteur* like Rivette. Like an *auteur*, Frenhofer neither owns nor controls his production, but rather signs and releases the result of a subjective labor made possible by the subjectivizing force that comes through a neutralizing of the strong subjectivity that held sway in his pre-existing situation in the world. In other words, Rivette’s film seems to point to an idea of art where art

and the world, seen as separate or subordinate one to the other, are inextricably folded within one another, and where subjectivization happens only as a result of a practice that breaks with the notion of “strong” subjectivity.

As Agamben argues, the impulse of originality taken to its extreme by artistic practice within the old paradigm of the genius-artist results in art adopting the attitude of nihilism, and thus becoming the privileged space of a nihilistic practice. When art seeks originality understood in the sense prescribed by doctrine, it takes a self-annulling turn and becomes passively nihilistic because originality stays true to doctrine, and art enters a state of self-deprecation. When art reinterprets originality and embraces as original that which rejects doctrine, thus proclaiming that the truly original can only be found in a departure from doctrine, it finds that even this originality was envisioned by doctrine, and that it is still playing the game of aesthetics. Thus, when aesthetics sets art up as something apart and has it follow a separate path or stream, what it actually does is create not a privileged space, but a kind of *backwater* for art as Agamben understands it. Eventually, nihilism comes to inhabit this backwater space of art, and it is only a matter of time before the space of art becomes the *privileged* space for nihilism.⁷

To invoke Frenhofer again, we see that he has stopped working and is inhabiting his own backwater of frailty, a relationship gone sour, and nihilistic inactivity. Only later does a paradoxically stronger Frenhofer emerge, one who in a “weak” gesture buries the originality of the original and starts anew.

The aesthetic tradition comes to interpret the situation of art artificially, Agamben tells us. This artificiality becomes apparent when we look at the fundamental presuppositions about art when it is faced with technology, but there is something else that doctrine forgets in the case

⁷ This is my rather schematic rendering of the gist of Agamben’s argument.

of art, and which remains prominently inscribed in doctrine, without being disavowed. The product of technology is the one that is in a relationship of distance from its origin. It also does not “possess itself in its own shape as in its own end, and thus the product remains in a condition of perpetual potentiality.”⁸ It is only the work of art, and not the product of technology, that has the character of being truly “at work,” of having that “energetic status” that, presumably, comes not only from its link to its origin. With the rise of aesthetics, we lose that energetic status. In being the object of “mere aesthetic enjoyment achieved through good taste,” the product, become object, loses its energetic quality. It has the potential to provide aesthetic enjoyment, but its being-at-work is stifled.

We might conclude, then, that the art product and the technological product are actually on the same path, not two different paths. To put it in other words, the real problem is that the division is not so much between different types of labor, as *within* labor as such, which is alienated from work as a whole.⁹ The work of art is work in name only. To stretch Agamben’s argument a little, saving art by reconstituting art the way aesthetics does ignores the fact that both the art product and the technological product *never cease* to be on the same side of the “divide”, the “divide” erected by the general alienation from work. Frenhofer is alienated not only from his being as an artist at work, but also in the sense that he does not control the means of production. It is only with the arrival of Porbus – that parasitic but necessary harbinger of the market forces with which Frenhofer must work or risk invisibility and insignificance – that Frenhofer works again. In the end, Porbus’s gift to Frenhofer is the space to work, and also, paradoxically, invisibility on another level.

⁸ Agamben, *Man*, 65.

⁹ Here, Agamben remains suggestive rather than explicit in his thought. It is not clear whether this is due to reproducibility, or whether he is engaging the thought of Marx on labor on some more fundamental level that bears a clear articulation.

Furthermore, Agamben argues that we would see with more clarity the situation of modern art and aesthetics – this double split: art from aesthetics and art internally split – if we acknowledged that the *entire frame* of art has changed. This is perhaps Agamben’s most important point: Greek *poiesis* has been replaced by modern *praxis* without there being an acknowledgement made of this important shift. What is worse, according to Agamben, there is a disavowal instead of a needed coming to terms. In Agamben’s account, the distinction that is obscured is that between *poiesis*, production as unveiling into presence, and *praxis*, another type of man’s doing understood as willed action. Aesthetics – and modernity in general – understand (all of) man’s doing as *praxis*. The flattened modern notion of *praxis* does not even conceive of the other kind of doing, production that unveils.¹⁰

In fact, production becomes almost synonymous with *praxis*. For aesthetics, and for us, the viewers conditioned by modern aesthetics, the work of art is indeed, for the most part, that which comes into presence in the artistic act (of a genius subject) in the manner of the *actus* of an *agere*. But art is not an *actus*. *Poiesis* is not, furthermore, the *poietic act*. Nor should we think that art is the vehicle for *poiesis*. *Poiesis* brings into presence something other than itself, and art, not being its result, is like the vehicle for that which comes to presence. The work of art has something like another dimension, a relief that does not easily appear today. What seems to be lost (for us) is the work of unveiling, not tied to the willed creation of something that contains its origin and end, but to the coming into presence of something that has its origin and end outside itself. It is this lost register of understanding work that makes it difficult to think art as that which works to bring to presence. Furthermore, the essence of *poiesis* is not will, but bringing into

¹⁰ Here, one finds that Agamben’s thought resonates with the thought of other major figures like Marx, Bourdieu, and Jameson. He himself writes only allusively in their regard. It is not within the purview of this chapter to develop these resonances, fruitful as that might be.

presence something other than itself: truth. According to Agamben, the unveiling of truth *precedes* willed action, and the work that is specifically that of art is bringing that truth into presence. To put it in Nietzschean terms, the will to power as art is active rather than reactive willing, active but also *de-subjectivised*. The will to power is thus not the *actus* either; nor is it a will exercised by the traditional subject. The artist's willing action – his praxis – is separate from and secondary to the dimension of *poiesis* – the outside origin that *qualifies* the artist as an artist, and “his” production as art.

We ought to remark at this point that Agamben's surprising conclusions mark a clear departure from Heidegger, whose notion of the origin of the work of art does not posit, even in the margins of his argument, the predicament of the artist practitioner. Agamben's is not simply a phenomenological argument on the originality of art¹¹ of the sort critiqued by Adorno, who says: “[P]henomenology wants to say what art is. The essence it discerns is, for phenomenology, art's origin and at the same time the criterion of art's truth and falsehood. But what phenomenology has conjured up in art as with a wave of the magic wand, remains extremely superficial and relatively fruitless when confronted with actual artworks.”¹² Agamben is not isolating an essence to answer once and for all what art is, but rather looking for what it *does* and clearing the way for an aesthetics that will be up to the task of taking the measure of art so that its work of unveiling may again emerge from obscurity. Though he does not say it in so many words, Agamben envisions nothing less than a new aesthetic theory, something like an “aesthetics without content,” to borrow the title of his book. Agamben, in his novel approach and departure from Heidegger, is not incompatible, as we will see later, with Vattimo and Badiou. Significantly, this conclusion about Agamben can be reached through a sustained reading of him

¹¹ Arguably, neither is Heidegger's, but ironing out that point is not the task of this chapter.

¹² Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 351.

alongside a sustained viewing of Rivette's film. Indeed, for Agamben, the problem of art opens directly onto the problem of work and what it means to produce in the modern age, as it does for Rivette, whose film shows us, precisely, the artist at work, and the scandal of art: the shock delivered by modernity is the alienation of *labor in art*, and the scandal is the denial or *disavowal* of the latter. The scandal is that we are told that the unity of art is possible – that there is no alienation in art or of labor in art – whereas art is split, as is the artist.

3. Rivette: *The Beautiful Annoyance, a Scandal*

Agamben shows us the *scandal* of the work of art, of its originality, its truth, its relation to its framework of aesthetics. However, what Agamben considers explicitly but abstractly, Rivette seems to literalize on screen: an original unity broken in modern art, the artist alienated from his work, understood in Agambenian terms, not in the terms of aesthetics. The split in art, the disinterested viewer's art versus the artist's pulsating, "living" art, is literalized on screen with two paintings, neither of which fits easily on the side of aesthetic judgment, of gallery space appreciation, marketability, or on the side of artistic subjectivity without content, pure creative principle, the unseen art for the artist alone. In an admirable refusal to play into a clear binary opposition, one that would amount to a dialectical pitting of art against itself, Rivette instead shows us a split art, which, if Rivette's art has "taken sides" at all, resides on the side of (the third term of) *unavowable scandal*. There is not one exemplary scene establishing this; rather, the entire film is susceptible of a different interpretation from those it has received from film scholars if we take up its suggestion that it is not a matter of the authentic art work versus the art commodity. There is a great deal of "slippage" from one to the other, just as the two paintings in the film are not in a clear opposition either. Thus, without making this split a traditional binary split of opposing terms, Rivette's *La Belle Noiseuse* plays out the avowal of the disavowed

scandal of modern art as Agamben lays it out in *The Man Without Content*. The question that arises is whether avowing the scandal does not in some sense free art to do its work, restoring it to an originary status that has neither God nor Master (*ni dieu, ni maître*) as its divine origin, but rather, demythologised and still constitutively split, it is rendered to working its event.

I will now endeavor to consider this question, turning briefly to the work of Gianni Vattimo and Alain Badiou, whose notions, respectively, of a radicalized Heideggerian nihilism and of weak ontology, and of the secularized Paulinian revolutionary model, might offer insight into this problematic of art.

4. Rivette: *The Beautiful Annoyance, a Revolution*

Let me begin with a brief allusion to Gianni Vattimo's pronouncement that nihilism ought to be our mode of politics and thought in general.¹³ On an optimistic note, Vattimo proclaims that our age is privileged in that, precisely, we have reached the point where there is no other way but to create and construct consensual projects and practices to see that what ought to be done is done. He envisions a radicalized nihilism whose destructive force is turned against all resurgent forms of metaphysics, without nihilism itself becoming yet another form of it.

Let us, however, stretch Vattimo's project beyond the frame he gives it – that of an ethical praxis in politics. Let us suppose that, just as he envisions a concept of “weak ontology”, which openly acknowledges the weakening of origins of ontological and political concepts alike and then embraces their discursively determined nature, we can envision a “weak” origin of art, one which we take to be in line with the attitude of nihilism as Vattimo understands it. In that sense, art with a “weak” origin would be understood as not only having its origin as its

¹³ See here esp. Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988; and more recently the collected essays in Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala, ed., *Nihilism & Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, & Law*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

problematic, but perhaps as *needing to break from its origin*. This is not exactly new in the history of art (Agamben has shown that it is all about the origin!), but our understanding of art's problematic as being that of the origin has never been radicalized enough to envision a real break, not just a break that hypocritically re-establishes the origin, fetishizes it in the mode of disavowal that Agamben so clearly lays out. The backwater of nihilism that Agamben sees resulting from the (false) distinction made between art and other human productions is a backwater precisely because the nihilism we find there is only half-hearted. It is a frustrated nihilism turned against itself, a scandalous one, but one perhaps not scandalous enough! The religion of art persists, as art's origin is not squarely planted in the realm of the human, but rather acquires an "aura". In other words, it is not so much art that continues to emanate a divine presence as it is we who continue to attribute that quasi-divinity to art. It is art's human origin that does not fully accept its openness and vulnerability not to God, about whom we could at least tell stories and whose origin emanated the divine, but to an even greater unknown than God, unpromising and yet *not* not promising openness.

The film *La Belle Noiseuse* is an exemplary instance of taking on this openness. Frenhofer is an exemplar of human becoming embroiled in this predicament. Taking human openness on through art and making it art's *radicalized, nihilistic origin*, in the mode of radical interpretive nihilism (invoked by Vattimo). Frenhofer is working in what used to be a cloister compound, a significant detail given that his practice of art goes to the limit and discards the religion of art by, quite literally, burying it. We see him returning to what is his "sacred origin", an earlier painting, against which he unleashes a half-hearted nihilistic energy in the attempt to erase it. However, the "sacred origin" is itself just another painting, another work, so that the problem of the sacred, ultimate origin, being at first eternally deferred, is in the end buried alive,

the better to unleash the “weak origin”. Ironically, the scandal of art portrayed in the film is always on a human scale, so that what gets buried is also the pain of unhappy, unfulfilled relationships, and this serves to further underline the film’s demythologizing of art and its subversion of *idées reçues* concerning art.

Art is an eminently human endeavor, and it is worth noting that the human element is not posited in the mode of mastery. We ought thus to take Frenhofer quite seriously when he pronounces at the unveiling of *La Belle Noiseuse*: “My first posthumous painting.” As if taking up the cry, “*ni dieu, ni maître*,” Rivette’s Frenhofer proclaims not only the death of God, but that of the author who stands in for the mythical, divine origin, fetishized by a fawning but ruthless Porbus, the representative of the art market. The originality that is being reclaimed in Rivette’s film is not Heideggerian in the sense that Heideggerian origin is commonly taken to mean – laden with nostalgia, going back to something that purportedly existed in the imagined Greece of our cultural origins. Rather, the originality for art that the film tries to elucidate is Heideggerian in the sense of the emancipatory embracing of nihilism posited by Vattimo, where received metaphysical underpinnings are cleared away, and where the received underpinnings of “the human” are not spared either in their encounter with radical nihilistic refashioning. So that the artist is always *posthumous* because he has exceeded himself, become something else, become extinct and emerged as another “species.”

Let us go even further and say that we should not fail to register in Frenhofer’s pronouncement something at once more literal and more revolutionary than a simply symbolic death of the author: Frenhofer’s art is posthumous, because Frenhofer has died and been reborn, *resurrected* in the Paulinian sense. He is fighting the establishment with the same revolutionary

fervor invoked by (Alain Badiou's) Paul.¹⁴ It is not accidental, then, that the muse/model is called Marianne, this new Marianne who, instead of actively tormenting and tantalising the artist, works with him and leads this other revolution. For Frenhofer, it is a question of remaining faithful to the event of art, much in the sense that Badiou posits a fidelity to the event of an emancipatory politics. Frenhofer does so by burying the art work to declare the death of its metaphysical origin. And if we are to do justice to the double meaning of his gesture, let us acknowledge that he not so much puts it out of the reach of a rapacious and reifying art market, as he buries it the better to put it forth in the world. Knowing that the process of creation cannot be "contained" in the art work, Frenhofer exhibits a perfect equanimity, a perfect "self-possession" and a possession of *his* art in the face of the disappointment that Nicolas evinces at the unveiling. It is not that Frenhofer exhibits such poise because he thinks he possesses the true origin; on the contrary, unlike Nicolas, Frenhofer is disabused of the myth of art, and he knows that its process, although impossible to represent, is at the same time constitutive of its *event*, which no wall could ever hold back. An end and a beginning once and for all – but once and for all only in so far as it is repeated faithfully, reaffirmed not only as double, but as multiple – the event of art is the gesture of breaking away from the origin, and its process, to quote Badiou, "the material course traced within the situation by the evental supplementation,"¹⁵ is the very *definition of truth* according to Badiou: "I shall call 'truth' (*a* truth) the real process of a fidelity to an event: that which this fidelity *produces* in the situation."¹⁶ For Badiou, as for Agamben, art has a productive dimension, and what is *produced* in the event of art through the fidelity of the new "subject" is a non-metaphysical truth. Furthermore, we can now better understand in what

¹⁴ For Paul, our weakness is our strength, and the fact that Frenhofer is not a young man, but mature like Paul, is both fitting and significant.

¹⁵ Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 42.

¹⁶ Badiou, *Ethics*, 42.

sense Frenhofer is posthumous: in the situation where an event of art takes place, the artistic subjectivity understood in the traditional sense becomes irrelevant and is reborn, arising together with the artwork. As Badiou puts it, “the subject of an artistic process is not the artist (the ‘genius’, etc.). In fact, the subject-points of art are works of art. And the artist enters into the composition of these subjects (the works are ‘his’), without our being able in any sense to reduce them to ‘him’ (and besides, which ‘him’ would this be?).”¹⁷ Nor are we able to reduce these subjects of art – also resurrected through their burial! – to their “models”. Art breaks with its situation, with pre-existing subjects, with its origin. As Badiou puts it, “Each faithful truth-process is an entirely invented immanent break with the situation.”¹⁸ Breaking with its origin, art nevertheless centers itself on its “true”, “weak” origin, that of truth production.

We might well ask about the political import of Frenhofer’s art (“Frenhofer’s” understood in the mode of non-mastery). What about politics in what seems to be an eminently *apolitical* film, where personal relationships stretch the sphere of the personal seemingly only to intersect with the (public) art market personified by Porbus? Let us briefly sketch an answer to this question by looking at a crucial issue, representation, and “the personal,” specifically the two women, Liz and Marianne. At the time when Liz, Frenhofer’s wife, is his model, Frenhofer is not able to “go all the way” with his art, not because Liz fails as a model, but because Frenhofer fails as an artist, and because there are relationship problems in the couple Liz/Frenhofer. The second attempt at *La Belle Noiseuse* is fruitful, but not because Marianne, strictly speaking, is a better model, but because this time Frenhofer does go all the way with Marianne’s urging and persistence. He forgoes trying to represent Liz as essentially a perfidious creature (Liz, who has betrayed him with Porbus, appears with crab claws), producing instead something like a painting

¹⁷ Badiou, *Ethics*, 44.

¹⁸ Badiou, *Ethics*, 44.

that proclaims a “weak” ontology, a radical nihilism, and which no one really knows how to appreciate. Furthermore, the two models, retroactively from Frenhofer’s encounter with Marianne, become substitutable. Nothing about the painting really ties it to either of them. There is in the end nothing mythical (on the scale of metaphysics, that is), nothing essentially special about the person Marianne, who herself has personal problems (the *ménage à trois* with Nicolas and his “sister”).

The substitutability of the two, however, should not be understood in the mode of “one is worth another” in an undifferentiated similarity such as is operative in the framework of capitalist exchange that has replaced relations between human beings, where one woman is worth another in an objectifying relation of convenient use. The substitutability that animates the aforementioned *ménage à trois*, and the end of which Marianne declares with a resolute, resounding, properly-nihilistic “No” that closes the film, is not the same as the substitutability of Liz and Marianne. This other substitutability points to something akin to Agamben’s unrepresentable “coming community,” in step with the radical nihilism inaugurated by Marianne and Frenhofer. “Against the hypocritical fiction of the unsubstitutability of the individual, which in our culture serves only to guarantee its universal representability” – and, we might add, thus aiding its capture by biopower –, Agamben instead champions “an unconditioned substitutability, without either representation or possible description – an absolutely unrepresentable community.”¹⁹ Could it be that our “new” Marianne leads a revolution that, perhaps, can yield a politics of resistance to the universal representability that serves biopower? Here, I would insert a provisional “yes,” provided that our notion of revolution also passes to a “weak” register.

¹⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993: 24-25.

What is the revolutionary potential of Marianne and of Frenhofer's Paulinian attitude of faith to the event of art? How is it that artist and model suddenly appear as counterparts, as equals in the subjectivization that has taken place? And, does the fact that art, politics and love come to share a close conceptual space mean that their projects intersect? Is their resemblance at once deeper and more superficial than the structural one of being tied to an event? Frenhofer embraces what is at heart an affirmative nihilistic calling, and he enters a new subjecthood that exceeds him.²⁰ It is at once greater and lesser than he, but what exactly makes this artist's calling eminently political rather than sublime, also understood in a "weak" register? We should not rule out that Marianne marks a threshold for the reader, a passage from a certain dream of revolution and a notion of the political that lingers on just as the doctrine of the originality of art does.

5. Rivette: *The Beautiful Annoyance, or the Split Subject Filmed*

The analysis so far might be summarized in the following way: Along with the art work being split, figured by the related yet separated *two* paintings of the *belle noiseuse*, there is the passage to another paradigm of the artist, and there might be revolutionary potential hidden in all this for the subject, as the last section suggests. What is significant is the fact that in the passage to another paradigm of the artist, the double nature of the work is not resolved into one painting taking the upper hand, just as the artist subject is not resolved into a happy, closed, unproblematic being, but remains and appears constitutively split.

It remains to be shown how film as a medium is implicated in making appear in a different, non-representational way a naked, split subject. The latter is at once unredeemably split and irrevocably of the medium in which it appears as if on the surface of an anamorphic mirror. It is in the following section that I jump a level to shift to a discussion of the nature of cinema

²⁰ See Badiou, *Ethics*, 43.

and the *auteur* in a specifically filmic frame, as previously announced, thereby drawing conclusions from the filmic medium for subjectivity. So far, subjectivity has been discussed on the level of theme in the film. With Deleuze, one passes to the very form, or rather *medium*, of the film to extract the 'pure concept' of subjectivity. If cinema for Deleuze is the medium that captures movement and gives us its true image, not a false reproduction, then with Deleuze we are in a position to ask: What kind of movement is captured, reproduced, in an image, by the film? What kind of new reality does the time-image help to perfect, or at least announce in its duration?

6. Rivettes's *Auteur* (action-image) and Subjectivity (time-image)

Gilles Deleuze's two-tome book, *Cinema One* and *Cinema Two*, is not so much a book of film-criticism as it is a work of philosophy of cinema, dealing with how cinema creates concepts on its own terms and not in those of philosophy *per se*. The concepts suggested by cinema have a basis in traditional philosophical concepts, but they function in a new way *in film*. To say that this is not traditional film theory is surely an understatement. Traditional film theory shares with traditional philosophy the enterprise of creating concepts *of* something. For Deleuze, however, concepts "are no longer 'concepts of,' understood by reference to their external object. [...] Concepts are the images of thought."²¹ The concepts or thought-images are images of thought that emerge as a result of thought's encounter with cinema, presumably on the part of the *auteur* and the viewer. To say that they are immanent to cinematic works is not exactly right, because that eliminates the thinking viewing subject whose concepts they are, and without whom they do not exist. In a sense, however, they are immanent to cinema, as they are not Platonic concepts 'somewhere out there' but are wedded to film and unabstractable from it the way ideas are an

²¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: Movement-Image*, xi.

abstraction residing in another sphere or world. Furthermore, what the creation of concepts takes from philosophy is its work of cutting, separating and grouping together things that at first glance seem to belong together, or apart. The modes of cutting of the cinema, of visual and sound images, converges for Deleuze with this kind of philosophical cutting.²² Indeed, this cutting is what makes cinema a new mode of philosophy. Deleuze is thus suggesting here not only the merging of cinematic modes of cutting with philosophical modes. Deleuze would then demonstrate that the modes of cutting of cinema can converge with the philosophical mode of cutting to produce striking results. His interest is the merging of cinematic modes on basis of philosophical themes to produce image concepts. For Deleuze, film announces a new way of thinking in images that improves upon traditional concept-making of philosophy, which has never left behind its Platonic calling.

In this section, following Deleuze, I consider what kind of concept or thought-image of the *auteur* of cinema Rivette produces in *La belle noiseuse*, and also how the film puts forth a time-image of subjectivity whose two supports are the two *belles noiseuses*. Rivette's film thematizes the painter-author and reminds us how outdated the notions of cinema and of the arts held by the layman museum- and cinemagoer continue to be. We watch the painter at work as if he were painting poses in the ancient sense invoked by Deleuze, while in fact the film becomes an invitation to rethink, with Deleuze, not only what it means to reproduce movement on screen, but the very position of cinema at the end of the twentieth century. It is easy to see the film as nothing more than a *recherche du chef d'oeuvre*, a quest for the absolute and the ideal, as critics have done, as if time had stood still since the age of Balzac and the cinema, here signed by Rivette, had not 'translated' and transformed Balzac's story into its own medium. But to ignore

²² Deleuze, *Movement Image*, xii.

this mutation is to refuse to acknowledge the evolution (understood not in the pseudo-Darwinian, but in the Nietzschean sense) in the arts that the cinema represents, namely, that the illusion of movement that it gives us is fundamentally different from the illusions of traditional painting and sculpture. What is more, cinema, by its particular medium, announces the novelty of the other arts concerned, painting and sculpture, and also that of literature.

To better grasp these insights, let us return to Rivette's film. Rivette unfurls a cogent filmic analysis in images of the artistic agency and shows a shift to a different paradigm of the artist, where the latter is in keeping with Greek poesis, thus placing artistic "agency" outside agency understood in the traditional sense, and thus outside subjective action understood in the traditional sense. It is the poietic origin that helps us to see the act of authorship as quite different from a simple act of an agent-subject in a (traditional) mode of mastery. In other words, to refer to Agamben again, the cinematic art also suffers like the other arts, as evidenced by the predicament of the *auteur*, the equivalent or counterpart of the predicament of the genius painter (and genius author). As Rivette makes clear, however, the *auteur* also differs from the literary or painter genius in that he is not in a position of mastery, his exercise of aesthetic force being an effect of the relation in which he finds himself vis-à-vis the film. Rivette in making a critique of the state of cinema and showing to what extent it inherits from the older arts, and to what extent it is able and not able at the same time to take that inheritance and make it its own, at the same time produces an action-image of the *auteur*. In a sense, Frenhofer becomes the painterly equivalent of the filmic *auteur*. The *auteur* as defined by film theorists of Rivette's generation resides in a space *hors cadre* of the work, which designates simultaneously the space occupied by the camera, crew, apparatus, etc., and the space radically other to the space of representation. The *auteur* is not to be confused with the living person of the filmmaker, but is rather the implied

filmmaker, the analog of the implied author in literature. This is the case in principle. In practice, however, the *auteur* is as fetishized as the painter Frenhofer. The term *auteur* is associated with aesthetic control over a production, which is easily misunderstood to mean that he is in the position of the genius author. For Rivette, Frenhofer becomes a stand-in for the *auteur*. The latter term refers to a force that exercises a kind of aesthetic control and resides in a *separate* space from that of representation, which in film is the on-screen and the *hors champ*, but at the same time, must be kept separate from the world of the person designated by the name.

What, in relation to this, are the *two* paintings, the *double annoyance* on which I have insisted in this analysis? To pursue these related lines of thought, let us return to Deleuze. Deleuze's claim that image is movement on the plane of immanence, which is not a closed set but instead an open set containing closed sets, is directly linked to the thought of Henri Bergson. Bergson's wish to do philosophy commensurate with scientific theory – a philosophy that takes seriously what science, as voice of the new and anti-dogmatic, has to say about the world and the appearance of life and of human subjectivity– is not so much Deleuze's concern, but Deleuze is concerned with a preservation of 'what is' from the aggressive forces of capitalism in the form of reification and hyper-representation. What Deleuze takes from Bergson is the view that the universe is acentered and everything reacts on everything else with an immediacy, and the impulse for a post-modern pre-Socratic philosophy that does not hesitate to speak, again, of particles of flux, or images. Where Deleuze develops on Bergson is in his espousal of cinema, which Bergson had repudiated. For Deleuze, the universe *is* cinema, in a sense! Cinema provides the best model for the universe, which is all images, some of which are perceived. What *is*, is movement images. Matter is light in the way that image is movement. Images are “images” even though they are not perceived yet. A closed system able to perceive is a kind of black screen that

the photographic plate lacked and which helps develop the image as perceived. The brain as perceiving image is a “centre of indetermination,”²³ an interval or gap between the receptive facet and the reactive facet.²⁴ Within this scheme, the subject becomes a kind of gap or interval that is subtractive: “Which is a way of defining the first material moment of subjectivity: it is subtractive. It subtracts from the thing whatever does not interest it. But, conversely, the thing itself must then be presented in itself as a complete, immediate, diffuse perception. The thing is image and, in this respect, is perceived itself and perceives all other things inasmuch as it is subject to their action and reacts to them on all its facets and in all its parts.”²⁵ The subject too is an image, but a special kind that acts as an interval to movement, a break, that also registers other movements, perceives them.

In considering Rivette’s film in this section, the question arises whether the painting or paintings are only a luminous imprint or cast of Marianne²⁶ or whether we are dealing rather with an imprint of a duration, that is, a time-image, not just movement-image, which is a mobile section of the whole or *duration*. There, the film itself seems to be preeminently that, a time-image, but considering the two paintings together, there is a non-identity of one with the other that, taken together with their shared name, puts in place between them a duration that remains invisible in either one by itself. This duration is what Rivette insists upon as being in the domain of the filmic art to capture, or render, in a pure image. But what does it mean to capture, or rather, to what end does one render a section of the whole? Is the role of cinema to preserve what is, in a move against the reification and hyper-representation that wears away at what *is*, and especially what is *in between*: the subject?

²³ Deleuze, *Movement Image*, 62.

²⁴ This is very much in keeping with Beckett. In perception there is never anything more than in the thing, only less.

²⁵ Deleuze, *Movement-Image*, 63.

²⁶ see here Deleuze's quote from Bazin, *Movement-Image*, 24.

Watching the film carefully, we see that the first *belle noiseuse* is a figurative work where a feminine figure with threatening crab-like claws executed in an expressionistic style dominates the visual field. The second *belle noiseuse* is also a figurative work, but the feminine figure this time seems closed and neutral, her back turned to the viewer as if refusing to be threatening or engaging him in any way. Significantly, the viewer comes away with the sense that neither is *the belle noiseuse*. The “first” *belle noiseuse* might strike the viewer as too expressionistic, or even kitschy. Both estimations, however, are pure projection by the viewer of values that cannot be said to reside with the art work. Frenhofer never makes clear why he walls up the first painting, but presumably it is because it is tied to an unhappy episode of his life with Liz. To put it another way, he lays it aside not so much because of its unsublimated naturalism, but because the painting is the product of an artistic practice that he has put to rest. The second painting, however, is not a redemptive painting, that is, not the marker of a happy overcoming of the old practice by the new in a simultaneous redemption of the genius creator. The second *Belle noiseuse* comes off as trivial. The triviality, however, is also purely a matter of perspective. It is the fetishizing viewer, partly figured in the film by Nicolas, who wants something more, something redemptive. The most accurate way to phrase the situation of the two *belles noiseuses* is that they lie somewhere between *Kitsch* or banality and another problematic altogether, that of the subject. If art itself is split as Rivette suggests by giving us two paintings and not just one palimpsest, so is the subject that “appears” in it. Despite any accusations of kitschiness or banality one could make, the 'naked subject' unveiled at the end is at once vulnerable and utterly closed, its back turned to the art world and the viewer, as if proclaiming by its reticence that the subject is in this sense utterly foreign to art, and yet utterly wedded to it: a foreign element residing in art and figured by it.

The insight arrived at in the previous paragraph is purely on the level of *theme* in the film. In the second *belle noiseuse* painting, the subject is “represented.” The second *belle noiseuse*, however, does not stand alone and opens up a space of non-representation that is on the one hand tied to the medium of film, and on the other hand arises with the split subject. To reiterate, the *belle noiseuse* is double in nature because the second *belle noiseuse* is and is not the same as the first. If we understand the first as origin in the strong sense of the second, it is not “the same” because there is a parasitic second, and yet it *is* “the same” because there is a secret link between the “original” and the parasitic other. However, the first *belle noiseuse*, the hidden counterpart, the monstrous *double*, haunts as a repressed origin only if we insist on the concept of strong origin. All this is still pretty firmly planted on the plane of representation. Rivette’s Deleuzian touch must be seen in the way he handles the auteur, whose action image I evoked earlier.

If we understand the first *noiseuse* being represented as walled up by its maker *by Rivette the auteur* in a filmic gesture, then the *belle noiseuse* appears in new relief: the auteurial gesture reminds us of the process of art, and of the disavowed scandal of the fetishization of authenticity and genius in a provocative exacerbation that extirpates, puts an end to, the fetishization. The double *noiseuse* is, indeed, *the same and not the same* in a different paradigm that Rivette’s filmic medium makes come to light only as a result of a long duration, a process. At the end of the film, the walled up painting in no way constitutes an origin, except to the unredeemed fetishist of authenticity and genius. It remains in a kind of space *hors cadre* to the unveiling party and represented situation, and signals a scandalous tendency to reify art, even drawing the viewer along in this tendency. It is not, however, completely inert. The double painting retains an invisible, repressed disavowed link coursing between its two poles. To the attentive viewer, who

at first might be disappointed with the second painting because it captures nothing of the fascinating, arduous, beautiful process of its becoming, it stands as a reminder of everything that is missing, that it cannot capture. To the viewer conscious of the medium of film, and viewed in the paradigm of the weak origin, *the belle noiseuse* lies somewhere *between* the two paintings.

Rivette literalizes on screen the split in art. The disinterested viewer's art vs. the artist's pulsating, "living" art, are literalized on screen with two paintings, neither of which fits easily on the side of aesthetic judgment, of gallery space appreciation, marketability, or on the side of artistic subjectivity without content, pure creative principle, the unseen art for the artist alone. In an admirable refusal to play into a clear binary opposition, one that would amount to a dialectical pitting of art against itself, Rivette instead shows us a split art, which, if Rivette's art has 'taken sides' at all, resides on the side of (the third term of) *unavowable scandal*. There is not one exemplary scene establishing this; rather, the entire film is susceptible of a different interpretation than it has received from film scholars if we take up its suggestion that it is not a matter of the real art work vs. the art commodity. The two paintings in the film are not in a clear opposition. Rivette's use of the binary split is such that the terms constitute not a true opposition, but rather two terms, one of which turns out to be the dominant (the unveiled *noiseuse*), the other subordinate (the hidden *noiseuse*), and both are caught up in a larger frame of reference. There is a great deal of 'slippage' from one to the other, from dominant to subordinate, as either *noiseuse* could be seen as occupying either position. The two *noiseuses*, the unveiled *noiseuse* and the *hidden* noiseuse, each simultaneously inert and pulsating, are thus the two *substitutable* supports upon which Rivette's film unfolds. They are united as paradoxical doubles in a chiasmic shift by the *auteurial* gesture that is Rivette's film. Their paradoxical relation – and there is one – is the filmic auteur's gesture. Rivette produces a Deleuzian action-image of Frenhofer the auteur: the

latter resides in an *hors cadre*, the formerly sacred space of the chapel that is his studio, where no one has the right to enter, and where he walls in the first “masterpiece.” This, on the representational level, drives home the point that the auteur is a radically neutral force that, like the camera, registers what will later be projected. It is not to be confused with the person, just as Frenhofer must not be confused with Rivette. He is a figure of auteurial mastery split between the neutrality of his poetic bringing to light, and the mastery of the genius that he rejects. Frenhofer is thus the perfect image in the Deleuzian sense of the filmic auteur, who, radically cut off from his work – and it is in this sense that we can now understand the walled up *belle noiseuse* – must nevertheless persevere in his creative gesture, sometimes at great odds, to exercise “his” force in a mode different from mastery. And in the *hors cadre* of Rivette’s film, which is not the same as the representational *hors cadre* of the “auteur” Frenhofer, and which is by definition *HORS cadre* and unrepresentable, there resides, along with her double, the *auteur*, the implied viewer who is interpellated to read the film and see on its surface a mirror image of herself that is not herself, a double image that is at once monstrous and beckoning and turning away into silence. In other words, if we understand that the space *hors cadre* in the film does not represent but mirrors our *own* implied space *hors cadre*, then we must recognize ourselves in the two images, in the split subject in the double annoyance.

Rivette’s film thus gives us a different thought-image of the auteur and of the enterprise of cinema – its specificity, to put in the old terms of categorization of the arts. Moreover, it gives us a different concept or image of subjectivity, which emerges, *en filigrane*, as a gap *in between* the twin poles of the *belle noiseuse*.

Chapter Three - From Silence to the Witness: The Authorial Subject

No, I must not try to think, simply utter. Method or no method I shall have to banish them in the end, the beings, things, shapes, sounds and lights with which my haste to speak has encumbered this place. In the frenzy of utterance the concern with truth. Hence the interest of a possible deliverance by means of encounter. But not so fast. First dirty, then make clean. Perhaps it is time I paid a little attention to myself, for a change. I shall be reduced to it sooner or later. At first sight it seems impossible. Me, utter me, in the same foul breath as my creatures? Say of me that I see this, feel that, fear, hope, know and do not know? Yes, I will say it, and of me alone. Impassive, still and mute, Malone revolves, a stranger forever to my infirmities, one who is not as I can never not be. I am motionless in vain, he is the god. And the other? I have assigned him eyes that implore me, offerings for me, need of succour. He does not look at me, does not know of me, wants for nothing. I alone am man and all the rest divine. How, in such conditions, can I write, to consider only the manual aspect of that bitter folly? I don't know. I could know. But I shall not know. Not this time. It is I who write, who cannot raise my hand from my knee. It is I who think, just enough to write, whose head is far. I am Matthew and I am the angel, I who came before the cross, before the sinning, came into the world, came here.¹

1. *The Impossible Space of the Narrator*

In Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable*, the reader encounters a narrator not dissimilar to other narrators in Beckett whose speaking voice is relentlessly taking leave of itself, or trying to come into its own as it speaks, what seems like a typical Beckettian voice grappling with the problem of speaking and never being able to say what needs to be said. Speaking inevitably “encumbers” the space of speech with “beings, things, shapes,” in a kind of frenetic concern with truth and leads to an unappeased need to cease coherent speaking altogether in favor of a primal utterance that has cut itself or been cut off from thought. The voice wants to be done with thinking and to simply utter. What stands out in this work is that the other Beckettian narrators, namely Malone and Molloy, are encountered here as figures present or mentioned by name by an authorial voice, as if the implied author, who speaks in *The Unnamable* about the other figures without ever addressing them, bore creative responsibility for these others, and as if he were in a

¹ Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable*, New York: Grove Press, 1958: 289-301.

kind of holding tank of indecision considering his creations orbiting around him, having created a world whose workings he himself does not master or understand, but tries to figure out and predict. It would be hard to summarize briefly the many philosophical and other discourses that Beckett takes on in this book, whether by allusion, mimicry or direct citation spoken by the authorial narrative voice. While this is also the case in his other books, Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable* is significant and unique for its sheer scope, and in that it seems also to be a kind of meta-critique of the Beckett oeuvre. The narrator who speaks mentions other narrators from the Beckett oeuvre, as if the boundaries between the different texts were porous. However, the reader should be careful not to confuse the implied narrator with the author Beckett or to assume that the implied narrator, even at a remove, stands in for the author Beckett and speaks authorial truth, which is tantamount to arresting the reading by positing without grounds a meta-narrator. The mise-en-abyme of narrators serves a purpose different from speaking referential truth, as I show in this chapter.

My purpose in this chapter is to read together several authors on an equal footing with Beckett – Foucault, Barthes and Descartes – who seem to revolve around Beckett the way Molloy and Malone revolve around the narrator of *The Unnamable*. The three authors mentioned constitute major interlocutors to Beckett, and one might begin with Descartes. From the beginning of the book, there is legible in the discourse of the voice who speaks a self-interrogation in search of some kind of certainty. A speaking “I” on a mission to discover the very ground from which to speak about itself and always missing that which it pursues, itself. This self-reflexive speaking “I” certainly brings to mind the famous thinking cogito who pronounces the Cartesian, “I think, therefore I am,” a stock formula expressing certitude found. The first pages of the book offer a general brief description of, then a long, unsystematic

speculation about, the *space* from which the narrator speaks. It is in the passage that stands as the frontispiece for this chapter, and another one preceding it, that the reader detects a noteworthy change in the discourse of the narrative voice and where this space becomes apparent and comprehensible as intertext with René Descartes. The narrator, who up to that moment had been pursuing his speculations in a rambling manner, makes a declaration regarding what he is doing and what he must still do, as if the whole time up to that moment he had been searching for a method. To better understand what seems on the surface to be an authorial voice speaking, and the impasse at which this voice seems to arrive in the passage, it is necessary to see how this voice is initially established as a double or split voice already at the beginning of the novel and how this differs from the speaking *cogito* of Descartes, whose unity is preserved. As I will show, there is good reason to read Beckett's text as an inter-textual foil to Descartes. The reading serves to show that Beckett handles the instance of the speaking "I" in a manner that is very different from Descartes, but which owes much to this groundbreaking seventeenth century thinker. By relation of intertext I mean more specifically that Descartes' implied narrator and Beckett's implied narrator become non-identical doubles whose resemblance returns the reader to their radical difference, while their difference returns the reader to their similarity. As I will show using the filmic terms and method established during the analysis of *Film*, Beckett picks up an impulse from Descartes and unfolds the cogito as an instance of speaking in the space of *writing*, a double authorial subject. Significantly, Beckett unfolds the subject into two in a double iteration, such that the passage that heads the chapter becomes a sort of non-identical double of another iteration of the authorial subject to be analyzed here, which yet resembles and stands in relation to it. The authorial subject can then be better understood in relation to Foucault and Barthes, the prime thinkers of the author refigured.

The following section establishes, through a careful reading of several passages from Beckett, the intertext with Descartes that Beckett stages *twice*, as it were. The following sections take up the authorial subject that arises as a result of this encounter and attempts to understand it through a “scissioning” of Beckett with Foucault and Barthes. As I explain later, by scissioning I mean a critical reading practice whose principal conceptual ingredient is separation or cutting borrowed from Foucault and refashioned to signify the encounter between two authorial points in a discourse in a paradoxical union that preserves difference rather than annihilating it.

2. Beckett’s *The Unnamable*: Toward a “*Fabula*” *Rasa*

Beckett’s *The Unnamable* opens with questions and with a seeming monologue whose short pronouncements are consistently contradicted or questioned, sometimes midsentence, but it quickly becomes clear that the voice speaking in *The Unnamable* is that of a split subject, as evidenced by the opening lines: “Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on. Can it be that one day, off it goes on, that one day I simply stayed in, in where, instead of going out, in the old way, out to spend day and night as far away as possible, it wasn’t far.”² What first seems like a monologue turns into a chorus of two seemingly contradictory voices. The reader first becomes conscious of a palpable breaking into one speech of another, interrupting speech in the following sentence: “Can it be that one day, off it goes on, that one day I simply stayed in, in where...” If the reader then goes back to the beginning, the contradiction is remarkable: the questions that open the narrative as to who is speaking, and where, receive a response of certitude in the injunction to say “I.” In response to “keep on going,” the other voice asks whether one can “call that going.” And yet these voices are not so much contradictory polar

² Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 291. From now on directly quoted in the text.

opposites, as they are self-contradictory. The clear suggestion to stop hesitating and “say I,” is made without real conviction, the speaker being “unquestioning” but also “unbelieving,” unconvinced by this turn of phrase. In the chorus of voices, one seems to be searching for the right words to say what he wants to say, while the other doesn’t really care, doesn’t really want anything to be said. And yet, the voice to whom it seems little whether the speech goes on interjects critically, “call that going, call that on” in unexpected, self-contradictory commentary. Furthermore, the sentence structure is marked with fluidity and exacerbates the self-contradictory character of the speech. The text permits attribution of bits of text to either speaker, depending on how one reads the stretch of text, how one decides to break it up, rendering them more or less contradictory. Going back to the beginning again, the reader realizes that it is impossible to tell who says exactly what. The speech is not clearly identifiable as that of one or the other because one could break up the words in indifferent ways. There is no deciding factor to force the reading in one of multiple ways. It leaves these different ways of reading intact and equally possible, making it equally impossible to figure out which of the two speakers is the primary, the real, the original one. In that sense, they are equals, hopelessly commingled as a double-voice, that of the split subject or speaking “I.”

This is confirmed later in the passage when the double voice says, “I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me.” (291) Exactly what the sentence voices and how it does so is worth looking at closely. Again there seems to be a deep contradiction expressed in an exhaustive way by a sentence that allows multiple readings. Unfolded, they are roughly these: (1) I seem to speak, but it is not I. (2) I seem to speak, but it is not I speaking. (3) I seem to speak about me, but it is not I (that I speak of, or perhaps, I that does the speaking). (4) I seem to speak but it is not about me. (5) I seem to speak about me, but it is not about me. (6) It is not I, but I

seem to speak. (7) It is not I speaking, but it is about me. (8) It is not I speaking, and it is not about me. (9) It is not about me but I seem to speak (about me). (10) It is not I speaking about me. And so on in a seemingly inexhaustible, dizzying series of possible permutations. What is clear from this inexhaustible way of stating is that something that needs to be said, or that the speaker needing to say it, is beset by an ever-widening doubt. It is not clear that indeed he himself speaks. It only seems that he does. His identity as speaker is cast into doubt. Further, when he seems to speak, when it is probable that he speaks, it is not about himself that he speaks. On the other hand, when it is not doubtful or less doubtful that he does speak, the doubt is cast upon the object, and it does not seem to be about himself that he speaks. The sentence as I read it repeats and completes itself, and it recombines in various ways. Read backwards, there is more self-contradiction. For example: It is not about me, but it is about me. It is not I but I seem to speak. The “I” speaks only when it is not itself, and what does not seem to be about it, is indeed about it.

The sentence read in its various possible combinations not only states in different ways the predicament of the internally split subject, but also performs the paradox and the paradoxical simplicity of the paradox, which lies in the fact that it cannot be stated in a simple, unequivocal fashion. Furthermore, in evoking the separation or split of the speaking “I” from itself, it affirms the distance between the two terms of the split. Whereas *Film* insisted on the proximity and the non-identical sameness of the protagonist and his double – that is the shock of discovery that protagonist and camera eye are one and the same – *The Unnamable*, at least at this early stage, separates them and emphasizes the distance and difference between them. The sentence performs on the textual level the internal splitting into two that nevertheless remain one, but this is the result of reading that scrambles and recombines what remains patently visible on the page: a

fragmentation into a multitude of four. To reiterate, the subject cannot tell about itself because the telling defers him from himself, both as subject and object. As soon as the speaker objectifies himself, he is no longer himself. Furthermore, the split thus does not lie between two voices, but is a wedge driven within one voice split into two. It is a gap between the speaking I, and the I posited by that speech, such that the I who seems to speak might not even be speaking, and if it is, it is not identical to the “I” who speaks, or the I that might or might not be spoken about.

In the second paragraph, the speculations lead to a proclamation that all encumbering people, things, objects must be “scattered” to the winds, and that in so doing, the “spirit of system” is to be avoided. (292) Among the things to be jettisoned, the split voice mentions “puppets.” In the next paragraph, he mentions Malone and Molloy, who might be protagonists from Beckett novels, and the reader wonders whether these are the puppets that need to be put out because they are useless, because “there is nothing further to be hoped” from them. (292)

And yet, the double voice continues to speak about them. Along with the named narrators from the other books of the Beckett trilogy, the question of space and depth comes up in the form of hypothesis as a preliminary questioning:

I believe they are all here, at least from Murphy on, I believe we are all here, but so far I have only seen Malone. Another hypothesis, they were here, but are here no longer. I shall examine it after my fashion. Are there other pits, deeper down? To which one accedes by mine? Stupid obsession with depth. Are there other places set aside for us and this one where I am with Malone, merely their narthex? I thought I had done with preliminaries. No no, we have all been here forever, we shall be here forever, I know it. (293)

The question arises what “here” is being invoked by the narrator, and what he means by the obsession with depth, and why the spirit of system is to be avoided. One can begin to answer these questions by seeing them as a reiteration of the three questions spoken at the beginning of the novel, “Where now? Who now? When now” (291) The latter questions ask about the speaker in context, that is, about the space and time in which he speaks, and whether this space and the

subject itself possess depth. The elements the three questions invoke from the previous quote and with which they form pairs or couples are space, depth, and system. The temporality that is invoked in the third question stands in contradiction with system, the other term in that dysfunctional couple, for reasons that I make clear in what follows. These preliminaries as the narrator calls them then lead to a striking passage that is also presumably a preliminary statement, but which seems to be a coherent statement regarding the speaker's situation, the one the reader has been waiting for and which deserves careful analysis:

I'll try it another way. Has nothing really changed since I have been here? No, frankly, hand on heart, wait a second, no, nothing, to my knowledge. But, as I have said, the place may well be vast, as it may well measure twelve feet in diameter. It comes to the same thing, as far as discerning its limits is concerned. I like to think I occupy the centre, but nothing is less certain. In a sense I would be better off at the circumference, since my eyes are always fixed in the same direction. But I am certainly not at the circumference. For if I were it would follow that Malone, wheeling about me as he does, would issue from the centre at every evolution, which is manifestly impossible. But does he in fact wheel, does he not perhaps simply pass before me in a straight line? No, he wheels, I feel it, and about me, like a planet about its sun. And if he made a noise, as he goes, I would hear him all the time, on my right hand, behind my back, on my left hand, before seeing him again. But he makes none, for I am not deaf, of that I am convinced, that is to say half-convinced. From center to circumference in any case it is a far cry and I may well be situated somewhere between the two. It is equally possible, I do not deny it, that I too am in perpetual motion, accompanied by Malone, as the earth by its moon. In which case there would be no further grounds for my complaining about the disorder of the lights, this being due simply to my insistence on regarding them as always the same lights and viewed always from the same point. All is possible, or almost. But the best is to think of myself as fixed and at the centre of this place, whatever its shape and extent may be. This is also probably the most pleasing to me. (295)

To begin to unpack this passage, there is a superficial resemblance to the moment in René Descartes' *Discourse on Method* that confers the latter the status of intertext to Beckett's book. Their central problems are similar: concern with preliminaries; stating something important about the speaking self in a sound, correct way; shutting out of the world so as to concentrate on the important basics; a space with arrested temporality in which to do so; the question of the centrality of the subject who speaks. Already in the establishing passages that precede Beckett's passage, there is a concern and preparation for the big moment of speech, just as in Descartes

there is long reflection on the motive for searching for the method, a discussion of the process of finding it that includes some biographical information about Descartes' adventures and his renunciation of the world that is at the same time an embracing of it. Just as Descartes professes to be in search of sound method, which he then states in systematic fashion based on the thinking *cogito*, the narrator gives method some thought and states that system is to be avoided. Both have shut out the world, or been shut out by the world. Time does not enter into the picture for Descartes, and is therefore significant by its absence, while for Beckett time seems to have been arrested. The problem of the centrality of the subject for Descartes is subordinate to his scientific method, which depends in the religious age of the seventeenth century on divine guarantee that the subject who enunciates it is not deluded in his perceptions, and which, once arrived at, is meant to be an exemplar for right scientific thinking. The problem of centrality for Beckett is handled differently as it seems to be a question of the subject's centrality, his position in the scheme of things, *tout court*.

In enumerating the similarity, the differences between Beckett and Descartes begin already to creep in, as if by chiasmic shift, and it is necessary to differentiate Beckett from his intertext by concentrating on Beckett, who constitutes an anamorphic mirror to Descartes. What suppresses time in Descartes, the idea of system and abstraction, is missing, avoided, *impossible* in Beckett, as evidenced by the sentences invoked earlier that fold and unfold themselves in recombining forms and stand in as reminders that the I, in fact, cannot say the I, cannot speak the *cogito* into existence, which exists already due to divine speech in the religious scheme to which Descartes belongs. Beckett's narrator poses the question of his speaking position, of his centrality, which does not arise in Descartes as such. For Descartes, the subject is central to the extent that he has divine backing, something that is never questioned by Descartes, who in

response to critics suggests that the reasoned methodical procedure that he discovers within himself is proof of the existence of God, and the method to undertake such a proof.³ Beckett's narrator considers the possibility of being at the periphery, not the center, but then settles comfortably back into the center of things. In that, he is like the *cogito* of Descartes, who is safely anchored within himself and central to the extent that the divine is central. The problem is, Beckett's narrator is dystopically *unanchored* from himself, adrift between being the static center and a moving point around some other center. His words on the page are interrupted, beset by parasitic reflections as if by another, marked by disjunctions, distensions, disjointedness. They state the being adrift and perform it. They undermine the very belief that underpins Descartes speech that would speak for every subject: "I think, therefore I am."

This is a crucial difference between Descartes and Beckett that must not be smoothed over, but unfolded. There is another passage that follows the one just analyzed, and which stands at the head of this chapter. It is here that the narrator proceeds to shift the focus to himself, setting a new agenda for what follows and makes a chiasmic shift to writing, a shift that constitutes a *caesura* in the text between the thought of Beckett and the thought of Descartes, at least as far as their paradigms are concerned, and which opens up a dizzying abyss of paradoxes.⁴ In particular the last sentence of the excerpted passage deserves a close look: "I am Matthew and I am the angel, I who came before the cross, before the sinning, came into the world, came here." To say that the mark of religion lies heavy on this passage because of this closing sentence is both an understatement – it is obviously so – and a patent inaccuracy – the elements of religious cosmogony have been lifted to a higher valence like so many atoms in the collider that is the literary text, and they no longer do the bidding of the religious paradigm. Let us say instead – to

³ He states this in *Meditations*, in which he answers critics of the *Discourse on Method*.

⁴ I talk about these paradoxes at length in what follows when I return to the previous passage analyzed.

open the discussion of this crucial fragment, now under the sign of the figures of the angel and Matthew – that with this identification of the narrator with these *writing* figures Beckett is elucidating something like the *hors cadre* of the Cartesian scene.

To put this in Deleuzian terms, Beckett actualizes a virtual potential in Descartes – an inexhaustible potential, it ought to be added – when he recreates the scene of the speaking subject and re-inscribes it as writing subject, as an authorial voice trying to tell its own story. In returning to the scene of the Cartesian subject, this time à la Beckett, Beckett is not doing so to overcome Descartes, or to solve his problem. This not philosophical one up man-ship, but rather a gesture of unfolding. Beckett is unearthing another, virtual Descartes. It is not my purpose to analyze the virtual Descartes, a task that constitutes another project. Suffice it to say that here one has a glimpse of a very different Descartes beset by doubt, unmitigated by certitude, a singularly un-Cartesian Descartes. A Descartes of the *and*, not of the *either/or* binarism, as the narrator who speaks in his voice part of the time makes clear. The intertext with Descartes as presented here serves the purpose of highlighting the difference between Descartes and Beckett, and it is the latter who is in question. The virtual Descartes can only be suggested here and is not the topic of the discussion. The intertext with Descartes, the allusion to the speaking “I” seen in Descartes, serves to transpose this problematic to another plane, that of writing. It is my interpretation that in having the authorial voice speculate about utterance only to make a chiasmic shift toward writing, Beckett not only transposes the discussion to a new terrain, as I have already said; he effects the shift to make apparent the identity between the subject and the divine that is put in place when the subject is conceived in the paradigm of speech. This is why the narrator is able to say at the end of the passage that he alone is human, while Malone and the rest are divine: “I alone am man and all the rest divine.” (300) The mode of speech, being either

atemporal or eternal, or rather, atemporal *and* eternal, puts the subject in the place of the divine. Viewed under a certain angle, Descartes subject, whose mode is speech, is just such an instance of the divine, which is identical to itself. This does not clarify anything about the subject, which is beset precisely by non-identity to himself. For Beckett, the mode is writing, and it is this mode that “captures” and is tied to the human subject. Writing is his very medium of temporality, deferral and differentiation, also from self.

This eminently human voice, as the narrator takes pains to tell the reader right away, goes on to state in no uncertain terms the problem, or question, which preoccupies him. After expressing his resolve to shift his focus directly to himself, to change the terrain of his pursuit from his creations to himself, the nameless, human narrator tells us in a questioning mode that the problem is that of writing, of thinking just enough to write. The problem is, to put it tentatively, the incommensurability of authorship in the act of writing, where the author is split between the evangelist and the attendant angel and distant to himself, and whose un-redemptive act or gesture of writing precedes – and thereby also outlasts – the event involving the divine subject that it is supposed to chronicle. To posit the genius author, the god-like creator, and project on him all the characteristics that were mistakenly attributed to God would be to repeat the same fallacy again. Thus, rather than trying to bridge the gap to the divine, the narrator in Beckett's text turns his attention to the remnant of that failed relation, the human author – an angel perhaps, but not an inspired genius – in order to come to terms with it in the remainder of the book. To put it in slightly different terms, with the discovery of mediation, and of the narrator's radical difference from the other narrators that he has created, comes the realization – and this is the *un-Cartesianizing* Cartesian moment – that one's own self is the most other of all others. The author is incommensurable because he is constitutively split, and because he is

incommensurate with the divine, but even more disturbing is the human remnant from which he feels distant, and which becomes the real subject, in the double meaning of this term, of his preoccupation (and arguably has been all along). According to the thought unfolded here by Beckett, it is to this human remnant, rather than the divine, that the exemplary subject of this scene must, as I emphasize, witness.⁵

To return to the dizzying paradoxes mentioned earlier on, what deserves a closer look is the supposition that the narrator is not at the center but the periphery made in the quoted passage, remembering that it is Malone who stubbornly appears, encumbering the space of speech within which the I is to speak itself and turning it into a space of writing: “I like to think I occupy the center, but nothing is less certain. In a sense I would be better off at the circumference, since my eyes are always fixed in the same direction. But I am certainly not at the circumference.” (295) In raising the possibility that he is not at the center but the circumference, the narrator denies it on the grounds that his senses, which seem to function, do not bear this out. The narrator concludes that Malone is revolving around him, and not he around Malone, because if the latter were true Malone would have to emerge from some source – “enceinte” – that produces him at each revolution or run in a straight line. This is untenable, because the narrator sees Malone revolving around him, not emerging from another source. The reader can conclude from this that Malone is the narrator’s pure projection, the narrator being a fixed, immobile projector of images as if he were living in a Platonic cave, or a monad. Indeed, the narrator opts to believe this “pleasing” scenario. However, one can read this differently, such that the narrator is both fixed *and* in motion, on the periphery and central, and in fact unable to hear Malone, but not for the reasons he gives. For if we consider projection here not as a metaphor, but as the medium that

⁵ I return to the problematic of witnessing later in this chapter and the next.

constitutes the relation between Malone and the narrator, then his indecision and mixed perceptions begin to acquire a programmatic logic, rather than simply playing the role of untrustworthy sense perception cast in a Cartesian reenactment. To entertain the other scenario, that the narrator is decentered and “in perpetual motion, accompanied by Malone,” is to see something more in this passage.

The medium to which projection belongs is of course film. The narrator is like a film projector that projects the image of Malone: “But does he in fact wheel? Does he not perhaps simply pass before me in a straight line?” Passing in a straight line recalls film stock that passes through the projector that makes the image appear on a screen. This would certainly fit with the idea of the meta-narrator discussing his projected creations that impede his saying something about himself, but the idea of a meta-narrator comes dangerously close to believing that somewhere there is a believable and unmediated narrator in a privileged position who sees the meta-truth. Or that the narrator who is speaking is, in fact, an unmediated Beckett, none other than Beckett himself. This is untenable according to the logic so painstakingly expressed by the narrator from the beginning of *The Unnamable*. The reader has no right to collapse the implied narrator with the author Beckett, or arrest the reading by positing without grounds a meta-narrator. The meta-narrator being an untenable proposition, the projector as apparatus of filmic mediation must be either dropped or taken further to its conclusion, if there be one.

The reader, like the narrator, will take “what is most pleasing” to her and pursue the medium of film as mediated projection, something that the text suggests when the narrator talks about the screen on which the image of Malone is projected: “This grey, first murky, then frankly opaque, is luminous none the less. But may not this screen which my eyes probe in vain, and see as denser air, in reality be the enclosure wall, as compact as lead?” (300) Of course one cannot

help but hear the allusion to Plato's cave of projections, and to Leibniz's monad that also lives a sealed, mediated, solipsistic life, but it is useful to examine this space in its own terms without jumping to conclusions by projecting ready-made concepts taken from Plato or Leibniz. As I show, here the screen is cinematic, that is, perspectival, and functions to unfold the logic of mediation.

One way to pursue this reading is to invoke Beckett's *Film* again and the filmic terms that are operative in that analysis, as they can be helpful to understand what is happening here. To begin with, the narrator and Malone are analogous figures to the protagonist and the intruding double in *Film*, or O and E as they are also known.⁶ N and M are like O and E, doubles in a space of speech where the I is to say itself, except that neither is necessarily assigned to either position such that O and E are empty place holders. N would be under the eye of his double, M, who like a stealthy camera follows him about. "And if he made a noise, as he goes, I would hear him all the time, on my right hand, behind my back, on my left hand, before seeing him again. But he makes none, for I am not deaf, of that I am convinced, that is to say half-convinced." (295) The strange logic of convinced/half-convinced is perfectly believable if one considers the figure who states this, the narrator, to indeed be split between two figures. The narrator would not be able to hear his other, Malone, not because the narrator is deaf, but because this specter is his double, the stand-in for his "I," and a camera "eye." The latter, Malone, would indeed be able to hear – register – the narrator if he were filming him, but not the other way round. The camera registers from a radically different space, the *hors cadre*. To reverse the roles, the narrator would not just be projecting Malone; he would be filming him. In that instance, he could be both fixed like a static camera, or in motion, moving relative to the fleeting Malone, his double.

⁶ I am using the conventional names O and E here to avoid overly-long statements and ensuing confusion.

To recapitulate, the narrator, in this scheme of things, could occupy any one of three positions: the camera that registers, that which the camera registers, plus the added position of projector of images. The narrator projects, registers and is registered. He projects Malone and he registers Malone, but since Malone, being a pure projection and a fiction, cannot register him, the question of who registers the narrator remains. This question needs careful unfolding, as it can receive different answers according to the double logic legible in this passage, and because it gets at the heart of the paradox under consideration.

Whereas in *Film* there is a collapsing of the spaces *hors cadre* and *hors champ*, a radical jumping of the axis, that brings together the two elements of the split subject, here there is an added space which houses both the collapse of the *hors cadre* with the *hors champ* that produces the splitting of the subject and the truly troubling specter of a subject who is *radically not identical* to himself because his double is not his double, not his doppelganger, which is what the protagonist O and the intruder E in *Film* are to one another. Here, Malone might be the narrator's doppelganger, but the narrator is *not his* doppelganger. According to this perspective, Malone is an other and one should maintain that Malone cannot project or register and instead appears *only* on the narrator's screen of projection. Presenting the picture of a fiction who outstrips its creator would simply reverse the role assignment of O to the narrator and E to Malone, not fundamentally changing anything. In any case, if it is allowed that Malone registers the narrator, one must be willing to admit that Malone is, indeed, his equivalent, his identical double, his *unmediated* self, and not just a doppelganger where one self is split over two. That is one possible answer. According to the double logic of the narrative legible in the passage, there is another possible answer. The role reversal could be entertained and Malone could "register" the narrator, thus presenting the troubling picture of a fiction who outstrips its creator. But what is

truly troubling about this is not the reversal of one to the other, but the very exchangeability or reversibility of the roles in the first place. What is more, this exchangeability *must* be admitted, unless one is willing to accept that the narrator is in fact unmediated, immediately perceptible, and that the doubling is just a ruse, that there is no doubling going on.

It should be apparent that the conclusions in both cases are the same, because there are two voices, two others, not one self and “an other.” In the end, the reader does not even need to decide whether they reverse or could reverse or could not reverse roles, because in fact they *do* reverse roles. From the beginning there are two indistinguishable voices, two doppelgangers, and neither can be trusted to be the “real” narrator, the real Beckett, the original speaker. It is the reader’s fetishization of the one entitled to speak that wants to assign a privileged authoritative, creative, authorial position to one rather than the other, but this becomes impossible in the case of two others who inhabit *three* positions, the one who projects, the one who registers and the one who is registered.

To come back to the passage ending in “I alone am man and all the rest divine,” (300), it seems to bear out the conclusion of the reversal and of the trinity that replaces the double, the split subject. This is a peculiar moment in the text. After reading a double voice speaking, here one is confronted with an unexpected resolution into one, uninterrupted voice, but this apparent unity heightens the split nature of the authorial subject speaking, building through this different narrative approach the *distance* between the doubles who are now triangulated. It opens up a space with relief or depth, the better to separate it into radically different spaces which nevertheless are apparent as such only in the confines of the narrator’s fixed space, where he remains paradoxically “motionless in vain.” (300) According to the passage in which the narrator resolves to pay attention to himself, it is Malone who is divine, not the narrator who no longer

fits the old paradigm of the god-like author. The dystopic reversal puts Malone in his place: “I am motionless in vain, he is the god.” And a mysterious other appears who was not there before: “And the other? I have assigned him eyes that implore me, offerings for me, need of succor. He does not look at me, does not know of me, wants for nothing!” Pure projection, this other, who could be either the narrator or Malone projected by either one, it does not matter by whom, is oblivious of his “projector,” the way a figure in a film projected on screen is oblivious of the viewer and of the film projector. The role reversal signaled in this passage confirms the filmic reading I that I perform here, and signals that the reversal is radical and irrevocable because of the substitutability of the figures. There is a chasm opened by the substitutability between the narrator and Malone, their relation beautifully expressed in a literary *chiasm*: “one who is not as I can never not be.” (300)

In a sense, the reader is no closer to answering the question of who registers the narrator, except that it appears to be in the purview of an impossible position of looking back or from above that does not belong exclusively to the author, that is, the real narrator. What has changed, however, is that the question does not matter, and the narrator suggests an answer to the question of his position himself in the passage analyzed first: “From center to circumference in any case it is a far cry and I may well be situated somewhere between the two.” (295) The narrator, would-be author, is *in between* the two terms of the split subject. The figure of the author, that is the narrator seen as occupying a privileged but fluid position in *The Unnamable*, whatever his name might be, is, in his relation to his text, like a pair of trousers.⁷ He is the seat of the pants, the

⁷ I am borrowing the figure of the trousers from Beckett, who surreptitiously introduces it in *Endgame*. Hamm tells a joke about a tailor who botches a pair of trousers after months of working on them and, when confronted about it, declares them a better product than the shabby world created in only seven days. The tailor’s speech is of course a perversion of theodicy, just as Beckett’s play is, and it fits with the problem of creation and authorship that Beckett’s play stages. Hamm is a god-like author in a relation of mastery over Clov, the figuration of his creation. What is more, the joke introduces an alternative perspective on the

unnoticed support that seamlessly gives way or extends into the legs, the two doubles that make up the split subject, subjectivity and what one might call the subject remnant. There is openness at both ends in the figure of the trousers, at the “top” or seat that seems to dominate, and at the bottom, at the issue of the two trouser legs, each of whom is bound to the other, and yet free, like the subject whose terms are necessarily bound together as non-identical doubles of the same. They resemble one another to the point of being indistinguishable, yet they have an undeniable independence from one another in their bound-togetherness. Furthermore, it is only under scrutiny – scrutiny seen as that peculiar moment of self-reflexivity that opens the space of writing, as stated earlier in the discussion of the Descartes-Beckett inter-textuality – that the doubles appear to be separate non-identical elements of the same, just as viewed up close, the trouser legs divide and diverge. Viewed from enough distance, the two parallel lines that are the trouser legs converge back into one and are not distinguishable as two.

This figure of the author vis-à-vis the split subject deserves another analysis, this time by examining the author-function in Foucault in relation to Beckett’s triangulated narrator-Malone-other complex. In the following, I propose a reading of Foucault through Beckett, that is, a *scissioning* of the two. Or, to put it in Foucauldian terms, I proceed by returning (in a Foucauldian mode) to Foucault, with whom this passage is in a relationship of resonance.

3. Michel Foucault: “What is an Author?”

It is no accident that, in the very essay in question, Foucault himself invokes Beckett as annunciatory of another era when the author's authority will not matter, or will have simmered

author that I develop here, rather than in *Endgame*, because in *The Unnamable*, the question of authorship is raised more explicitly.

down to a “murmur of indifference,” as Foucault puts it.⁸ If I begin the theoretical component of this chapter with an exposition of Foucault, it is because Foucault sets out, in a straightforward fashion, the terms and a critique of the question of the author, and because the relationship established here between Foucault and Beckett as authors is significant and relevant to my argument regarding subjectivity and how the latter is announced by Beckett, Foucault and Barthes. Again, it is not because Foucault's is the voice of theory, and theory deserves to set the tone. It is precisely because Beckett does not serve as a mere illustration of a problem but rather stands as its exemplar – in Foucault's own estimation and according to Foucault's own terms that redefine authorship – that he deserves careful and strategic analysis. If I now return to this particular theory, it is not because I wish to give it the upper hand, but rather the better to give Beckett's novel the critical weight it deserves. Looking at Beckett in connection with the question of the author, one can appreciate that there is more at stake than just the concept of the author. Furthermore, one might also inquire to whom Beckett's characters speak and whether there emerges another figure, a political, ethical, readerly and subjectivized being to whom Beckett says implicitly, “reader, what say you?”

Michel Foucault's famous essay “What is an Author?” comes as a corrective measure against Foucault's previous, and as he avows, misleading use of terms like “author” and “work.” Foucault's goal is to address and make explicit the meaning and function of the term “author.” Foucault begins by reminding his readers that literature has left behind its old calling to expression (116) and keeping death at bay as it immortalizes heroes. The achievement of modern literary art has been to make writing refer only to itself, and to “murder the author,” (117) as we see in Kafka, Proust and Flaubert, Foucault's examples.

⁸Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977, 138. From now on cited in the text.

Let us look at one of the examples mentioned by Foucault, that of Proust. The reason that Proust is a pertinent example for Foucault, and worth a closer reading here, is not simply that he is a monumental author among the modernists whose works thematize, perform and make their very form the death of the author; Proust is interesting also because he himself wrote a collection of essays on the topic of the author and the treatment the latter receives at the hands of literary criticism in Proust's time. Although Foucault does not go into specifics about Proust in his essay, I invoke the details here as a way of fleshing out and supporting Foucault's argument, without, of course, claiming that the thought of Foucault and the thought of Proust amount to the same thing. While Foucault draws attention to Marcel Proust representing an important moment in modern literature, one could also add that he represents an important moment in literary criticism when, in his *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, he declares openly the break with biography as method of literary criticism. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust states that the real subject of literary criticism – if the latter is truly interested in the author – ought to be confined to the author's literary work and not include the pursuit of the man of the world. The mundane face of the author only obscures the literary one. The real author is not to be sought out there in the world as he figures in the opinions of others and in the habits he manifests, but rather in the text itself, in the avatars of the author folded into the work. However, inasmuch as the author as man of the world might die, in his place is born the preoccupation with the subject who speaks in literature, the preoccupation that Foucault states is the new calling of literature. What the case of Proust makes quite clear is that there is a limit to what is accomplished by the rejection of the literary method based in biography as far as the rejection or death of the author is concerned. Proust still subscribes to a 'strong' notion of the author who presides at the center of his work in a dying mode of release of sovereignty but continues to be, in every sense, its core subject. Rejecting the man of the world

could be said to intensify the power and hold of the other, literary subject, the author proper understood as concept or function.

Seen in this expanded context, Foucault could be said to sound the death knell for the author understood properly as the function or voice at the heart of the modern work, much as Nietzsche sounded the death knell for God. The author is already dead – dead in several respects and several times over at the hands of modernist authors like Proust – but we refuse to face the consequences of the “murder” of the author accomplished by the modernist novelists and poets, those consequences being a retrenchment of sorts of the very thing whose disappearance was sought. Significantly, the sounding of the death-knell comes at a moment when one literary author at least is analyzing those consequences. It is Samuel Beckett who shows that the price to be paid for the “death of the author” is the unending agony of the author as literary subject par excellence. The abyss that separates the writer and the man of the world comes to inhabit the space “within” the dead/dying authorial voice and is so vast as to create a split subjectivity, one that henceforth comes to dominate the literary enterprise.

Modern literature, Foucault tells us, “is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears.” (116) In an age where the ethical principle of writing has become a fundamental “indifference” of who speaks (155-116), Foucault, in keeping with this, wants to examine “the singular relationship that holds between an author and a text, the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it,” (115) even if, or perhaps especially because, the author is supposed to have *already* disappeared. It is the incommensurability of the new ethical standard, literature's immanent rule, with the state of literary affairs that leads Foucault to say that he is “not certain that the consequences derived from the disappearance or death of the author have been fully explored or that the importance of

this event has been appreciated.” (117) Specifically, it is the discursive elements that have replaced the author that interest Foucault here.

The essay “What is an Author?” was first delivered as a conference lecture to the *Société française de philosophie* during a meeting at the Collège de France in February 1969. Although this is not my focus here, it is worth mentioning that the lecture constitutes an effort on the part of Foucault to dissociate himself from structuralism at the time, something that becomes apparent during the question and answer session after the lecture. It is no surprise, then, that the elements of authorship in question should also be key concepts of structuralism that had entered literary discourse as a way of thinking beyond the author, thinking according to one of the new “fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing,” the indifference of who speaks, as mentioned above. The author's place has come to be occupied by “two themes,” (118) Foucault tells us, which, although “destined to replace the privileged position accorded the author have merely served to arrest the possibility of genuine change.” The first of these is the concept of the work: “[W]e lack a theory to encompass the questions generated by a work [...]. [...] if some have found it convenient to bypass the individuality of an author or his status as an author to concentrate on a work, they have failed to appreciate the equally problematic nature of the word 'work' and the unity it designates.” (119) For Foucault, the word work is not only not a full-fledged concept; he suggests that it naively recuperates the notion of unity, taking up in the author precisely what was most problematic, isolating it and letting it in through the back door of thought, so to speak.

Furthermore, Foucault tells us, “Another thesis has detained us from taking full measure of the author's disappearance. It avoids confronting the specific event that makes it possible and, in subtle ways, continues to preserve the existence of the author. This is the notion of *écriture*.

[...] It appears, however, that this concept, as currently employed, has merely transposed the empirical characteristics of an author to a transcendental anonymity.” The disappearance of the author is thus also held in check by the transcendental, specifically the transcendental notion of *écriture*, and it is its status as a “transcendental” that is troubling. When it no longer matters who speaks, we speak not of the humanist subject-author, but of the process of writing itself, the play of signs, the interplay of presence and absence under the aegis of anonymity. Foucault says of the concept of *écriture*, “Strictly speaking, it should allow us not only to circumvent references to an author, but to situate his recent absence. The concept of *écriture*, as currently employed, is concerned with neither the act of writing nor the indications, as symptoms or signs within a text, of an author's meaning; rather, it stands for a remarkably profound attempt to elaborate the conditions of any text, both the conditions of its spatial dispersion and its temporal deployment.” (119) It should allow us to situate the author's absence, but it does not, according to Foucault, at the time of the essay's delivery. Brushing the problem aside, the critical practice that employs the concept of *écriture* does not interest itself in the meaning of the author in texts built around the new ethic of immanence, in the signs of his symptomatic, absented presence.

Thus, to have circumvented references to the problematic author with the invention of terms like “work,” or better, “text” and “*écriture*,” is not to have addressed the consequences of the disappearance. Foucault's answer is to point out the difficulties related to questions regarding the name of the author and its related author function, the remnants in this disappearance. He tells us that the specificity of the name of an author is not its being a proper name and pointing to a real person outside who produces discourse. Rather, “the name of the author remains at the contours of texts – separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence. It points to the existence of certain groups of discourse and refers to the status

of this discourse within a society and culture. The author's name is not a function of a man's civil status, nor is it fictional; it is situated in the breach, among the discontinuities, which give rise to new groups of discourse and their singular mode of existence.” (123) Rather than being a full subject authorizing a discourse and its commentaries, the author function represents for Foucault an originating *fragmentation* that lingers on the (virtual) edge of a text and *gives rise* to fragmented discourse. Foucault continues, “Consequently, we can say that in our culture, the name of an author is a variable that accompanies only certain texts to the exclusion of others [...] In this sense, the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society.” (123-124) The author remnant is in the breach because he is in an in-between position: while he is neither the full subject nor the 'real person' referent of the name, he also is not altogether divorced from the so-called real world, in which his name functions to make discourse circulate. As I understand Foucault, the name of the author – the author remnant – is split between his real capacity to produce and make circulate discourse and his sheer virtual adhesion to the text with which he arises, and where the virtual, in proper Deleuzian fashion, must be understood as not opposed to the real.⁹

To further address the problem of the author function – which presents itself in a kind of fluidity released by the disappearance of the author, a fluidity that we have not fully grasped, according to Foucault (121) – Foucault identifies four features of the author function. In a process of historical and genealogical differentiation, and limiting himself to “books or texts with authors,” (124) Foucault identifies those “features” within the discourses in which it appears. The features are simultaneously a way to generalize about the author function, but they arise from an analysis of, and are specifically characteristic of, the discourses where the author

⁹ I use the term “virtual” here carefully, yet pointedly. Virtual, because the author is not the person of the author, and yet he is not simply a fiction either, having real consequences for discourse. It is the position of author in discourse.

appears. When undertaking the task of understanding the author function, he cautions us, we must be mindful of what characterizes a given discourse that supports the author function to determine the difference between that discourse and other discourses. This is the only way to get at the singularity of the author, the generalized specificity in question.

Foucault identifies four features of the author function, and it is well worth looking at them carefully. First, the discourses where the author appears are objects of two-fold appropriation, their status being encoded as property and their appropriation controlled by the penal code. Being an author carries risk and is subject to strict copyright rules that arise toward the end of the eighteenth century. Foucault finds, secondly, that there is nothing universal or constant in the function. Unlike Medieval literary texts, literary texts today require authors, while the truth of scientific texts is no longer guaranteed by an author the way it was at the inception of the modern scientific tradition. Furthermore, the author function is not spontaneous or reducible to simple attribution, but rather involves a certain continuity that is best discernible in the method of defining an author according to the practices of literary criticism in Foucault's time. Surprisingly, medieval principles of authenticity still “define the critical modalities now used to display the function of the author,” (129) although it would be incorrect to see the author as nothing other than a reconstruction after the fact, as he or she was in the Middle Ages. All texts, even ones without a clear author (like the one of literature) bear grammatical signs of the author as function. The fourth feature of the author function comes about with Foucault's important twofold insight: the author function is reducible neither to the actual writer, or “author,” nor to the narrator, but “arises out of their scission.” The author function is just that: a sheer *function*, a complex operation upon which is then projected a rational being called the author. Texts where the author function arises – and this includes mathematical and scientific texts, as Foucault is

quick to point out – are characterized by a plurality of speaking egos, as many as three (speaker at the outset, speaker who completes the demonstration or project, and speaker who comments on goals and experience). According to Foucault, the author function effects a *dispersion* of these three egos.

It would be a mistake at this point to recognize the author function as a specifically literary one, even if at the outset the literary author function seems to be the focus of Foucault's proposed study. One could say in Foucauldian terms that just as the author at the outset of the experiment is different from the one who comes later, so does the author function itself come to be rather different from what it seemed to be at the outset, where one is more likely to persist in projecting upon it the flesh and psychological characteristics of the author. Perhaps in the course of reading and rereading this essay the attentive reader loses his or her naïve fetishizing of the author function, a fetishization that says, "I know the author function has none of the qualities of the author (psychology, being, reason), but even so, I persist in this fantasy." It is only at this later point in the essay that one can note the significance of Foucault making the subtle point of choosing the mathematical example quoted above to illustrate the author function. It is his way of making a decisive point about the author function being neutral, impersonal, grammatical, and ultimately an instrument of *scission*. In fact, to say that it is an instrument is to reify it already too much: it is that instance of scission and dispersion of simultaneous speaking selves. The mathematical example is a well chosen one, because it, at first prejudice-laden glance, seems to admit the least an author function into its workings. Furthermore, if Foucault thus insists on the sheer functionality exemplified in a mathematical rather than literary case, this is because he does not want the author function tied exclusively to non-scientific texts in the age when scientific knowledge is power, a point that Foucault makes in elsewhere in different but equally

incisive terms. To tie the author-function to literature would effectively make the author function a *literary* aberration, which it is not. Instead, Foucault wants the texts of non-scientific, literary-philosophical discourses to be the place where “a singular type of author” (131) arises. In other words, the author function is a functioning of dispersion operating across literary, scientific and mathematical discourses and texts that allow an author; in the case of certain literary discourses and texts, a special form of the author function arises. This special form, to put it in terms of the *scierie* invoked early on in this chapter, might best be described as an especially cutting instance of the reworking of discourse. This special author function invoked by Foucault is the bringer of functioning that is an especially cutting one in that it represents a decisive, sovereign, ultimately *self-justifying* move, performing a cutting or scission that instantiates a singular scission-*ing* in that a new discourse is “formed,” if such a misleading term might be used, and unleashed to do its largely critical, destructive, restructuring work on its own terms.

The special author-function who initiates discursive practice, the bearer of this new *scissioning* as I call it, comes, significantly, from non-scientific discourses. The stakes here are high, no less than the founding of discourses, and Foucault wants to give non-scientific discourses their due recognition in the founding process in an age where science rules (or, as Heidegger put it, where science and its human user have lost the ability to take the measure of Being, which is another way of saying discourse as a whole). Singular authors are not like the “great” literary authors, the founders of canonical religious texts or the founders of science, giving rise to imitation, exegesis and scientific practice. They are truly, Foucault tells us, “initiators of discursive practices.” (131) Foucault's two examples, psychoanalysis and the Marxist discourse – both non-scientific discourses – are just such initiators that engender their own variations even as the engendering “founders,” their special author functions, remain

inescapable points of reference for that discourse. They are linked to a name, an author, to whom one necessarily returns in order for fundamental changes in the direction of the discourse to be possible and for new texts to be generated. They produce “not only their own work, but the possibility and the rules of formation of other texts.” (131) The special author-function generates not so much method as the possibility of difference and departure from its practices: “They cleared a space for the introduction of elements other than their own, which, nevertheless, remain within the field of discourse they initiated.” (132) These initiators of discursive practice generate the susceptibility of their discourse to radical amendment, of being redirected in a non-linear fashion, from within the discourse, not only outside it, as is the case with science and religion. Science and religion can be challenged by a rival theory or a heresy that supplants the older theory or dogma, coming from outside. Science folds in its founding act, while the initiation that Foucault claims for these non-scientific discourses remains “heterogeneous to its ulterior transformations.” (133) The author-function that Foucault privileges has, then, an important function, that of new discourse foundation, and given this heterogeneity, we can understand the importance of returns to “the origin.” The intertext with Descartes discussed earlier in this chapter now appears in a new light: Beckett returns to Descartes, who belongs to those authors who are also initiators of discursive practice. Beckett can be in a conversation with Descartes without necessarily espousing what the discourse becomes later in its afterlife. The space of this encounter is an in-between space- neither pro nor anti-Descartes, but engaged in a dialogue with him. “Him” of course does not refer to the “real” Descartes, but rather the implied author, or at even more remove, the author-function, as I develop Foucault’s concept here.

To put in other, more Deleuzian terms, the initiation of discursive practice that Foucault has in mind when he talks about the special author function is not simply limited to initiating a

repeatable method, as in science; rather, what is initiated is the possibility of departure from that method, of a particular kind of variation already virtually inscribed within the discourse and lying dormant, as if the originating discourse were pregnant with the possibility of its own *difference*. To put in terms of *scissioning*, such an initiation anticipates, as it were, the encounter between the originating text and the terms of another discourse that it already “contains” because it is from the outset internally, constitutively split. This is not a dialectic between terms external to one another and vying for dominance, but rather a reading in the best sense of the term where the read material is essentially a reader itself. Dispersal and decision in favor of the new, something created, and not the instantiation a hybrid clone.

At this point, Foucault ends the essay on an unexpected note. Having argued for the author function, and the role of initiator of discourse for non-scientific discourses such as psychoanalysis – no small feat considering that he and we live in an age where science and technology claim primacy of description of our world and effectively order it – he asks a provocative question: “Is it not possible to reexamine, as a legitimate extension of this kind of analysis, the privileges of the subject?” (137) The answer is yes, but not only because “the creative role of the subject” (137) is the last shred of the creative author-initiator, the remnant of the author that refuses to disappear, the shreds of authorhood that we fetishize when faced by that impersonal scissioning force of the author-function. We need to undertake this kind of analysis because the subject has always been lurking behind the mask of the author, an extreme case, but “undoubtedly only one of the possible specifications of the subject.” (138) Furthermore, just as we should not abandon the author function even as we wave goodbye yet again to the flesh and blood writer, we should not abandon subjectivity as we wave good-bye, again, to the subject. Clearly, we do not want back the subject of plenitude and presence, of a certain kind of

humanism, the creative genius subject, but rather the subject as “complex and variable function of discourse.” Here Foucault makes an eloquent plea for the subject:

Is it not possible to reexamine, as a legitimate extension of this kind of analysis, the privileges of the subject? Clearly, in undertaking an internal and architectonic analysis of a work (whether it be a literary text, a philosophical system, or a scientific work) and in delimiting psychological and biographical references, suspicions arise concerning the absolute nature and creative role of the subject. But the subject should not be entirely abandoned. It should be reconsidered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its system of dependencies. We should suspend the typical questions: how does a free subject penetrate the density of things and endow them with meaning; how does it accomplish its design by animating the rules of discourse from within? Rather, we should ask: under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy; what functions does it exhibit; and what rules does it follow in each type of discourse? In short, the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse. (137-138)

Foucault encourages us to move to an analysis of the subject function and ends the essay with another reference to Beckett's statement of indifference – “What matter who's speaking” – which concerns the subject as bare fact, *tout court*, rather than the author of a text.

It is the ending of this essay that should give us pause as we move to a discussion of Beckett because it puts us in a position to appreciate the Beckett-Foucault encounter for what it really is. Much has been said about the derivative nature of Beckett's texts, his borrowing of philosophical discourse in order to parody it, and the post-modernity of his work, its fragmentary nature and its gloomy insistence on bringing those discourses to an end. Foucault's encounter with Beckett suggests something else entirely, and his inscription of Beckett's name in his text provides an important clue as to what this might be. It exceeds the marginal 'presence' of the other author secured by an attributed quote, or a passing mention.

Foucault situates Beckett's name at the beginning of his argument (115), and then again at the end (138), giving Beckett not so much the last word as inscribing his name as parenthetical *frame* around Foucault's essay. To say that clearly such an inscription flouts traditional authorial convention is inaccurate. Knowing that Foucault is not interested in safe-guarding conventions,

and that citation is itself a field of study where conventions are made and broken we ought to recognize that his inscription of Beckett is clearly programmatic. If Foucault starts out from and then returns to Beckett, this is not to fetishize the authorial name of Beckett in direct contradiction of everything he has just written regarding the author function. Neither is it an abnegation of his own authorial authority, a tempting alternative that we should reject for the same reason: on the grounds that this purported authorial authority is redolent of a kind of author whom Foucault does not endorse. The inscription is rather the logical playing out of the very theory that Foucault delineates in the essay. Foucault's inscription is an ethical act that, quite literally, respects and affirms that fundamental indifference of who speaks, which constitutes the fundamental ethical rule of contemporary writing. At the same time, I would argue, it hands Beckett a different kind of authorial authority, one in keeping with Foucault's theory.

4. Beckett and Foucault: Chiasmic Scissioning

In the sections above, I have suggested a nuanced handling of a double paradox – the paradox of authorship that reveals another paradox, that of the human remnant after the mask of authorship is lifted – that involves interweaving the cited passage by Beckett with texts by Foucault and Barthes. I argue that the paradox of authorship is in one sense central, but in another sense secondary as it appears in and is handled by Beckett. As I have already stated, the fact that it arises in a highly figurative form should alert us to the fact that it gives itself to a multiplicity of interpretations rather than explicitly putting Beckett in a line of direct communication with writers like Foucault and Barthes, who theorize it in their own terms in a systematic way.

Indeed, it would be more correct to claim – as Foucault effectively does if we read carefully what he has to say, or rather, *what he leaves unsaid* about the paradox of authorship –

that Beckett occupies a crucial position as initiator of the discourse on the subject veiled as author. In Beckett's *The Unnamable*, it is not just another narrator who speaks in the mode of "what matter who speaks." Transposing Foucault to the terrain of Beckett's figurative fiction, one could say that the narrator's *is* the impossible voice, not of the author or even of the narrator as such, but rather of the *author function* understood in its full Foucauldian sense. As Foucault tells his readers, the author function is reducible neither to the actual writer nor to the narrator of a text, but "arises out of their scission." (129) The narrative voice thus speaks from the breach or split situated at the heart of the authorial subject. Furthermore, the authorial subject comes to exemplify a more generalized state of affairs, the split at the heart of the subject understood as not limited simply to the author subject. The paradox of the author is to some degree secondary and passed over in silence by Beckett in order to witness to another, greater predicament: that of the human subject's incommensurability with itself, the paradox of the human subject *tout court*. However, that the author as such and "authorship" are words that are never uttered by Beckett's nameless narrator, the one who at the head of this chapter, does not mean we should simply dispense with that paradox in favor of the other, more important one. Or rather, to put in other words, the subject, inasmuch as it thinks, is a writing subject *already*, a temporal and non-self-identical being. It is by looking at authorial subjectivity that a generalized fault line of the split emerges across subjectivity as such.

Thus, as I argue, the passing in silence of authorial subjectivity in favor of a more generalized inscription of all subjectivity under the clear signs of an authorial paradox is a programmatic one. This silence insists on a certain neutrality of authorship, of a refusal to associate too much the flesh and bone author with the force at work. It attests to Beckett's having adopted a concept of neutral authorship to a degree that needs, indeed allows, no explicit

development and only a performative inscription in the namelessness of the author-narrator and the (telling) absence of a discourse of authorship. As I attempted to show through an analysis of this famous essay by Foucault that says what Beckett presupposes and leaves unsaid, and will attempt to show in a later section dealing with an essay by Roland Barthes – both of whom do directly address authorship in the form of the “author function” or “scriptor” – Beckett's text attests to his having already adopted a concept of authorship stripped of the trappings of the divine and the genius, and which is palpably at play in his work, even if it is never spelled out. And it is because Beckett's text functions with this implicit concept of authorship that he is able to look behind the mask of the latter and see lurking behind it the greater paradox of the subject *tout court*. In other words, if we read Beckett carefully, we see, first, that the split spreads across all subjectivity, and that therefore the paradox of authorship reveals itself as a paradox of the witness to subjectivity, where the witness is engaged in a gesture of reading-writing best interpreted in synch with Barthes.

In the previous section, I gave an account of Foucault's insertion of Beckett as author in Foucault's by now eponymous essay on the author. On the surface, the insertion serves to perform what the essay delineates in clear theoretical terms: the insertion of Beckett's name serves to unleash the authorial function of Beckett, exercised in his being an initiator of discourse according to Foucault's definition. We thus see Beckett in a new light as an author who initiates the multivalent discourse of indifference, thereby returning to the problem of the subject – and its limit case, the author – raised by the modernists. Beckett is fittingly invoked and recognized as the initiator of a discourse, and as the author-function virtually adhering to the surface of texts where the voices that speak are precisely the voice of the author-function speaking from the breach, between text and world, and what they have to say pertains to a greater problem: that of

the subject and subjectivity. However, what this account does not render is the real textual encounter between the two author functions, Foucault and Beckett, subtending their all-too-legible relation. It is not so much that a deeper relation exists; it is, rather, that the exact nature of the scission of one discourse with and through another still remains to be accounted for. Furthermore, the detour through Foucault's essay should have served as a reminder not only of the ethical stakes, yet to be fully developed later, of the position from which the authorial voice speaks (the new ethical principle of modern literature according to Foucault) but also of the precariousness of this position, something that Beckett renders with acute clarity, and which requires a clearer statement here.

A careful analysis of this encounter is precisely what I propose in what follows. Indeed, it is time to signal that a chiasmic shift has occurred: it is appropriate to consider Foucault transposed to the terrain of Beckett, where the precariousness of the position of the author function is only now fully legible. To do so, I turn to a third term in the discussion, that of Descartes and the foundational speculative discourse. So far, the exposition of Foucault and Beckett has laid the foundation for a real engagement with them, which happens through a reading of Beckett's fragment that takes up ideas stated earlier and develops them in tandem, in a synchronized suspension. The real engagement is in the form of a *return* to Beckett, in the strict Foucauldian sense of return developed by Foucault in "What is an Author?" To point toward the gravity and meaning of the point of contact between Foucault and Beckett, who intersect at least at one discursive point – the author function that inhabits the space in between world and text – a consideration of Beckett and Foucault alongside one another is in order. Looking at Beckett with Foucault has allowed the reader to understand why Beckett must move beyond Proust, so to speak, in moving the absented author from the textual center to its margin – in other words, why

Beckett must wear his authorial name on his textual sleeve. Significantly, this also allows the reader to grasp why Foucault insists on this marginalization of the author function by putting it not just into the text, but wedging it *between* text and world. For Beckett, in *The Unnamable*, creates the conditions not just for a narrative voice to speak; the voice that considers Malone and Murphy – in short, other voices that the reader hears either because they narrate or their speech is reported second hand – becomes itself the focus in that it is the very function that animates all narrativity. In other words, Foucault envisions a particular instance of subjectivity, the authorial function; in the chosen fragment, Beckett unleashes a subjectivity that exemplifies the authorial in-between function – this model function effectively standing for the subject function understood as generic – to consider it in the broader context of a religious notion of authorship and to follow this subjectivity down a trajectory that suspends this notion while cleaving to the in-between space, between world and text.

Further, as will become clear later, the engagement with Beckett returns in what might be called a Barthean mode, such that the engagement privileges the interpretative powers of the reader, empowered and subjectivized as reader by the text, arising with it and not preceding it.

To summarize, my argument is as follows: (1) Beckett shows the limits of the Foucauldian author function, showing that its roots lie in the speculative philosophical tradition. Although the author function is a *speculative* function, this is not the grounds for its wholesale rejection. What Beckett does is, (2) in a Foucauldian move, to show the limits of the speculative author function by letting it speak from exactly the position that Foucault claims for it: wedged between text and world, between the actual writer and the fictional narrator and reducible to neither, but arising “in the division and distance of the two.” (129) Beckett creates the space in which the reader might listen to an exemplary author-function, think *with* it and reactivate a real

subjective moment, rather than represent such a moment or simply think about it, thereby objectifying it. Beckett returns to the founding speculative scene to think it through against the grain and in a Foucauldian mode, one that privileges a genealogical approach to epistemology seen as an interrupted movement, over arrested epistemology that seamlessly moves into the field of *ontology* and its existents (this is a harder bridge to gap, according to Beckett). In a Foucauldian move that uncovers the limits of the (speculative) Foucauldian author function, Beckett (3) does away with a false conceptual split – the split author, split from his own subjectivity by virtue of writing – in favor of seeing the real fissure, the one running across – inscribed on the surface or margins of – the thinking subject itself, split by virtue of thinking, and for whom it no longer even matters “who speaks.” As was already mentioned, the procedure requires a “return” to Beckett; this return, it should be noted, requires a return to Foucault in the Foucauldian mode of return, as the author function remains Foucault’s discourse transposed to Beckett’s literary field. Furthermore, in the midst of this scissioning encounter between Foucault and Beckett,

5. (Beckett’s) “Return” to Foucault: a Critique of the Author-Function

To begin the proposed “return” to Foucault – one that allows this analysis to continue through its “suspension” in a non-linear course through a series of shifts and turns – a return to the cited passage is in order. The point at which the narrator-cum-authorial voice says, “I who came before....,” is particularly pertinent for this discussion. For a consciously authorial voice to claim such precedence, and in language that makes overt reference to religion (“before the cross, before the sinning...”) confirms the suspicion that one has reading the passage already at the beginning that it is a long-held paradigm of authorship, one based on a religious model, that is being invoked and questioned here. The sweeping movement that Beckett’s text performs at the

very end of the passage constitutes a preceding or “precedence” without precedent, and it is this idea of the author preceding the text that has been a long-standing hallmark of authorship. On the one hand, the author as witness to the divine must either be on the scene already or come to it after the fact to keep record of the divine event. Be it an evangelist or an inspired genius, the essence of the author is that he precedes the text to channel the divine source. Here, it is not an exaggeration to say that for Beckett, as long as we continue to subscribe to the author’s preceding the text, we are essentially subscribing to a religious or metaphysical world view. In this worldview, as Beckett so vividly shows, the precedence of the author is a kind of slippery slope. In a striking literalization, Beckett shows that the author’s preceding the text is caught in a cascading movement that skips historical time and movement and goes straight to the biblical mode, in a backward theological flow of anti-time. Beckett, as I argue, has his narrator speak these lines in a programmatic, provocative way that makes the reader consider whether this is a tenable position. One would do well to ask whether in Beckett’s account this paradigm of the author does not destroy that which it upholds by marginalizing it at a point of near-transcendence that is neither divine – in the way of the divine Author – nor human in any shape recognizable as such. This reigning paradigm of the author seems indeed to denature both the writing subject and the subject of his writing, to put it in terms suggestive of the split subjectivity that is partially the product of this paradigm and partially a symptom of another disease that one might tentatively call its subtending speculative tradition. The denaturing, in any case, inverts the status of the writing subject and the subject of writing, the former becoming singularly human (the narrator), the latter (Malone and others like him) inaccessibly but ubiquitously divine. Indeed, it seems that the writing subject who speaks here has been driven into a corner where he alone is “human, the rest divine,” and where the sphere of the divine, which we might simply refer to as the sphere

of alterity, has spread to include the most banal literary creation, has engulfed everything that might be called the “outside” of the author, whether textual or of the “real” world.

It is this subtle shift marked by Beckett that I read as his simultaneous debunking of the old author paradigm and careful consideration of what has come to replace it, the author-function. What comes to replace the old paradigm, the authorial voice that speaks here after what I in an earlier section called the chiasmic shift to writing, is itself marginalized into the very breach between the world and the text – much as Foucault envisions it, but in Beckett more outspoken, pathetic, and riddled with paradoxes. The narrative voice in this passage by Beckett is peculiar and special in that it is simultaneously the impossible voice of the author-function speaking out of the breach where it is situated, and of the split subject-function, all three caught in the tripartite scheme elucidated earlier in the analysis of Beckett. In other words, Beckett enacts the Foucauldian author function speaking from its position, wedged between text and world, and considering its predicament, speaking as a split self and not about being one. Further, the authorial function that paradoxically and impossibly speaks here does not in any shape or form constitute a redemption of the author as one knew him or an introduction of a new authorial figure per se. It is pure paradox that speaks here. To make sense of what exactly Beckett is getting at in this passage, and to tease out what his critique of authorship might be, I propose to follow in the passage the virtually embedded critique of the author function.

To begin, one must grasp what is meant by the author paradigm in this passage, and to do so one must come back to the beginning of the passage, where the founding scene of speculative subjectivity is not so much invoked as it is replayed, reactivated. If the birth of modern speculative subjectivity is invoked here by Beckett, that is because it is in a relation not just of contiguity with the authorial paradigm, but of *continuity*. It is invoked as being also the birth

(and death) of a certain kind of authorial subjectivity. The old authorial paradigm posits an author who does little more than transcribe sacred passages, receive messages from God, or, according to the Romantic model, channel inspiration from outside himself. As long as writing is transcription and the writing subject believes himself to be a kind of puppet of outside forces, without a properly subjective force interfering because it is either absent or repressed, the old paradigm of the author can be said to function. As soon as there is interference from a properly subjective force, as there is explicitly and thematically in the Romantic period, for example, the model is in full crisis. In other words, with the appearance of the modern subject – the whole subject who stakes an ontological claim on his tautological thought gesture – both the paradigm of divine authorship and the modern subject are immediately challenged by the very means of their founding, the gesture of radical thought, even if the effects take a long time to develop. Centuries separate the dawn of modernity and the Romantic period, but the threat is there all along. As long as the thought is contained and foreclosed, as it is by Descartes, the subject “is.” As long as writing just transcribes and forecloses this founding gesture, the author – or rather the subject that has come to hold the author’s place – stands. However, when the modern subject of the enunciation “I think, therefore I am” begins to think and write *for himself*, without divine guarantee and protection, it can be said that a true subjective force comes to inhabit the authorial position and to undermine not only the purported objectivity of the latter, but also its own basic wholeness, its basic foundation. Thus, if in inhabiting the authorial position the subject should embark upon writing that is not mere transcription, the subject will end up split on the shoals of non-self-identity, the effect of his or her own doubling and multiplying. Thus, one arrives at the point of the modern, dying author undone by his or her own subjective force from within.

One can certainly read the cited passage as another instance of the agony of the modern author, where agony must also be understood as the (losing) agonistic relation of the author with his doubles, something for which there is plenty of evidence (reducing the competing voices to mere creation, but having to acquiesce that they, not he, are divine). However, given the special nature of the narrative voice and its global perspective, it is safe to say that Beckett takes things a good deal further. Perhaps one could describe the failure of the old authorial paradigm as Beckett replays it in this way: For Beckett, the question then arises whether writing, understood as modern scription, to borrow a term from Barthes, must inevitably repeat the Cartesian gesture of foreclosed thinking, or whether, rather than closing thought off as the Cartesian gesture does, it opens up to thought in a whole new way. Writing, when considered otherwise than as simple inscription, is a mode of thought, a repetition in the Deleuzian sense of a gesture (the Cartesian gesture) that opens the door to multiplicity and to variations where the original, the self-identical subject, is inevitably lost and irrecoverable. I think, therefore *I write* is closer to the state of the subject, with nothing tying it to the “I am” part of the Cartesian equation, thereby rendering it a pure epistemological function rather than an existent, an ontological construct. With Beckett, the reader comes to see that “I write,” seen apart from “who writes” or “who speaks,” comes to be the repository of generic subjectivity, a neutral writing without ownership by a speaking something – the author who was the harbinger of a greater crisis and the “pretext” for looking at the greater “text” of the subject, also a pure function.

At this point, it is worth taking stock of the author-function figured by Beckett in his text, again with the help of filmic terms. Beckett performs exactly the kind of “architectonic analysis”¹⁰ of literature that uncovers subject-functions that Foucault envisions for the reader,

¹⁰ Foucault, “What is an Author,” 137.

making the author-function come to light in the text. Further, the peculiarly Cartesian “cast” and the *plan* of indeterminate space of a cleaning of the subjective house manifested by this moment, the reader can recognize that the *speculative* author-function is split over three terms, as the analysis earlier showed, such that the author is the point of support for doubles who exceed him in the functioning of the subject. What is more, genius author has been replaced by a “jean-ious” author function, if I may be forgiven this pun. Beckett’s scene of birth folded into the death of the subject, the speaking something, the author, is not pure function. For even if subjectivity is seen as a function, that function is still a *speculative* function. Foucault thus remains indebted to Descartes, opening up the speculative function to time and becoming, taking away its purported part of eternity, but not its sheer speculative thrust. If we understand thinking as thought deployed over time, the thinking is in essence the gesture of writing whose essence lies less in the act of scription or recording than in the unfolding of thought. This is of course the authorial subject considered in its most basic founding gesture, “I think, therefore I write.” And this too, as Beckett reminds us, is a speculative moment when thought and writing are linked, as they are here.

What follows from the author and the subjectivity being speculative functions is that a remnant of the subject not explained (away) by the functionality remains as a haunting, absented presence, a kind of repressed of thought, a foreign object that obscures as much as it necessitates the intervention of the function. One cannot in good faith simply brush it aside, something the metaphysical tradition itself did not dare to do, calling it instead physical substance. But recourse to such concepts is untenable because it is as arbitrary as brushing the repressed part aside. A new name does nothing to address its state or its status. One must maintain the afore-mentioned continuity between author and subject and consider the real split. The real fissure in question, if

the continuity between the concepts “author” and “subject” is accepted, lies elsewhere. This becomes apparent when the rest of the Cartesian equation, the “I am” part of the equation held apart from the function of the equation – the subjectivity – is upheld. This is perhaps where the real split lies. The split in the speculative sphere is only apparent and harmless compared to the gulf separating the speculative function from the substratum of the subject, the “bare life” – to borrow, perhaps prematurely, a term from Giorgio Agamben’s work.

It is thus in an admittedly paradoxical move that Beckett shows the limits of the speculative author function, in a sense subverting the Foucauldian mode in a Foucauldian move to make way for the real fissure of the thinking subject *tout court*. It should be recalled that Foucault, in the essay under discussion here, is interested in discussing the waning of authorship and the neutrality of discourse and of speech. His aim is not to discuss what this vision represses or ignores conceptually, even as, throughout his *oeuvre*, Foucault champions its sort with a new politics of action over dialectical dialogue. My argument here is thus limited to Foucault’s concept of the author function grasped at what is arguably a crucial moment for Foucault’s *oeuvre*, but it is in no way a judgment of Foucault’s entire *oeuvre* viewed globally. Indeed, Foucault admits that the famous Beckettian question of who speaks, what matter who speaks, touches on the predicament of the subject, and not just the author who is ethically bound to speak in a neutral mode. It is, however, Beckett’s aim, if we read him a certain way, to show the limits of the author function and to point to what lies beyond: the subject who speaks and whose apparent unity belies the teeming multiplicity at work in subjectivity once subjectivity is embarked upon, once it is activated. To put it in other words, the problem is not who speaks (attribution) but that one speaks at all, that one thinks, and whether this thought must necessarily reintroduce the false paradoxes of speculation (exclusion).

By laying bare the limits of the author function, Beckett shows its uses and arrives at the impossible voice of the authorial subject. If for Beckett the authorial voice is, as it is for Foucault, nothing but a function of a subjectivity in crisis situated in the breach between its ordinary text of speculative thought – which introduces a fissure in its center – and the world, this authorship does not redeem anything. It does not save or assuage, but neither does it glorify the subject in any way. It could be said that in this function is expressed, in brutally lucid terms, the subject's moment of authenticity – another important term in the discourse of the subject – which, to put it in Heideggerian terms, is only partially, or almost, ontical (of the real world) and in large measure ontological (or virtual, of the text). In that sense it could be said that the author function is the last shred or vestige of a discourse of *authenticity* where the subject and the author coincide. However, in Beckett, we clearly see a split performed where authenticity is dispersed to the side of the author, not the subject. That is, the subject, or subjectivity, seems to exceed the authorial function, which becomes the repository of authenticity lodged between the ontical and the ontological activated at certain speculative moments (and not given for eternity). The subject's ontical part that goes steadfastly against the Heideggerian grain, as the latter sees *Dasein* as pure ontological construct remains unaccounted for, because the subject, false divisions aside, is a messier affair. The subject seems to precede the text – hence Beckett's enigmatic “before” – but the author comes and goes with the text, being instantiated by it.

Immediately the question arises whether this is an untenable vision of the subject, and whether to say that the subject precedes – something with which Beckett's narrative voice experiments – is necessarily to posit a subject-substance already there beforehand and not arising with the text as a function. In the mode of repetition, and in a mode of opening old paradoxes to the questioning of thought, it is my view that Beckett does not posit the “preceding” subject as a

purely metaphysical proposition, a new version of the thinking substance. In pitting an old speculative paradox against itself, Beckett seems to be advocating for a different vision of the subject, one that does not simply repeat the mind-body split to “solve” the paradox, but dwells within that paradox, within its breach. We therefore must see the subject itself as nothing more or less than instantiated by the text that is thought, arising through the mirror-stage, to borrow from Lacan, of the speculative mind. Nothing more or less than a *function* of discourse with – and this is what Beckett adds to the discourse of subjectivity – a significant virtual remnant that must be accounted for.

To put it more precisely, Beckett, in a Foucauldian mode, rejects the migration to ontology, to the “I am” that logically concludes the speculative equation. Beckett favors instead a pure performance of the subject through speech that exhausts thought and its attendant speculative paradoxes, exhausting all of them except, perhaps, one: the ontological, material remnant of the subject.¹¹ It is the material remnant of the subject, that inexhaustible, muttering unknown, that provides the real proof of the failure of ontology and of traditional ontological concepts that are nothing but hasty afterthoughts and latecomers to the western speculative scene, and which cannot account for human subjectivity.

The fact that these questions are being raised in a text that is not philosophical but literary should alert one to a certain ethical mission, one signaled by Foucault in his essay, that now resolutely lies within the purview of literature, belonging to it rather than to philosophy viewed in the traditional manner. Literature must witness to this substratum, the inaccessible real, of subjectivity as existent. It is not enough to declare the age one of epistemology, where

¹¹ While for Deleuze it is an exhaustion of language that Beckett attempts, I take the idea of exhaustion in a slightly different direction, one perhaps not as radical as Deleuze’s but perhaps one less abstract: exhausting the concept of ontology, of subjective ontological being.

knowledge and power are seen as related and one must track power down to its epistemological lair by way of functions rather than existents in the world. To put it in Foucauldian terms, one must rein the function in and maintain it in the in-between space – resolutely between the repressed world and the text, the realm of the virtual, but then one must make another (Beckettian) leap deeper into the heart of speculative skepticism – that is to say, to its outside, its surface or skin – and come back to *witness* to the bare existent.¹²

6. “I am Matthew and I am the Angel.” (Return to Beckett II)

I stated earlier that it is necessary to look at both the structure of and the specific figures invoked in the fragment. Regarding the structure, we may well ask what purpose there might be to its replicating the cadence of “I am the alpha and the omega” spoken by the voice of the Divine. To formulate it in the terms under discussion here, the question is whether this obvious allusion somehow ‘seals the deal’ on a newly-humanized subject that actually used to be just another version of God, in that alluding to the speech of God we are reminded of what has been evacuated from the narrator’s pronouncement, the thinking divine subject, and of what remains, the old problematic of the subject re-inscribed in new terms. As I interpret it, Beckett writes in a recognizable cadence beyond the religious paradigm and in a new cosmogony to drive home the point that the human subject, in his or her human speech always already muddled by and in the mode of writing, must be sufficient unto him or herself, except that the sufficiency unto self is not of the atemporal creative kind, as in Descartes. I think therefore I write is not the conclusion here. The subject writes, but in an infinite distance from himself. It is impossible to speak as speech is divine, so that the spoken word is God’s. Every human spoken word is already in the

¹² This, along with Agamben’s concept of bare life and Agamben’s notion of “the time of the end,” is taken up in the next chapter. What Beckett shows is a reified, arrested subjectivity by means of a text marked by movement. He inscribes it in time, Agamben’s redeemed time.

mode of *writing*, this mode that captures and is only possible because of the short circuit of Cartesian subjectivity. It is as if Beckett had split off subjective self-sufficiency from the creative act. The sufficiency, instead, is an *ethical* one, an injunction to ethics as he or she encounters other subjects. The creative act is one that, in conjuring figures of others – or even of the self, who is always other in the act of writing because of the element of time that is inherent in writing – bears the mark of the radical split from the divine. The contour of the subject would thus appear to be a human writing subject bound by time and faced with an injunction to ethics. To this I have proposed to add the function of witness, the writing witness suggested by the figures of Matthew and the angel, and it is to them that I now turn.

While the purpose of this chapter is not to delve into New Testament Studies, even the cursory glance at Matthew that I propose here is revelatory. Matthew is the most popular and widely read of the evangelists, having given rise to many artistic adaptations (Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *The Gospel According to St. Matthew (Il vangelo secondo Matteo*, 1964) is just one example among others). Furthermore, his is a controversy-laden gospel, given that tradition had it that Matthew held a position of priority among the evangelists, but newer scholarship has revealed that Matthew is actually the most derivative of the group. Once believed to have written in Hebrew and thus considered to possess the greatest degree of authenticity of all the gospels, Matthew has been taken down a notch by contemporary scholars, who agree that he wrote in Greek. While Matthew was formerly considered first among the evangelists because of the accessibility of a text thought to be authentic and because he includes the infancy of Christ, biblical scholarship over the centuries has revealed that the apostle Matthew did not in fact even write the gospel that bears his name. The authenticity of his authorship has suffered on highly significant grounds. Matthew the writer, a tax collector and Jewish-Christian convert, probably

knew the disciple Matthew whose account he *recounts*, but his is not the eye-witness account that it was once believed to be. The gospel according to Matthew, scholars agree, uses *other* sources, the gospel according to Mark and the so-called *Quelle* sources, to tell the tale of Christ.

Other distinguishing characteristics of Matthew include his heavy allusiveness to Old Testament prophecy that finds echoes in Christ's life. He makes use of references more than the other evangelists. Unlike Luke, who chooses to trace Christ's lineage on Mary's side, Matthew gives Christ Joseph's genealogy, thus establishing a legal ancestry that proves that Christ is a legitimate successor to David's kingly throne. The allusions to the Old Testament serve a purpose similar to that of the genealogy – establishing a certain lineage of tradition and legitimacy – but the picture of Jesus they paint shows him as *fulfilling* the Old Testament and the old law. Matthew presents Jesus as a greater Moses. Furthermore, Matthew spends a good deal of narrative time discussing the *Parousia*, the second coming of Christ, emphasizing that he himself is living in the last days but that the judgment of God is indefinitely delayed. Finally, Matthew is the only evangelist to mention Peter as the foundational “rock” of the Holy Church built upon him. He is thus the only one to convey a sense of organizational tradition in a way that shows clearly the importance of the concept of foundation and origin.

Let us consider, based on the characteristics laid out above, what Beckett's choice of Matthew might signify for Beckett's scene of the subject. As the only gospel to mention the church as an institution, as I have just mentioned, there is an element of ‘institution consciousness’ to Matthew that is remarkable in its own right, but combined with the other characteristics mentioned makes Matthew's gospel stand out as sharing ground with a recognizable problematic, one with which Beckett also shares common ground. It is not an exaggeration to say that Matthew's ‘institution consciousness’ combined with his fraught

authorship is suggestive of a certain discourse of authorship understood as a phenomenon in a network that arises in poststructuralist French theory. Indeed, to put it quite plainly, Matthew is the Beckettian evangelist *par excellence*. and What could be more suggestive of the fate of the authorial voice – the writer taken down a notch and understood not as divine voice or genius, but as a human subject inscribed in cultural networks – than the first evangelist who comes to be seen as last. Beckett’s choice is thus a programmatic one. In having his narrator identify with the figure of Matthew, Beckett is of course raising the problem in and for his own work of a host of problems, only one of which is whose version is being told. Indeed, *The Unnamable* is written in the third person like the gospel according to Matthew, and like it has a narrator whose reliability is questionable at best. What Beckett has enacted here is therefore not only a scene of Cartesian subjectivity revisited, but the scene of the authorial voice or author visited by a cutting-down of his status. Beckett manages to leverage religion to lift the heavy stone of the myth of the author, allowing the writing subject *witness* to emerge on the scene. In one fell swoop, Beckett manages to dispel not only the religious fiction of God the creator who wants our imploring eyes upon him, but also the fiction of the god-like author modeled upon this same God. All that is left is a human writer engaged in the eminently human activity of witnessing to an element of the divine he has not even seen firsthand, but knows because he is inscribed in a network of other writer-witnesses.

There is more to be said regarding the nuanced nature of witnessing being proposed here. This regards both the nature of the witness and the “evental” quality of writing by that writer-witness, and again the intertext with Matthew, if we can call this allusive use of his name an intertext as it is normally understood, is instrumental to grasping both. On a very fundamental level, Beckett, in turning the authorial voice into an evangelist’s witnessing, is claiming a certain

status for the artistic creation of that witnessing subject. The witnessing subject – human, fallen and unfulfilled though he might be – has nothing less than the power to write an event, just as the evangelist effectively writes the event of Christ in which Christ lives on. It is the event as written that has the power of persuasion and conversion. Under Beckett’s pen, the figure of Matthew might even be said to have a Paulinian quality, whereby in a sense it does not even matter whether one has seen Christ as an eyewitness, provided one believes in the good news and spreads it to others. What this amounts to in the case of artistic creation, which is a topic situated in the *hors champ* of the scene of the Cartesian subject, is that it too has the power to persuade, but it persuades in a typically Beckettian mode of *unfulfillment*, something that I will discuss in the next chapter.

The nature of the witness needs a fuller explanation. Among the distinguishing characteristics of Matthew’s gospel is his treatment of the scene at the tomb after the resurrection of Christ. While the other evangelists tell us that the apostles saw a young man who greets them and imparts the good news, Matthew tells us that it is an *angel* who stands there. Why should it be noteworthy that an angel rather than a man has witnessed the great, founding event of Christianity? In asking this question I am more than hinting that the significance – one upon which Beckett also insists in collapsing the figures of the angel and Matthew in the statement of identity of the narrator with those figures – puts us at the center of the paradox of writing *as witnessing*. If for Beckett the authorial voice in the guise of the narrator writes in the mode of witnessing of the evangelist, Beckett then takes the analogy one step further by making the witnessing that of an angel. A witness must be both human *and* an angel. In other words, the writing-witnessing that is left to the narrator has a dimension of *impossibility* about it that cannot be dispelled by availing oneself of a divine status for the authorial voice, which as I have already

argued went the way of the religious paradigm – at least in Beckett’s view, if not in that of the average reader, or even the average literary critic. It would seem that for Beckett the writer witness is engaged in a witnessing whose constituent element *is* precisely its very impossibility. The impossible witness and the event have powers essentially analogous to the evangelist’s as well as an equally impossible measure of blind angelic vision and superhuman perseverance past the limits of exhaustion. To sum up, the writing-witnessing proposed here and understood as a new formulation of the predicament of the *writing*-subject (that Cartesian remnant) has the impossible function of creating an event of momentous persuasive powers. In a discussion that I reserve for the next chapter but want to suggest here, in the last section of this chapter, these persuasive powers of the subject- witness, to be discussed in resonance with Barthes and Agamben have to do with nothing less than the cipher of ethics that arises as the new *hors cadre* of the paradox.

7. “Profaning” the Subject: Agamben’s Account of Foucault’s Author-Function

The question of the authorial subjectivity, and in particular the development that it receives in the hands of Michel Foucault in the famous lecture presented before the Société Française de Philosophie in 1969 and later published as an essay, continues to be a source of interest, as attested to by the recent engagement with the essay undertaken by one of the most original figures – one could even call him an *extrapolation* – of Franco-Italian thought today, Giorgio Agamben. In a book that appeared in 2005, *Profanazioni* (trans. *Profanations*, 2007), Agamben devotes an entire chapter, “The Author as Gesture,” to the question. A very different figure, the well-known Anglophone literary critic, Terry Eagleton, also mentions Foucault, but

under very different circumstances, in a 2008 review of a book on literary anonymity.¹³ This mention would not bear repetition here, were it not that Foucault is mentioned in passing and with a degree of hostility that gives one pause. Before analyzing Agamben's engagement with Foucault, which permits one to take a real measure of the critical power of Foucault's concept, it is worth looking at Eagleton's lack thereof as a kind of symptom of the status of Foucault's concept in recent criticism – its current critical after-life, as it were – standing as a useful contrast to Agamben's approach and putting it in starker relief.

In an article entitled "Unhoused," Eagleton begins with the declaration that "all literary works are anonymous," invoking immediately the pillars of a certain criticism that insists on the independence of the work from its author, "come adrift from its source."¹⁴ The writer does not have the final say on the work. Neither does the reader, since literature, being portable, necessarily acquires new meanings as it enters new contexts. Eagleton even denies literature having any real-life original context, inscribing it instead in a hermeneutical free circulation that he associates with the name of Walter Benjamin and his philosophy of history. There is a kind of potential to literature that is actualized at different points in its afterlife as a function of a new readership and new historical context that simply cannot be predicted and which might possibly never be fully realized. Thus far, Eagleton reads like a faithful adherent to the kind of criticism espoused by Foucault, but in the second paragraph he attenuates his seeming espousal. Literary works are only "to some extent cut free from those who engender them," and his tone becomes much more guarded vis-à-vis "such Parisian formulas as the Death of the Author."¹⁵ Significantly the author of this formula goes unnamed at this point in Eagleton's piece, and as an

¹³ Terry Eagleton, "Unhoused," *London Review of Books*, vol. 30, no. 10, May 22 2008 (<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n10/terry-eagleton/unhoused>, accessed 10/01/2010).

¹⁴ Eagleton, "Unhoused," 1.

¹⁵ Eagleton, "Unhoused," 1 and 2, respectively.

antidote to the presumably heavy-handed theorizing by Parisian authors to whom some have become “allergic,” Eagleton instead looks for other sources, literary authors themselves who say or imply something similar or even in synch with such theories without actually theorizing or stating explicitly that which today elicits such purported allergic reactions. It is as if Eagleton wished to show, on the one hand, that the cutting loose of the work of art is as obvious, natural and critically undeniable as it is critically untenable for “Parisian” theory and its avatars today to champion it as doctrine.

Eagleton’s disregard for the instigators of such doctrine contradicts his own insistence on the author mattering after all and strikes one as an odd, unresolved contradiction in his article. He suggests that for reasons not fully developed in the article but only hinted at as being grandiosity, elitism, and exclusivity – all qualities of the city that harbors these doctrines and which the author of the book being reviewed successfully avoids – such theories have today become obsolete, unnecessary and inert. Eagleton even exhibits downright hostility when he declares,

Even so, the author is not quite dead. It is true, as Paul Valéry pointed out, that many things are involved in the creation of a work of art besides an author; but this is to demote authors rather than to annihilate them. ‘What does it matter who is speaking?’ Michel Foucault famously scoffed. In real life, it can matter quite a lot. In literary affairs, too, knowing who wrote a piece can be important.¹⁶

To say that Foucault “scoffed” is a gross misrepresentation, to say the least. One wonders why Foucault receives the cavalier treatment that he does at the hands of Eagleton, who not only inexplicably confounds him with Barthes but seems to forget that it is Samuel Beckett who is quoted, and that Foucault is well aware at the time of the delivery of the address that houses the offending quote of the dangers incurred by authors, as well as of the history of authorship, which arises precisely as part of punitive measures against those who speak heresy or

¹⁶ Eagleton, “Unhoused,” 1.

disseminate otherwise objectionable views. One wonders whether, despite the favorable remark that “Mullan’s *Anonymity* [the book Eagleton is reviewing] is far from such grandiose reflections” as parsing the author from his function, intentionality, etc., Eagleton is secretly irked by a book he sees as possessing shortcomings, among which one might include its not treating that degree of anonymity that every work is supposed to possess, as Eagleton himself claims at the outset of the review.

The only explicit criticism that Eagleton makes of Michel Foucault – this time at least not misdirecting his remark – is that Foucault comes to see the very category of authorship as kind of omnipresent “intellectual policing” that does not envision any use for the author. Whether one agrees with that or not, it is Eagleton’s afore-mentioned off-hand, almost reflexive hostility that gives critical pause. For there is no veiling the fact that Eagleton is irked by Foucault, and even more so by Barthes, as if even having to think about them when less grandiose, more modest and laudable approaches have become the intellectual mainstream somehow produced unresolved, unconscious, undesirable critical stirrings. Eagleton mentions a certain “strain of Modernism” that becomes the refuge for subjectivity, which later, on the postmodern scene, becomes personality as interchangeable commodity. Perhaps such grandiose flights of intellectual fancy as the neutralizing discourses of Foucault and Barthes that, paradoxically, hinge on subjectivity that is less a refuge than an ineluctable remnant that continues to linger in postmodernism continue to produce odd stirrings in the critic because they are still pertinent. Eagleton’s review, though hardly a real engagement with these thinkers, is precisely interesting for the minor register in which it captures their relegated status, but also their repressed *relevance* today.

Agamben takes a very different approach that, as I show, addresses precisely the kind of critical disregard and disuse illustrated by Eagleton’s minor encounter with Foucault, instead

looking squarely at the operative contradiction in Foucault as programmatically sustained contradiction. Agamben sees it not as something accidental and needing to be overcome – and certainly not in the disingenuous manner of Eagleton who deliberately misses the subtlety of Foucault’s use of the quote, seeing *it* as a disingenuous scoffing – but as the epicenter of the problematic of the author. Agamben retraces the major points and insights of the lecture, doing justice to the operative contradiction anchoring the talk that he thinks, “seems to evoke the secret theme of the lecture.”¹⁷ With the term secret, Agamben is doubtless not evoking an old-fashioned approach to texts, namely, interpretation that pierces the surface of the text to get at its secret matter. Nor is he implying that Foucault is trying to hide something from view. Perhaps he uses the term secret because the scandalous or shocking nature of what the talk is proposing lies elsewhere than might be supposed at first. The “secret” theme of the lecture is not so much the split of the living author from the author-function, the latter being the pronounced theme of the lecture, but rather just that productive tension that arises from pitting that constitutive indifference toward the author that Foucault is championing – and which receives such a strong iteration in the words of Beckett, “What matter who’s speaking, someone said what matter who’s speaking,”¹⁸ quoted at the beginning of the lecture by Foucault – against the seeming opposite of indifference to the matter of who is speaking, as evidenced by the very same quote. As Agamben sees it, the operative tension brought to light by Beckett is that there remains *someone* speaking, without whom the denial of the importance of the speaker could not be made: “There is thus someone who, while remaining anonymous and faceless, proffered this statement, someone

¹⁷ Agamben, *Profanations*, 61.

¹⁸ Beckett 1955/1974. The quote is from the third, untitled text of the collection *Textes pour rien*, published in French in 1955 (« Qu’importe qui parle, quelqu’un a dit qu’importe qui parle »). The English translation did not appear until 1974: as *Texts for Nothing*. The quote from the English edition is as follows: “What matter who’s speaking, someone said what matter who’s speaking” (1974: 16, *The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989*: 109). Foucault invokes the French original quote, translated from the French in the English text of Foucault’s lecture: “‘What does it matter who is speaking,’ someone said, ‘what does it matter who is speaking?’” (Foucault, “What is an Author?,” 101).

without whom the thesis denying the importance of the one who speaks could not have been formulated. The same gesture that deprives the identity of the author of all relevance nevertheless affirms his irreducible necessity.”¹⁹ Thus, rather than simply scuttling an old notion of the author, which he does – and this is perhaps where the misunderstanding implicit in Eagleton’s remarks comes in –, Foucault goes further and raises the riddle of the irreducible author, the function that necessarily arises under certain textual circumstances that include both literary and scientific ones, but which does not amount to the subject of plenitude, or anything like the author in the real world. That the author-function is wedged between the margins of the text and its outside – *outside* understood as a non-exterior limit or surface of the text, and which was amply developed in the previous chapter and does not need reiteration here.

What does merit a closer look here are two important elements of this instance of re-opening of the discussion of the author: the Beckett quote and the notion of the “secret theme” of the lecture, which Agamben recalls and insinuates, respectively, without giving any further explicit – that is *explicated* – development. I reserve the discussion of these two elements for later, as one must grasp Agamben’s concept of authorial gesture *tout court* before one can appreciate the subtlety of the gestural nature of Agamben’s move to reopen the question of the author. As I show later, the gestural nature of Agamben’s move is the proper context for understanding the insinuation and the all too obvious contradiction that work hand in hand.

In his discussion, Agamben sees fit to allude to this discussion taken up two years later in a modified version of the lecture that Foucault presented at SUNY Buffalo. According to Agamben, the distinction between the author-individual and the author-function is here stated by way of “an even more drastic opposition,” one that is inscribed in a strategy that is “marked by a

¹⁹ Agamben, *Profanations*, 61-62.

profound gesture” on the part of Foucault. The profound gesture is Foucault’s insistence, on the one hand, on the proper context of the discussion of the author-subject, *subjectivity as such or as a broader phenomenon*, and on the other, on the nature of the subject in question who, as Agamben reminds us, is “present in his research only through the objective processes of subjectivation that constitute this subject and the apparatuses that inscribe and capture it in the mechanisms of power.” In other words, the author function is just one iteration among others arising in a broader network of power relations that reads, or registers, something like a subject that crosses its path, that provides resistance. Without the apparatuses of power, the subject would remain a sheer invention or fiction. On the other hand, without the subject, there would be no apparatus either. Their co-dependence thus has a Münchhausean quality. Agamben, whose goal seems to be to reactualize Foucault’s claims in all their subtlety, is right to evoke at this point the critics of Foucault to point out their misunderstanding – blatant or latent – that continues to hang like a fog around Foucault. These critics raise charges against Foucault of abstraction and aestheticization – both of which amount to a disregard for the purported individual and for subjectivity in the world – against Foucault’s subject that is subjectivized by power, by external force. Agamben’s countercharge is, “a certain incoherence,”²⁰ on the part of the critics, whose extrapolation to an aestheticized *objective* subjectivity that purportedly ignores another objectivity in the world, the individual subject, misses Foucault’s point. These critics need to be reminded that subjectivization as a process does not yield objective “things” called subjects, but rather traces of a resistance, or of an absence in the case of the author. It is not that the individual subject is effaced, as Agamben is quick to point out. Rather, the process of its arising as a subject – the instance of resistance recognizable or readable by power in its very

²⁰ Agamben, *Profanations*, 64.

opacity and inscrutability, or its emerging in a certain kind of text, which amounts to the same thing – is something altogether different from a traditionally understood objective thing with ascribable truth value. The arising of a subject as viewed from Foucault’s perspective – if we take to heart the lesson of Foucault reiterated by Agamben – is a more neutral process that is *not* geared to producing what one might call the *fictions* of individual subjects understood as plenitude. One can, of course, think of examples of apparatuses of power – nineteenth century literary criticism heavily based in biography, and nineteenth century humanist discourse, to give just two examples that served as targets of Foucault’s critique – that do, precisely, give rise to subjects understood in the mode of plenitude, but these examples serve to drive Foucault’s point home with added impetus: the apparatus of power is not itself a neutral recording device of the subject, giving its true image. It must be kept in mind that it produces fictions. Looked at under a certain angle, the impossible “truth” of the subject appears as a kind of negative image. By a certain angle I mean an oblique view that eschews the purportedly truthful “head-on” image of the subject captured by humanist discourse. The impossible “truth” of the subject appears only as a necessarily missing negative image: that impossible image before development that, in the case of the photograph – that indexical imprint of reality – is beyond the “grain” of the developed image; in the case of the image of the subject as captured by an apparatus of power, the image can at best be *against* the grain because it cannot elude the instant of development that is the encounter with power. To put in other words, the process of accounting for the arising of a subject viewed from Foucault’s perspective involves accounting for the fleeting phenomena of ephemeral subjects – who appear sometimes as famous authors, sometimes as infamous monsters, depending on the apparatus of power they encounter and which develops their image. What Foucault introduces conceptually to the process of scrutinizing the arising of a subject

viewed from this perspective – in a step *dans un deuxième temps* that is actually only conceptually but not temporally removed from the process – makes visible what has always been there. The accounting for a subject *is* at once the instantiation of that subject. Foucault goes one step further to point to something like a negative image of the subject, an imprint impossible to represent because it is simultaneously developed into an image by power according to that power's desires and its systemic settings. In other words, to move a bit ahead here in order to give examples, Mathurin Milan and Jean-Antoine Touzard, the exemplary infamous-subjects, must necessarily appear as perverts because that is the filter that captures them, but this is one perspective on them among others that can be adopted. Without suggesting too much conceptual depth, but rather a certain danger of conceptual shipwreck, their infamous subjectivity is only the tip of the conceptual iceberg that is the subject. The infamous subjectivity says nothing about their ethical status as subjects, precisely the playing out of their very lives as subjects as Agamben goes on to suggest. It says nothing about the negative, invisible image of that subject, its face hidden from sight.

To come back to Agamben's reading of Foucault, Agamben sees fit to bring a new term to the table of this discussion. He ascribes the term "gesture" to the paradigm of the author as developed by Foucault. Agamben finds justification for this term in a text by Foucault from 1977, "Lives of Infamous Men,"²¹ which he claims "contains something like the cipher of the lecture on the author: the infamous life somehow constitutes the paradigm of the presence-absence of the author in the work."²² Referring to this text, Agamben takes the notion of the (infamous) subject caught up in power and thus, and only thus, become subject – something on which Foucault insists on occasions too many to mention – to draw a parallel between infamy

²¹ Michel Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men," *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: New Press, 2000.

²² Agamben, *Profanations*, 66.

and authorship via the term “gesture.” This term is something new that Agamben brings to the discussion : “If we call ‘gesture’ what remains unexpressed in each expressive act, we can say that, exactly like infamy, the author is present in the text only as a gesture that makes expression possible precisely by establishing a central emptiness within this expression.”²³ The gesture being separate from the expressive act is a kind of substrate of inexhaustibility, or inexhaustible potentiality of acts, subtending that expression. In this, Agamben is in tune with his earlier philosophy, in which, for example, he develops a concept of community where belonging is first and foremost to the shared quality of possessing no special qualities whatsoever, a ground zero of community that is also inexhaustible because all-inclusive, and by extension inexpressive because possessing no qualities to express, and thus unrepresentable.

Agamben then reaches for the consummate Agambenian term, the *threshold*, to account for the space of that elusive infamous subject understood as the author-function associated with certain acts and doctrines readable through archival traces. Speaking of two notorious subjects, Mathurin Milan and Jean-Antoine Touzard (“vagabond” and “atheist sodomite sexton,” respectively) – in essence, “authors” of unspeakable acts and doctrines who appear for us only because they become enmeshed in the institutions of power, the prison and the juridical system – Agamben writes:

Where is Mathurin Milan? Where is Jean-Antoine Touzard? Certainly not in the laconic notes that register their presence in the archive of infamy. Nor are they outside the archive, in a biographical reality of which we know literally nothing. They stand on the threshold of the text in which they are put into play, or, rather, their absence, their eternal turning away, is marked on the outer edge of the archive, like the gesture that has both rendered it possible and exceeded and nullified its intention.²⁴

In other words, their paradoxical presence vis-à-vis the text is a *gesture* – to which they are nevertheless *not* identical, if we read Agamben carefully, as they are always exceeded by some

²³ Agamben, *Profanations*, 66.

²⁴ Agamben, *Profanations*, 67.

unaccountable remnant – a gesture located on the *threshold* of a text from which they are absent in a process of continued absencing.

Whatever Foucault's, and Agamben's, critics might think of this restatement of the paradoxical paradigm of the author (and subject) – which in gaining from Agamben's poetical *mot juste* loses some of its enigmatic quality but none of its paradoxical essence – there is another aspect to consider that goes beyond Agamben's "gesture" of restatement being simply a poetic play with the language of Foucault's statement of some key concepts. Agamben comes back, significantly, to the question of ethics, which has perhaps had less attention from critics in the context of the new subjectivity than it merits – even though from the start the question of ethics looms large for Foucault, for whom the new neutrality of authorship *is* the new ethical imperative. One ought not to dismiss the ethical dimension of the author-function as yet another textual construct not borne out by, or divorced from, the so-called real world. One certainly should not dismiss it because one has simply not grasped the nature of this ethical dimension of the new paradigm of the author-function, taking it for an objective abstraction far removed from the field of ethics reserved for "flesh and blood" individual subjects caught up in their worldly engagements. At best, certain critics were able to see engaged literature, of the sort championed by Sartre, as possessing an ethical dimension. For this reason, Agamben's revisiting and reactualizing of the debate on the author-function come as a welcome corrective to the *méconnaissance* surrounding the ethics of the author-function, and it is worth looking in depth at what he says regarding it.

To reiterate, the author-function is a gesture located on the threshold of a text that makes expression possible without itself being expressed, either in biographical "life" or in the words of the text. The threshold is a constitutive emptiness within expression. Furthermore, the expression

itself is not harnessed for purposes of representation or intention to that authorial subjectivity, which shares everything, according to Agamben, with the infamous criminal subjectivity that appears – behind, through, even virtually on – the surface of a text not unlike, one might add, an anamorphic image. Furthermore, one could conclude from reading Foucault via Agamben that this anamorphic image appears *despite* any stated agenda of representation (in the case of literary texts) or the absence thereof (in the case of juridical recordings) and thanks to the fact that, as Agamben puts it, “they are ‘played out’ or ‘put into play’ in these sentences; their freedom and their disgrace are risked and decided.”²⁵ It is this “playing out,” beyond any ascriptions of theatricality one could make to it, that possesses an ethical dimension. In other words, the ethical dimension arises with the infamous subject, whose taking risks to be what it is and “playing out” its life in an authentic²⁶ fashion – rather than presumably repressing its desires in accordance with the wishes of higher powers – leaves traces on the apparatus of power that captures it. This playing out is ethical in a sense that bears repeating here: “A life is ethical not when it simply submits to moral laws but when it accepts putting itself into play in its gestures, irrevocably and without reserve – even at the risk that its happiness or its disgrace will be decided once and for all.”²⁷ The subject risks its very life when, like the good Nietzschean gambler, it puts into play its gestures, be they writerly or of the criminal sort.

In the case of the author, another – or even *the* – instance of the infamous subject, the gesture of “playing out” needs some more careful explanation. It is not that the author’s gesture

²⁵ Agamben, *Profanations*, 67.

²⁶ As I understand it, ethics does try to win back a kind of authenticity of desire, a purely subjective rather than objective thing. I am thus not making a plea for an objective authenticity. I use the word “authenticity” with a view to putting distance between any misunderstood “Heideggerian” sense of the term that smacks of the purity of racism and its attendant objectivity and instead approaching the sense that can be salvaged from Heidegger: the authentic *Dasein* that only arises extremely rarely, an almost virtual because ontological-- *not* ontic-- authenticity that has nothing to do with purity. Authentic thus does not refer to the representation that the subject receives at the hands of power, which selects this particular subject because of certain qualities it projects onto him, but to another authenticity, the unrepresentable one of simply risking being selected by power in the first place that might bear some resemblance to a primal authenticity of *Dasein*.

²⁷ Agamben, *Profanations*, 69.

of writing expresses some sort of ethical imperative. It would perhaps make more sense to say that moral or ethical imperatives of the characters find expression, but not those of the author: “The author marks the point at which a life is offered up and played out in the work. Offered up and played out, not expressed or fulfilled. For this reason, the author can only remain unsatisfied and unsaid in the work. He is the illegible someone who makes reading possible, the legendary emptiness from which writing and discourse issue.”²⁸ Invested in something that is utterly foreign yet intimate to him or her, the work, the author’s life is thus also risked and “played out” in the work, without being expressed in it but rather handing it off to the reader, an important element in this ethics of the author-function. Speaking about literature on the basis of an example taken from poetry, Agamben says the following of the paradoxically illegible gesture that is the author-function making reading possible: “This individual will occupy the empty place in the poem left by the author; he will repeat the same inexpressive gesture the author used to testify to his absence in the work.”²⁹ Perhaps it is only here that one can see the clear meaning of the concept of ethics shared by Foucault and Agamben, and which in the context of the author-function has a concrete *destinataire* of the gesture: one might conclude that ethics, on a very basic level and always tied to a form of life that sometimes arises as the subject, is the inexhaustibility of a gesture proffered to the other, in this instance the reader whose job it is to put into play his or her gesture of readership. Perhaps the ethical nature of the author’s gesture can also be summed up as the ultimate giving away, rather than petty and false ownership, of something that the writer never possessed in the first place – a something that, incidentally, resembles love as defined by Jacques Lacan – in order for the gesture to be repeated by the receiver. The repetition of the gesture – the burden placed on the reader – also possesses an

²⁸ Agamben, *Profanations*, 69-70.

²⁹ Agamben, *Profanations*, 71.

ethical dimension in that restraint and a respect for the poem or work must be exercised that leaves it intact and inexhaustible, rather than consuming it like a product of expression.

Although Agamben does not explicitly address this question, finally the status of Agamben's own gesture of taking up the question of the author-function must itself be understood in the full significance of the term "gesture," including its ethical dimension as developed by Agamben in the chapter of his book in question. Agamben's reopening the discussion is tantamount to exercising authorial power with regard to it, weakened though this power might be in the accounts of both Foucault and Agamben. Or rather, it is precisely because this power is weakened – gone are the mainstay notions of genius, intentionality, ownership by the demiurge author – that the critic's responsibility as writer and reader grows in (inverse) proportion to his diminished status. It is the exercise of the author-function known as "Agamben" who joins the network of this discourse and must henceforth answer for it. In what is an ethical gesture, Agamben accepts the risk inherent in revisiting this question at a time when it seems criticism has moved on, but the risk is less one of ridicule than of *responsibility* for a discourse and what Agamben might be said to add to it. Or to unfold in it, which is equally a matter of responsibility.

What Agamben unfolds in or adds to Foucault is an insinuation of secrecy – heralded by the Beckett quote – to which it is now appropriate to return, as announced earlier. Agamben insinuates secrecy regarding the hidden theme of the lecture, the necessary and *irreducible* author-function, that Agamben then splits off from the explicit theme, the passing away of authorship as we knew it, but at the same time Agamben maintains that the secret is an open secret – open because contradicted by the very quote from Beckett summoned to be its harbinger. Agamben then respects and maintains this secrecy that he attributes to Foucault. As already

stated, Agamben never really explains the provocative insinuation he makes –but one might well ask whether this should simply be interpreted as a projection of a foreign idea on Foucault, an inadvertent remark that says more about the unconscious of the Agambenian author-function (if the latter can even be said to possess such a thing) than it does about Foucault’s discourse. Setting aside the question of whether it is fully conscious or not as unanswerable with any certainty, I suggest a slightly different interpretation: the insinuation is neither an innocent nor even loaded slip (of the Freudian kind) but rather a remark symptomatic of and *programmatically* for the properly Agambenian discourse that extends to authorship and beyond. To put it rather bluntly, the insinuation of secrecy amounts to Agamben’s *profanation* of Foucault: Agamben’s discursive profanation of Foucault’s authorially inscribed gesture *par excellence*, the author-function. Of course, *profanation* must be understood as being the specifically Agambenian authorial gesture vis-à-vis another author’s text. As much as authorial gesture, isolated conceptually as it is by Agamben, possesses the sheer lack of any quality, being a kind of inexhaustible potential, it ought to be added that associated to a specific name, as author-functions inevitably come to be, the authorial gesture must also take some shape, some trajectory, perhaps even the contours of a *style*. That trajectory for Agamben is *profanation*, which is another way of answering what Agamben “adds” to the discourse.

What does it mean for Agamben to operate a profanation of Foucault? Addressing this question necessitates a detour via another chapter of the book *Profanations*, but also the aforementioned closer look at the Beckett quote. If I begin with the quote it is to put into sharper relief the move by Foucault to invoke it in the first place before considering the profanation Foucault’s move and reconceptualization sustain under the pen of Agamben. The Beckett quote is taken from *Textes pour rien*, an early work by Beckett. According to Paul Sheehan, the early fragments

of *Textes pour rien* were often overlooked by critics because they are Beckett before Beckett, written before he became really famous, and because they are perceived as especially impervious to critical handling: “Of all Beckett's works, this one appears to be the most unapproachable and the most critic-proof, resisting all attempts at methodical analysis. Barely more than a circuit of reflective misgiving, the *Texts* are almost entirely patternless, possessing neither the pitiless permutations of Watt nor the compulsive cycles of resignation and hysteria that propel *The Unnamable*.”³⁰ Resisting methodical analysis, they are perhaps just right for a “non-methodical analysis” of the sort executed by Foucault, who does not analyze, but rather lets the quote speak, in its weakness and thus its paradoxical power – minimal, yet monumental. The quote anchors the ship that is his text, but is retractable as all anchors are, giving it freedom to pursue its course. It frames his discourse, as I argued in the previous chapter, already launching or putting into play, through the gesture of invoking it, the new ethics and paradigm of neutralized authorship, of the network of author-functions. Furthermore, choosing what amounts to a critic-repellant Beckettian source among others that are more or less critic-friendly speaks volumes about Foucault’s ambition to tread where other critics do not dare set foot, but perhaps ambition is a misleading term in this context. For it is not critical ambition that drives Foucault, who, again, does not critique or analyze Beckett; one is more justified to speak of Foucault’s desire to respect Beckett as an equal, an author function who speaks in the discourse on the author, and the subject, with equal weight if not with similar terms. Also, as one instance in a “circuit of misgiving,” the quote is well suited to the mood of Foucault’s lecture, which is after all based on an open contradiction and which in an unspoken but palpable way anticipates the misgivings that it elicits, first from the listeners and later, after its publication, from readers and critics.

³⁰ <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/conf/anotherbeckett/sheehan/>, accessed August 10, 2010

Significantly the speaker of the Beckett quote says “qu’importe,” not “peu importe,” the difference being what matters, versus little matters, who speaks. He does not say it matters little who speaks, and neither does Foucault’s lecture. This is a questioning statement rather than an outright value judgment. One could perhaps suggest that the “que” of “qu’importe” might be inviting the reader to toy with *qui*, the subject rather than grammatically suitable object pronoun. The “qu” would thus stand as an amputation of *qui*, in a sense hiding the subject in plain sight in a sentence that is asking something slightly different. This would be a mangled rephrasing of “*celui qui importe est celui qui parle...*” (“the one who matters is the one who speaks”), or “*celui importe qui parle,*” (“he matters who speaks”), which of course alludes to the originary speech of *the* subject par excellence, God. There is also a curious reading that can be done of the English translation: “what matter who’s speaking” becomes the genitive *whose* speaking, putting emphasis on the substance of speech by making it a grammatical substantive while casting doubt on the value of its attribution to a subjective source, on the ownership of what is said. Speculative though all these suggested readings may be, they nevertheless give pause and suggest another reason why the quote constitutes an apt choice for the lecture.

In the chapter of *Profanations* entitled “In Praise of Profanation,” Agamben comes back, as he often does, to classical roots, the Roman jurists who play an important role elsewhere in his oeuvre.³¹ Here, they allow him to reclaim what is in the period of late capitalism an obscured meaning of “to profane.” According to these Roman sources, Agamben reminds us, “if ‘to consecrate’ (*sacrare*) was the term that indicated the removal of things from the sphere of human law, ‘to profane’ meant, conversely, to return them to the free use of men.”³² Consecrating a person or thing marked it as belonging to the gods: these persons or things “could neither be sold

³¹ See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, for example, as well as Agamben, *The State of Exception*.

³² Agamben, *Profanations*, 73.

nor held in lien, neither given for usufruct nor burdened by servitude.”³³ At the opposite pole to consecration is profanation: “The thing that is returned to the common use of men is pure, profane, free of sacred names.”³⁴ It is noteworthy that profanation is tantamount neither to desecration, which seeks to discredit or destroy the sacred as such, nor to secularization, which for Agamben is a kind of displacement through repression from one sphere to another.³⁵ As Agamben emphasizes, that passage from sacred to profane, from the sphere of the divine to the human, is one that can be effected in *either* direction, provided that the rite of sacrifice or of profanation – *contagion* in the case of the latter is the term Agamben invokes – is exercised. The rite has the status of a kind of threshold for Agamben, a space that divides the two spheres, neither of which is abolished in the act of sacrificing or profaning: “What is essential is the caesura that divides the two spheres, the threshold that the victim must cross, no matter in which direction. That which has been ritually separated can be returned from the rite to the profane sphere.”³⁶ In this scheme, what profanation operates at the most basic level is a *return to human use*. For Agamben, it becomes a question of how we are to understand the term “use,” especially as it stands in relation to profaning, and given, one ought to add, that the current understanding of use is dictated by the use-value notion of capitalism, which would seem to be exclusively the consumer’s use of a thing given to the circulation among men.

Troubling this notion of use – or making stark the political contours of use if we profane the notion made ‘sacred’ by the capitalist era – is precisely what Agamben sets out to accomplish. This is an important task that deserves a thorough analysis, especially as it has consequences for my own discussion of the reconceptualized subject in Foucault, Agamben and

³³ Agamben, *Profanations*, 73.

³⁴ Agamben, *Profanations*, 73.

³⁵ “Thus the secularization of theological concepts (the transcendence of God as a paradigm of sovereign power) does nothing but displace the heavenly monarchy onto an earthly monarchy, leaving its power intact.” (Agamben, *Profanations*, 77.)

³⁶ Agamben, *Profanations*, 74.

Beckett understood through the passage in terms that I have announced as the procedure for my project. For the moment, I want to set aside the full scope of “use” as developed by Agamben, to return to it at a later, more opportune moment in the chapter, and concentrate on the sort of “use” to which Agamben is putting Foucault. That is to say, to explain in what sense Agamben has profaned Foucault, or at least Foucault’s discourse, by freeing the concept of the author-function to new critical use.

It is perhaps not too much of a generalization to say that Foucault’s author-function, and the concept of the subject whose face it hides, has been an object of a seeming critical cult to some – an unassailable, almost sacred concept even as it was poorly understood – while at the same time it was the object of critical fire, even scorn, for others who sought to show its lack of applicability to the situation of real subjects in the world. In short, these concepts, from one view or the other, have had a limited *use*, a lack of usability, perceived as they have been as remaining on the level of pure abstraction and having little to say about the “ontical” (to borrow again from Heidegger) situation of subjects. Although it would surely be an exaggeration to claim that Agamben renders an ontological concept ontically useful, it is not off the mark to say that he renders the author-function (and the attendant concept of the subject) critically useful or functional by removing some of the critical shroud in which it had become bound and reactivating its dormant potential. Looking again at what Agamben says about the distinction between secularization and profanation is quite helpful here: if secularization is a displacement that leaves intact that which it displaces, profanation is the execution of a stronger gesture: “Profanation, however, neutralizes what it profanes. Once profaned, that which was unavailable and separate loses its aura and is returned to use. Both are political operations: the first guarantees the exercise of power by carrying it back to a sacred model; the second deactivates

the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized.”³⁷ If we agree that critics have to varying extents created an aura of inapproachability around the author-function, or, being hostile to it, re-sacralized the traditional author, then we can see that Agamben indeed attempts to “deactivate the apparatuses” of critical power in order to return to common critical use a concept that these “powers had seized.” With his profaning repetition of Foucault’s decisive gesture, Agamben, no less decisively and at no less risk, “neutralizes” the concept, dispelling its “aura” and “returning it to use.”

Thus, Agamben makes the focal point of his argument a concept which, if it was not a centrally held tenet, was certainly one of the most provocative products of post-structuralist thought, but which has effectively disappeared off the radar screen of criticism: the author-function and the subject lurking behind its mask. Agamben dispels the aura of secrecy shrouding it, bringing to light the “secret” agenda that he reads in Foucault and *neutralizing* both concepts in a gesture repetitive of Foucault’s neutralization.³⁸ As I have shown, Agamben brings to light what I would call the non-speculative edge – the gesture – of the concept of the author-function. If one agrees with Agamben that something remains hidden in Foucault, as if for protection from conceptual mishandling, that something would be the subject that exceeds and remains once the subject of the author function is accounted for. Rather than “staying faithful” to Foucault and preserving the secret agenda as secret, Agamben “profanes” both concepts. To put it in other words, Agamben reactualizes a moment in Foucault’s thought where the concept can be seen as standing on the threshold between sacrilization and profanation – understood as Agamben understands them – and gives the concept a decisive push in the direction of the sphere of the

³⁷ Agamben, *Profanations*, 77.

³⁸ Agamben’s use of the loaded term “aura” is a direct reference to Walter Benjamin, whose thought is repeatedly invoked in the chapter of *Profanations* under discussion. I return to Agamben’s “use” of Benjamin and to the question of aura later.

profane, the sphere of use. Thus, in proffering his profanation, Agamben takes the subject out of the sphere of mere consumption – capitalist and critical alike – and moves it to the sphere of *use*.

To do justice to this decisive push by Agamben into the sphere of use, the larger context of his argument in *Profanations* must be taken into account. Under Christianity in the modern era of the West, the religious paradigm was structured as a separation, but one in which there was always a kind of mixing of spheres, “something like a residue of profanity in every consecrated thing and a remnant of sacredness in every profaned object,” Agamben states.³⁹ Another way of putting this, as Agamben does, is to say that religion posits the paradox “where the divine sphere is always in the process of collapsing into the human sphere and man always already passes over into the divine.”⁴⁰ The figure of Christ is an example of this, as is the figure of Agamben’s own *Homo sacer*, who removed from commerce with men but not a figure to be sacrificed, belonging already to the gods, may nevertheless be killed, thus possessing an “incongruous remnant of profanity” within his sacred element.⁴¹ If the religious machine, like the political one elsewhere in Agamben’s oeuvre, is here seen to reach a “limit point or zone of undecidability,” capitalism, with its secularizing force of *displacement*, takes a seemingly decisive step in a different direction. For Agamben, reading Walter Benjamin, capitalism takes the structure of separation from its religious context into a secular one where a radical, seemingly irreversible separation in every sphere becomes the norm: “Where sacrifice once marked the passage from the profane to the sacred and from the sacred to the profane, there is now a single, multiform, ceaseless process of separation that assails every thing, every place, every human activity in order to divide it from itself. This process is entirely indifferent to the caesura between sacred and profane, between

³⁹ Agamben, *Profanations*, 78.

⁴⁰ Agamben, *Profanations*, 79.

⁴¹ Agamben, *Profanations*, 78.

divine and human. In its extreme form, the capitalist religion realizes the pure form of separation, to the point that there is nothing left to separate. An absolute profanation without remainder now coincides with an equally vacuous and total consecration.”⁴² In an elegant move, Agamben demonstrates that the seeming “secularization” effected by capitalism – the displacement characteristic of secularization – is only superficial, characterizing capitalism instead as “the capitalist religion” that pushes the displaced element of separation to its limit. For Agamben, radicalized separation becomes the hallmark of capitalism functioning in a religious mode, where the separation is such that the opposite move of returning to the sphere of mankind is no longer possible. The difference that capitalism thus introduces into the scheme is less the decisive step one might recognize at first than it is a bringing to a grinding halt the mobility of the sliding scale between profanation and sacrilization that had functioned before (and arguably continues to function in the religious sphere or “machine”). Capitalism for Agamben arrests a process of passage, and, “indifferent to the caesura between sacred and profane, between divine and human,” capitalism instantiates what Agamben elsewhere calls the *monstrous* threshold or zone of undecidability, which can now be better appreciated in light of Agamben’s remarks in *Profanations*.⁴³ The monstrosity of the threshold lies in its becoming a sort of trap, a state of immobilization, for the subject in that threshold space, rather than being a point of passage between other stations, the human and the divine. Further, the nature of separation has been radicalized, in that everything – subjects, spaces, activities – are *divided from themselves*, not just from their kind. Agamben sees in this the total collapse of consecration into profanation, which for him amounts to an absolute and thus remainder-less profanation of every thing and every sphere. By absolute, he means irrevocably so, such that this profanation results in a rendering

⁴² Agamben, *Profanations*, 81.

⁴³ I am of course referring to Agamben’s books on the *Homo sacer* and the state of exception.

useless of that which has been so profaned. To the extent that use depended on a meaningful separation, this radicalized separation of everything from itself makes use paradoxically impossible.

This state of affairs, this monstrous threshold, is what receives from Agamben the name of “sphere of consumption.” It is a typical move by Agamben to take a vulgarized or self-evident notion of use, of which consumption was held to be the exemplar *par excellence*, and transform it into a paradox, unfolding the concept of use such that an altogether different image of use emerges. It is precisely this other kind of use by subjects of themselves and the things in their human sphere that has become impossible since every subject and every thing has become separated from itself, has become a commodity. “In the commodity, separation inheres in the very form of the object, which splits into use-value and exchange-value and is transformed into an ungraspable fetish. The same is true for everything that is done, produced, or experienced – even the human body, even sexuality, even language. They are now divided from themselves and placed in a separate sphere that no longer defines any substantial division and where all use becomes and remains impossible. This sphere is consumption.”⁴⁴ To sum up Agamben’s thought, the commodity in the sphere of consumption, rather than being the object of use, has instead the status of a collected fetish whose function, one might add, is quasi-religious, but whose use is altogether ungraspable. At the same time, since everything has undergone a radical profanation, the real outcome is that nothing can be profaned as it is stuck in a state of perpetual unusability: “This means that it has become impossible to profane (or at least that it requires special procedures). If to profane means to return to common use that which has been removed to the sphere of the sacred, the capitalist religion in its extreme phase aims at creating something

⁴⁴ Agamben, *Profanations*, 81.

absolutely unprofanable.”⁴⁵ Agamben’s conclusion is a startling one because it goes further than showing that use as we had surmised it has become impossible; the very concept of a natural or self-evident use is itself undermined here, because, as Agamben stresses repeatedly, there is no such thing as natural use. Use must be arrived at through profanation understood as a process, as a movement in time.

Agamben mentions a convincing example to develop this idea of (non-natural) use arrived at only through profanation. In the thirteenth century, the Franciscan order in their call to poverty, “asserted the possibility of a use entirely removed from the sphere of law.”⁴⁶ They championed a de facto use, *usus facti*, of objects. In response, Pope John XXII issued the bull known as *Ad Conditorem Canonum*, which denies “a use distinct from property.”⁴⁷ In this statement, the pope proclaims the paradox of use, which cannot exist in nature as a state apart from the act of consumption of the thing, this purported state of “de facto use,” which does not use up or consume in the process of the use of the thing, being a pure projection into the past or the future. This kind of use is not to be had except ““in the instant of its disappearance,”” as the pope puts it, quoted by Agamben, which is to say it cannot be had.⁴⁸ In effect, when John XXII clearly states the “theological canon of consumption as the impossibility of use,”⁴⁹ as Agamben calls it, he is stating “the paradigm of an impossibility of using,”⁵⁰ that still holds – and can be said to have come to fruition – with regard to the consumption exercised by consumer society today. What in effect the pope isolates, and whose existence in nature he denies, is the concept of pure use. Pure use paradoxically cannot be the object of property. Nor is it something “out there”

⁴⁵ Agamben, *Profanations*, 82.

⁴⁶ Agamben, *Profanations*, 82.

⁴⁷ Agamben, *Profanations*, 82.

⁴⁸ Agamben, *Profanations*, 83.

⁴⁹ Agamben, *Profanations*, 82.

⁵⁰ Agamben, *Profanations*, 83.

in nature, intact and waiting to be appropriated (turned into property), by necessity inconsumable and *not* appropriable. Within the logic of capitalist consumption that takes up this view of use – or rather has no inkling anymore of what a pure use might be, even in a mode of denial as in the case of the pope – use has lost this dimension of “pure use” asserted by the Franciscans. This dimension of pure use is exactly what has been *separated* from use in the understanding of consumer society. Although Agamben does not say this in so many words, one can surmise that this is indeed the case: “That is to say, use is always a relationship with something that cannot be appropriated; it refers to things insofar as they cannot become objects of possession. But in this way use also lays bare the true nature of property, which is nothing but the device that moves the free use of men into a separate sphere, where it is converted into a right. If, today, consumers in mass society are unhappy, it is not only because they consume objects that have incorporated within themselves their own inability to be used. It is also, and above all, because they believe they are exercising their right to property on these objects, because they have become incapable of profaning them.”⁵¹ One can now see in stark relief that profanation as use regards a dimension of use that has been separated from itself by the logic of capitalist thinking in terms of property or dominion over objects (and subjects). If the pope is in the end a champion of property – for reasons of worldly control over the Church’s dominion rather than theological ones, which presumably would need precisely such a concept of pure use – the concept of pure use that he denies can still be and *is* the hinge upon which hangs the concept of profanation as understood by Agamben. Profanation must be that relation to a subject, object or space that – precluding destruction, using up and abuse – posits instead a free and happy or felicitous use akin to play. As already stated, Agamben is careful to remind his readers often that profanation does not

⁵¹Agamben, *Profanations*, 83.

restore some fictive free use in a natural state (such as that claimed by the Franciscans for themselves) and preexisting its separation (it is separation that first brings it about!). Instead, he insists on pure use as operating through the *threshold* of profanation, positing a passage effected to pure use.

It should be remarked that what might seem at first like a binary opposition between use and pure use is a non-binary relation between terms that are not only not opposed, but also not in a dialectical relationship of *Aufhebung* to a higher term. The passage to pure use is in effect first isolated and immobilized by the dialectical impulse to separate two kinds of use into opposed terms, as if those terms really were opposed antinomies. For Agamben, the moment of profanation would be a kind of repetition or a playing out of gestures that counteract the separation effected by capitalist dialectics, through a kind of *profaning of profanation*, the latter having been rendered at once meaningless and impossible, but for which Agamben nevertheless holds out some hope. His examples of profaning gestures include a cat and a child whose play amounts to a profanation that does not restore a natural use. That is, the operation effected by play involves a gesture “more cunning and complex” than simply restoring “an uncontaminated use that lies either beyond or before it.”⁵² The cat playing with yarn, or the child playing with religious objects or objects of exchange or everyday use not only empties the repeated gestures associated with these objects their sense, but also *deactivates* these gestures and opens them to a new use not necessarily foreseen in the scheme of their efficaciousness: This kind of play “knowingly uses the characteristic behaviors of predatory activity (or, in the case of the child, of the religious cult or the world of work) in vain. These behaviors are not effaced, but, thanks to the substitution of the yarn for the mouse (or the toy for the sacred object), deactivated and thus

⁵²Agamben, *Profanations*, 85.

opened up to a new, possible use.”⁵³ In being deactivated, the playful behaviors or gestures are severed from their original activity in whose pursuit they were deployed. That is, they are liberated from “any obligatory relationship to an end,” presenting instead pure use as pure means, employing the means without having in sight the habitual ends associated with those means.

It might be helpful here to think pure use in terms of another book by Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, which he does not himself invoke here. In *The Time That Remains*, Agamben wants to rediscover in Paul a Messianic thinker who has less to do with a projected time that comes after the end, or “at the end of time,” than with the time at hand, “the time of the end.” To summarize very briefly, it is a subtle but crucial difference that Agamben posits between a traditional revolutionary thinking of overcoming limits and a more sober but equally, if not more so, political moment of adhering closely to those limits to find a latent, dormant element of difference from within. Agamben writes about Paul’s exhorting the followers of Christ to live “as if” the kingdom of God were at hand, “as if” they were living in this projected moment not yet arrived, because it is precisely living “as if” that has transforming power rather than redemption from without. This other instance of the threshold moment that is a fixture of Agamben’s thought presents an instance of a threshold moment holding out a possibility of passage to something else, indeed seamlessly becomes this something else because its means, to invoke *Profanations*, is not geared toward ends other than those already, latently inscribed in the time at hand. One could thus also argue that pure use has an implicit “*as ifness*” that bears non-accidental resemblance to the “as if” aspect of the time of the end of Paulinian expectation evoked in *The Time That Remains*. The play of pure use is an unfurling of pure means *as if* one

⁵³Agamben, *Profanations*, 85.

were proceeding as usual, except that the fulfillment of ends is foreclosed in favor of something else.

It is of course this something else that needs further development here, as it might shed light on the idea of pure use. One could posit an even closer resemblance of these two “as if” moments despite their apparent difference at first glance: the acting “as if” of the time of the end is supposed to precipitate the new time of redemption, while the play “as if” of pure use is meant, as stated above, to foreclose the fulfillment of the usual ends. However, what both of these moments share is the desire to forestall “ends” in the form of the radically new or other (a revolutionary political moment; a set of *consumable* goals accomplished) in favor of opening up an overlooked dimension within what is already available, and inexhaustible, if not exactly already *there*. After all, what is involved is a passage – a kind of chiasmic shift – toward, *not* that which is available in a natural state (natural use; natural state of redemption), but toward a *produced*, profaned state whose inexhaustible potential lay dormant (*usable* and thus political time; the kingdom of God *at hand*).

It is perhaps an auspicious moment to come back to the Beckett quote and Foucault, and Agamben’s gesture of profanation understood as a *return to use* of Foucault and the concepts he first puts forth on the critical scene. Both Foucault and Agamben exercise restraint and a respect for the Beckett quote that leaves it intact and inexhaustible, its meaning open rather than proscribed. In effect, Agamben’s gesture of profanation repeats in a self-conscious mode Foucault’s putting to use of the quote rather than consuming it like a product of expression. Putting Beckett to use this way serves Agamben to explicate the aporia of the author-function – and of the subject – that seems like a secret cipher of the lecture. Agamben, through his profaning gesture, renders the aporia “less enigmatic,” as he himself claims at the end of the

chapter on Foucault.⁵⁴ However, one should also see in his gesture a full-fledged return to critical use of viable concepts that had become *unprofanable* for some, and *unusable* for others in a strict Agambenian sense: the enigma of the author is shown to be a *functioning aporia* which ought to inform critical investigations of the subject whose oblique image places the question of ethics into the hands of readers, making the gesture of the latter an especially delicate issue as sometimes this oblique image arises in unexpected places where the subject as full-fledged subjectivity would seem to be altogether absent. As Agamben puts it:

Perhaps Foucault's aporia becomes less enigmatic at this point. The subject – like the author, like the life of the infamous man – is not something that can be directly attained as a substantial reality present in some place; on the contrary, it is what results from the encounter and from the hand-to-hand confrontation with the apparatuses in which it has been put – and has put itself – into play. [...] And just as the author must remain unexpressed in the work while still attesting, in precisely this way, to his own irreducible presence, so must subjectivity show itself and increase its resistance at the point where its apparatuses capture it and put it into play. A subjectivity is produced where the living being, encountering language and putting itself into play in language without reserve, exhibits in a gesture the impossibility of its being reduced to this gesture.⁵⁵

Reading the quote carefully, one might even say that Agamben renders the concepts “subject” and “subjectivity” to a new use in that he makes the difference between them operative. The living subject only acquires a subjectivity when that living subject encounters language at the point of its capture by an apparatus of power. That subjectivity, however, is not the end-all of the subject – just as the subject is not the end that one reaches by means of subjectivity. One attests to the other, but neither is, or ought to be, subjugated by the other. One is a profanation of the other, or perhaps more accurately, in some instances of encounter with power, the rendering inoperative or *unprofanable* in the capitalist context in the strict sense developed by Agamben.

It would seem that one lesson one can garner from Agamben's profanation concerns the critical reader's duty, which would be to keep open the possibility of profaning the subject and

⁵⁴ Agamben, *Profanations*, 72.

⁵⁵ Agamben, *Profanations*, 72.

subjectivity, having split the two terms. If one remembers that separation from within of seemingly whole, intact, inseparable concepts and things is the hallmark of postmodern unprofanability, perhaps the reader's duty is thus to consider how to bring these two – subject and subjectivity – back together so as to make them usable as terms where passage between one and the other is possible again. This is another way of saying that the reader, wishing to investigate the subject and subjectivity, must look elsewhere than simply the obvious places where subjectivity is caught in an image, where its speech marks it as an author-function, as was the case in chapter three. One must also look where the subject is perhaps simply too weak, too exhausted, to speak and to thus “increase its resistance at the point where its apparatuses capture it and put it into play.”⁵⁶ The reader must be attune to the subject where subjectivity – of the speculative function kind – is no longer discernible because a paradoxical and mute weakness of the subject has taken hold as the last effort of resistance against apparatuses of power that bear a special name: biopower.

It is this kind of exemplary reading that I propose here. By now the question of whether my critique in chapter three that claims that the author-function is nothing but a *speculative* one is too harsh ought to appear in the proper perspective as it has been reframed through the encounter with Agamben's reading of Foucault. To make somewhat more explicit that frame, Foucault's speculative author function is *only* speculative if we demand from it that it account for a certain depth in subjectivity and make a full account of the living subject at which it can only hint. It is thus only speculative – and implicitly unsatisfactory – if we are unsatisfied with the rather flat rendition or image of subjectivity that it yields – in short, if we remain attached to the notion of a subject possessing *depth of representation*. If we look at the speculative author-

⁵⁶ Agamben, *Profanations*, 72.

function under a different angle, we see, as Agamben points out, that its quasi-invisible gestural dimension – impossible negative image of subjectivity as I have termed it – does indeed suggest a (paradoxical) legibility of the subject remnant. The author-function – we can also call it subject-function according to the ethical criteria that Agamben brings to light – is after all the *only* marker of subjectivity understood beyond the traditional speculative paradigm and arising with – concomitantly produced by – an apparatus of power. Foucault’s speculative critique, even though the charge of its being a speculative function might not be unfounded, *does*, precisely, remain attentive to dimensions of the subject that cannot possibly be read, because they have not been recorded by the instruments of power with which the subject was enmeshed, and to a properly *ethical dimension* of the subject, as unfolded by Agamben. Thus, the author-function is a special case of the subject and the workings of subjectivity, and not their full account – but not, thereby, an obliteration of either. If we might unfold this negative or anamorphic image, we will see that it tells a different story of the subject, one to which I want to turn later in this chapter: the loss of what Agamben (in a another chapter of *Profanations*) calls “genius,” the oppressive reification of the “I” stuck in a “state of exception” (Agamben in a book by the same title) and banished from the “bare life” (Agamben, *Homo sacer*) that marks its near absence.

There remains the question of why the ethical dimension of the subject and of the author function should transfer to the reader. To understand this, one must look at Foucault vis-à-vis Barthes, a discussion I have reserved for the second part of this chapter, because the discussion of Agamben’s account of Foucault’s concept of the author-function as ethical gesture was needed to posit in stronger terms the ethical dimension of reading as another recording, or witnessing to, a subject who is barely legible, the “infamous” tip of the subjective iceberg, as it

were. This too is an ethical gesture. The ethical gesture of the author-function is one that bears repetition by the reader, a concept that must be further developed now in this chapter.

To continue to unfold this other perspective on subjectivity – contours and *hors cadre* both considered – Barthes, another important figure of discourse initiation in the Foucauldian sense, must finally be analyzed in some depth.

8. If the Trousers Don't Fit..... Wear Them

At the end of chapter two, I claim that Rivette's film produces a pure filmic image of the *auteur*. Here in chapter three, Foucault's "What is an Author" and passages from Beckett's *The Unnamable* read together produce the concept of the author-function that also appears as an image understood in the Deleuzian sense. The image of the speculative author-function is a curious one, as I show in this chapter, as it brings in tow the split subject. To come back to the figure of the trousers, what results is an image of the author-function splitting off into two "legs" of speculative subjectivity, but with nothing inside them.⁵⁷ To recall what was stated in chapter three, the speculative author-function is wedged in between the two terms of speculative subjectivity that are substitutable doubles and is the crucial third term or point of the whole hanging together. At the same time, the speculative author-function is a witness to its predicament of making hang together something that misses the non-speculative remnant of the subject, something crucial that exceeds it and makes its speech in the mode of writing a (partial) failure. The image of the trousers raises the ghostly, properly *speculative* quality of the speculative subject: he is like a pair of trousers walking around with nothing inside them, no subject to populate or flesh them out. The speculative subjective trousers, composed of the

⁵⁷ The empty trousers are not unlike the "pale green pants with nobody inside" of a Dr. Seuss children's story, whose narrator is first profoundly frightened by the sight, but eventually makes friends with the trousers (Seuss, "What Was I Scared Of?," in: *The Sneetches, And Other Stories*. New York: Random House, 1961: 42-64.). We should do the same. As an aside, there is a Deleuzian analysis waiting to be done of Dr. Seuss' dystopia of the subject, bodies without organs, and proliferations of all sorts.

author-function and the two substitutable terms of “subject” and “subjectivity,” present the dystopian image of a pair of *depopulated* trousers.

Excursus Eye II: Framing Beckett

One could begin the preceding chapter by immediately alluding to, if not explicating, the problem with which the narrative voice grapples in this passage. Clearly, the voice, an actor in a *mise en scène* of authorial subjectivity, grapples with the problem of speaking, of utterance vis-à-vis thought, and of thought vis-à-vis writing. One is tempted to “apply theory” to the passage by moving right into a discussion of authors who are “clearly” related: Foucault, Barthes. There is, however, a subtending textual device that Beckett deploys here and which has primacy of exposition because it diffuses or neutralizes the problem of application of theory to the literary text: textual framing. To begin, the work of framing through montage that Beckett’s text performs is a pre-emptive gesture against the precipitous application of theory, where other theoretical voices come to crowd, even muffle, the already double voice of the text that, purportedly, was to be better “heard” through the “engagement” with theory. One can – but only naively, and to disastrous critical effect – apply theory to a text that foresees such a misguided gesture, and which suggests a very different approach. Beckett, in drawing these other authors into his sphere, by creating porous boundaries between his text and others, by folding theory in rather than keeping it out, has already let the “foreign” and polluting voice of theory speak through his narrative voice. His text is, in effect, a peer or equal to any theoretical text that could wish to come into Beckett’s sphere. It is thus justified to examine the real engagement with theory happening in this text, provided that the critic remain aware of the terms on which this happens. And these terms have everything to do with the framing that exercises the textual “pull” on other texts.

As the allusion to the filmic frame suggests, the process of framing a text delimits it as an object of study and indicates to some degree the approach that will be taken in discussing it. To

frame something meant to give some sign posts to the reader regarding the relations I was trying to establish between the “object” of study, usually a text, and attendant concepts and texts that serve to offset it, to put in sharper focus. In the course of this project, the framing process has revealed itself not only as tantamount to sound critical practice, but also as more problematic than initially thought. The framing invoked here is more complex and yet, on a level that subtends the entire project, *simpler*. Moving away from simple-minded application of theory, one sees that it is actually Beckett’s own framing in movement that suggests the device or method of choice for this chapter: the bringing together under one canopy of authors who, to certain critical eyes, appear seemingly unrelated, or altogether too much so. It is Beckett’s text, and not simply the whim, prejudice or suspicion of the critic, that justifies discussing these authors in relation to one another under the aegis of “Beckett.” Furthermore, because Beckett’s text already consists of moving concepts, it is this that relates him on the level of textual practice to the authors in question, whose concepts, as we see later, are also moving concepts.

Let us come back to the passage (300) that heads chapter III, an important aspect of which I have only alluded to indirectly and signal now as being just as much the subject of this study as human subjectivity, and as being crucial to the passage that I propose to execute here. To continue the interpretation at this point simply by pursuing the themes, the literary structure or the content/structure of the multiple intertexts contained within this fragment would be to treat the text as a static image and ignore something striking about the passage. To treat the image as static – as the afore-mentioned snapshot – would be to misunderstand, ignore even, the important virtual aspect that makes the image an image. It would be to approach the text as nothing more than what one finds on the internet: a text with a false virtual field of many hyperlinks indicating intertexts seen in a kind of simultaneity without temporality or movement, and without regard for

the complex relations between them. This misrecognition of the text would tell us nothing about the *real* virtual nature – to insist with Deleuze on the reality of the virtual – of the movement that is this fragment. The entire passage, if read carefully, reveals itself to be much more than a static piece of text. Indeed, the text is animated by a movement whose peculiar arc the text follows, but from which the text is not separate according to a classic form/content divide. Like the fragmented, recombining sentences mentioned earlier in the chapter, the cited passage *is* movement. It requires multiple readings, moving back and forth within and between sentences, such as this one: “Malone revolves, a stranger forever to my infirmities, one who is not as I can never not be.” (300) It is a movement that, ought to be understood in the strict sense in which Deleuze writes of cinematic movement in the *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2* books. It would be a gross misreading to say that this movement is somehow captured by Beckett in his text, precisely because the nature of the movement under consideration here does away with the content/divide split, which is the only conceptual construct that would allow a movement – the palpable ‘passage’ that happens in the fragment of text – to be ‘captured’ by the form. Instead, the movement is performed in and through an attuned *reading* of the text and thus cannot be said to reside in its form. The movement animates the form and is the very content of the text in question, in essence rendering the form/content opposition inoperative and clearly showing that this opposition is a conceptual remnant of a false split. Only this way does the real split, so to speak become visible: that between the implied author speaking and his non-identical double, the narrative voice of Malone.

The subtending device is a particular kind of framing within a suspended movement of disparate elements, including Matthew the Evangelist, mentioned explicitly, Descartes, mentioned in a clear allusion to the founding “clean sweep” of his *tabula rasa* of consciousness,

and authors such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault who, although not mentioned, belong to related theoretical discourses that suggest themselves because they, too, deal with authorial subjectivity. The framing that Beckett puts “in place,” so to speak, is not an impermeable, static border between text and world. To account for this frame by simply calling it a “putting in context” misses the quality of the real relation existing between Beckett’s text and other texts and works. The frame in question is not a picture frame, or even the invisible frame of the excised snapshot, but rather a permeable, dynamic border between text and discourse understood as a broader context or network. Furthermore, the aesthetic device of the frame is a full-fledged one where there is no division between content and form, where the framing is the very textual work and not something that is put into place beforehand. The cinematic term “montage” comes closer to this act or gesture of framing where movement is not deployed in order to achieve something else, but rather is the very effect produced by the piece by way of disposition of allusions and references. Through this textual montage, Beckett achieves the movement that marks this passage in its trajectory from philosophy to religion, from New Testament reference to founding work by Descartes, from purely literary to theoretical voice, and which also warrants designating the passage with the Deleuzian term “movement image,” and in a further analysis, “time image.”

For Deleuze, there is a certain kind of cinematic image that, more than a static snapshot, is on another plane compared to the snapshot isolated from the flow of static shots that make up the film. In this understanding of film (Bergson’s understanding), movement is nothing but a *mouvement factice* happening between shots. The Deleuzian movement image is rather a gathering and a deployment of the movement rendered *in* the image and which is movement proper, the real movement, a *real becoming*, effected by cinema. To come back to the problem of

framing in the Beckett passage, it is precisely such a gathering that is happening in the passage by Beckett. To say that Beckett creates a textual movement image is to suggest that the relation normally considered to be happening between texts in a discourse (or discourses) has been deployed within the text, gathering them all in a textual encounter, one that, it should be added, bears no resemblance to the hierarchical, foreclosed dialectical dialogue.

It is *à propos* to speak of image rather than form with regard to this passage in Beckett, as I have already done here. The image in the Deleuzian sense executes and makes palpable to the viewer the particular movement that he attributes to the seventh art, cinema. I propose that we think of Beckett's text as having proto-cinematic qualities – or better, cinematic qualities *in strictu* – whereby the image can be said to be a piece of text where a movement is exercised or unleashed through the reading performed by a reader. Further, I propose that terms normally reserved for film analysis be applicable here in the discussion of Beckett's text. If we think of this passage as of an image or even a sequence of images, then thinking the *hors cadre* and *hors champ* of the frame might prove particularly elucidating when considering the scene depicted. Indeed, I want to argue that the cinematic vocabulary is indispensable if we are to unfold and understand the specificity of the movement Beckett has executed in the fragment under consideration, namely a movement through time and thought that executes a kind of dynamic, temporal suspension of both in an image whose multiple facets face the past and the future simultaneously.

To reiterate: the frame to which I allude here is not, or no longer, the common-sense frame of painting – a limit between the painting and the world, that troublesome border that is sometimes transgressed by the content's over-spilling – but rather the *cinematic* frame proper. By the “cinematic frame” I mean a certain technical discourse, a collection of terms, that ought

to be used in discussing Beckett vis-à-vis others. More than that, however, by the “cinematic frame” I mean the isolated cinema picture, or image, that only seemingly stops the movement of a sequence of frames that constitute the moving picture that is a film. The picture constituted by a succession of frames, if we take Deleuze’s notion of movement in film seriously, can also yield a proper *movement image*, a succession of frames where the movement is only seemingly arrested and where the picture cannot be accounted for in terms of the static picture. The cinematic frame is also more porous in some respects than the traditional frame of painting. To put it using the terminology of cinema, the cinematic frame has an *hors cadre* and an *hors champ* that, while cut off by the camera, are virtually in attendance, never fully dispelled. The latter is potentially there as a space that could be explored, or from which something or someone could emerge or intrude into the field of vision of the *plan*. The *hors cadre*, on the other hand, is the impossible space of the (*auteur*) filmmaker without thereby belonging to him.

The quality of porosity can thus also be stated in these terms: the porosity of the cinematic frame represents to a radical degree the non-binding quality, the collapse, of the form-content divide. Further, the cinematic frame openly beckons to, rather than sweeps aside, the elements that remain “outside” the frame. The cinematic frame, in its porosity, invites the reader or viewer to see these elements as virtually coursing with and informing that which is “within” the frame. Moreover, he or she is invited to read this virtual, simultaneous coursing as a development that happens, not through a succession of discreet steps (static images), but rather within the framed piece under consideration, within a movement image understood in the Deleuzian sense. In an effort to offset the chosen text, it is this kind of movement image that I propose to put to work here in the process of “framing” Beckett, a process initiated by the reader and requiring his or her active reading.

Any remaining suspicions that I seek to illustrate either Foucault or Barthes with a “use” of Beckett should be assuaged. Foucault himself certainly never put Beckett to such use, and for good reason. In “What is an Author?” Foucault invokes the name of Beckett and Beckett’s problematic, the leading question of “who speaks,” but he never makes the *faux pas* of claiming that Beckett represents, figures or even allegorizes the problem of the author as Foucault lays it out in his essay. Instead, as I show above, Foucault suggests – without stating it explicitly, which would be to infract upon the new ethical convention of authorial neutrality – that in the scheme of neutral authorship, Beckett occupies an important position: that of initiator of a particular discourse of subjectivity. As for Roland Barthes, another important initiator of discourse on the writer, or scriptor, and reader, it is more *à propos* to consider in what sense Beckett, in his own right and on his own terms, initiates a mode of readership in keeping with the motto of Barthes’ essay, which Barthes ends with a calls for a process of demythologizing: “We know that to restore to writing its future, we must reverse its myth: the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author.”¹ While Beckett can be said to have engaged in such a process of demythologizing of the myth of writing, he also does much to instantiate a writerly reader-witness, the one “ransomed,” if not exactly redeemed, and called to a different kind of witnessing than the sort that lies at the “origin” of writing.

To reiterate, framing Beckett in the way I suggest here – indeed, to take seriously as a critical practice the framing cues suggested by Beckett himself in his text – is to move away from notions of mastery and from hierarchized notions of theory vis-à-vis literature and art. It is to move toward an understanding of a passage in terms, from silence to the witness, effected through sophisticated textual framing by Beckett himself, as well as toward an awareness of the

¹ Barthes, “Death of the Author, 148.”

terms upon which the understanding of this passage is facilitated by an encounter with other authors drawn into Beckett's sphere.

IV: From Utopia to Dystopia: the Subject Remnant

Abode where lost bodies roam each searching for its lost one. Vast enough for search to be in vain. Narrow enough for flight to be in vain. Inside a flattened cylinder fifty metres round and eighteen high for the sake of harmony. The light. Its omnipresence as though every separate square centimetre were a gleam of the some eighty thousand of total surface. Its restlessness at long intervals suddenly stilled like panting at the last. Then all go dead still. It is perhaps the end of their abode. A few seconds and all begins again.

Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 202.

0. If the Trousers Fit..... Don't Wear Them

The typical Beckett figure seen walking about, going by bicycle, on foot, finally hardly at all the day when it loses vigor and begins to decompose before the reader's eyes, to continue its journey with the help of crutches, to finish crawling along, a monstrous larval stage of humanity find a particularly denuded context and figuration in *The Lost Ones*. Bare life¹ dressed as Molloy, as Murphy, as Mallone, and countless others at least has a name and a voice, albeit profoundly conflicted, that speaks from the page. What sort of power could condemn them to write without ceasing, to voyage without a fixed or identifiable goal, to exhaust themselves, if not a sovereign power? These banished *Homines sacri* who have nothing left but fragments of warmed-over philosophical discourse and shreds of old newspapers. Like yesterday's newspapers, the philosophical discourses appear outdated and irrelevant, and certainly provide little comfort, unlike the newspapers, which at least provide warmth and protection against exposure to bodies in sore need. Without mentioning politics, Beckett delivers a trenchant critique of ubiquitous discourses, such as "the just society," "state of nature," etc. What is remarkable about *The Lost Ones* is its almost total lack of the biting and black humor that

¹ I tentatively borrow this concept from Agamben.

one finds in other Beckett texts. Allegory or perhaps simply a bitter realism almost without tenderness reflecting its age and written according to the criteria of that age, *The Lost Ones* is a spectacle where humanity, taken as a group lacking the individuality and voice of the carefully crafted Molloyes and Murphys, shifts about from place to place, goes up and down ladders, moves about ceaselessly until it loses its seeking spirit, all in the space of a cylinder whose logic and particular parameters are carefully laid out by the narrative voice, and which, together with the narrative voice, become the substance of the analysis that follows. This Beckett text that resembles the script or directions for a film without words, without visible affect and without performance on stage – except as it gains a performance in the active reader’s imagination, and from the reader’s perspective. For, whereas in other Beckett texts, such as in *The Unnamable* analyzed in chapter three, the narrative voice itself is under its own scrutiny, the narrative voice that speaks in *The Lost Ones* foregoes such self-scrutiny and speaks from a space impossibly outside *The Lost Ones*, from a space not even off-screen, a space properly *hors cadre*, as I use the term in the preceding chapters. The unbridgeable distance between the narrator of *The Unnamable* and Malone, his double, is mediated by a proximity of the two voices speaking. The distance in *The Lost Ones*, however, is strikingly *unmediated*.

Whether this stage or space populated with Beckett’s figures then becomes the space where concepts discussed in previous chapters, as well as concepts such as Agamben’s “bare life,” his concept of the “state of exception,” and his concept of witnessing are helpful for reading the image of the subject that appears in the reading of *The Lost Ones* is a question that arises at this point. Do we have the right to speak of banished *Homo sacer*, of bare life named or nameless? Is it justified to posit that these

concepts are figured through the moving bodies and those sitting still to then undergo a process of ‘scissioning,’ whereby a critique of these concepts becomes possible as they are transposed from the abstract to a more concrete figuration? To put it in terms that will become clearer in the course of this analysis, Beckett engages directly the *matter* of politics, the searching bodies, in a non-representational mode – where both the matter of politics and the politics itself must be understood as unrepresented and un-representational – while Agamben writes in the abstract about the “bare life” that the reader suspects might be the bodies seen moving from place to place, circulating, coming to rest. In the course of the analysis, it will become clear under what circumstances it is possible, even necessary, to make this scissioning link.

Let us turn to the text, whose peculiar status as translation deserves some attention. *The Lost Ones*, a Beckett work that first appeared in French (*Le Dépeupleur*) in 1971, was published in an English translation in 1972, done by the author himself. *The Lost Ones* is a loose, even unfaithful translation of *Le Dépeupleur* as it is known in French. The two stand like the doubles of subjectivity, the same, yet non-identical. They are in a relation as complex as that between *Film* the film and *Film* the book. They are in fact translations of one another, rather than one being the translation of an original text. Their difference, already announced in the very different titles they bear, speaks to the demystification of the concepts of authorship and authenticity of the piece under translation that Beckett operates, and the translation he executes does not adhere to the model that slavishly seeks to reproduce the same as the same. Rather than seeking perfect equivalence and fetishizing the authentic original, Beckett, in his unfaithful translation,²

² I give examples later in the analysis of the text(s).

breaks with all that and hands over to the reader a real power to read. The particular status of Beckett's text in English known as *The Lost Ones* as *translation from the outset* makes that text especially susceptible to multivalent readings, including such as I propose to undertake here in the careful passage of concepts through the prism of Beckett's text. The text of *The Lost Ones*, rather than having the status of an original that then receives a faithful translation that attempts to preserve the meaning and keep intact the nuances of the original, is already itself a transposition of the text. It becomes clear when one reads the English version alongside the French that Beckett, who translated the work himself, makes no attempt to preserve the nuances of the French version in the English. The versions are just that: *versions* of something that *exceeds* either text taken alone. The work of translation is not that of slavish approximation to an original, but a kind of searching for words to say one more time, in another language, what perhaps cannot even be said. The first sentence of the work serves as a perfect example of translation as searching: "Abode where lost bodies roam each searching for its lost one." So begins the text, whose original French version reads thus: "Séjour où des corps vont cherchant chacun son dépeupleur." It is not accidental that already the first sentence points the attention of the reader to the bodily nature of the humanity seen milling about. In English, the bodies are "lost," while in French they are simply "some" undetermined bodies. "Abode" suggests a dwelling place, while "séjour" suggests a living room or a place of sojourning during a journey, where one stays for some indeterminate amount of time. If the lost bodies search each "for its lost one," the "some" bodies of the French version search each for its "dépeupleur," its "de-peopler" or depopulator. Or are they searching

for something else? This is the question that arises when switching between the English and French versions in search of a definitive answer does not yield a satisfactory result.

As I discuss at length later on, no text can do justice or adequately speak for the events being described by this text. The French version therefore does not possess the status of an original text whose profundity or unique perspective and meaning must be preserved; it is, rather, already a translation of sorts, the representation doomed to failure that approximates but misses at every turn its object, the subjects it seeks to evoke. Therefore, to move from language to language, from French to English, is to shift from one inadequate iteration to another. From another perspective, this constitutes an invitation not just to interpret the text in a variety of ways that acknowledge its multivalent character, but, as I show at the end of this chapter, to read it in radically different, even seemingly opposed ways. Significantly, the searching of the lost bodies of the cylinder finds its mirror image in the searching that is translation under the sign and practice of difference, and in the searching that is the reader's work of analysis, because it is in nature no different from these as *gesture of searching*.

Translation in the paradigm of originality is like the search for the perfect pair of trousers. Beckett's answer to this would seem to be: if the trousers fit, *don't* wear them. Translation in the mode of strong originality that seeks to preserve "the" original attempts to close the abyss of double texts, of split textuality. This is an abyss that Beckett opens wider. As for the concepts, they are translated in the figuration, not represented.

Here in chapter four, the analysis of a very different late text by Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, becomes the occasion to pursue the figure or image of the trousers to its limit, if the latter is even reachable in the dystopian landscape of the subject split off from

subjectivity, itself internally split. If the speculative author-function image is a movement image (the trousers) as seen in *The Unnamable*, the encounter with *The Lost Ones* makes visible in turn a time-image of the subject. However, this time-image is only possible if we acknowledge yet another conceptual split. As I show in what follows, in *The Lost Ones*, the author-function no longer holds the whole,³ the speculative subject (understood as tripartite complex of author-function, subject and subjectivity), together, having been “torn” off. In a progressively more dystopian image, the text now presents the trouser legs of formerly speculative subjectivity “each in search of its lost one.” And importantly, this separation is only recognizable as a separation of terms formerly held together if a radical shift in perspective is acknowledged. It is this shift in perspective that radically transforms the author-function into the *scriptor*, but in so doing, the writing-function that the term *scriptor* seems to mask is itself unmasked as the *scriptor-witness*. It is the latter who is the speaking voice in *The Lost Ones*, the *scriptor-witness* whose perspective distant from the “trouser legs,” themselves wandering about unhoused and “unseated” but according to strict limitations, can only witness and *record*, rather than speculate about, interpret, *represent*. The voice of *The Lost Ones* is the fixed, static, pure *recording-function* split off from the tripartite system of author-function with supports, and who speaks in a neutral voice.

1. *The Lost Ones: Narrative Voice*

The description of the space of the cylinder focuses on its dimensions and atmospheric conditions, the rules and modalities of movement allowed, as well as the

³ The “whole” is pure invention of the speculative mode. It is only possible, that is, it appears only from the perspective of the speculative subject. I am in no sense positing a “whole” subject, as should be clear from the preceding analyses, which insist on split, separate, doubled elements that constitute “the” subject.

condition of the bodies in it, all rendered with the same tone as if everything being described were categorically the same: *objects* of descriptive knowledge. The reader quickly learns that both flight and search are in vain and what the exact dimensions of the cylinder are in meters (fifty round by eighteen high) and square centimeters. The description then becomes more particularized, and the reader learns that every square centimeter of surface area (eighty thousand centimeters) is aglow with an omnipresent, dim, yellow light. Moreover, it is as though every centimeter were aglow on its own, something that suggests in a radiating image not only the volume that is not reported on numerically, but the fragmented, singular disparity of all elements – whether centimeter or denizen – contained by the cylinder. Furthermore, the oscillations or frequency of pulsation of the light and of atmospheric change are remarked upon. While the light going on and off is spaced at long intervals, the temperature oscillations appear more extreme, spaced at 4 second intervals of passing from hot to cold, but nevertheless these oscillations “coincide with those of the light.” (8)

Apart from what is described by the narrative voice in this text, it is that narrative voice that strikes the reader as peculiar, peculiarly neutral and devoid of the self-reflexivity that one finds in other Beckett texts, such as *The Unnamable*. Lacking self-reflexivity, the narrative voice who speaks in *The Lost Ones* strikes the reader as voiceless, or almost so, because it speaks in a dispassionate way, conveying seemingly neutral, unembellished information. Speaking in relatively short sentences, sometimes fragments like the first line that opens the narration, the text’s neutral speaker attempts to give perspectives on, or “aperçus” of, the cylinder space in question: “So much for a first aperçu of the abode,” it says, as it moves on to more description of the place. However,

the seeming neutrality is itself an *effect* of a certain type of unembellished speech and delivery in short sentences and sentence fragments that deliver bits of what appears to be objective information about the cylinder, rather than simply being the pre-existing or conventional frame of the piece. This seeming neutrality achieved as an effect rather than through the conventional framing and narration that informs the reader the voice is “objective” not only resembles, but makes of the neutralized speaking “I” that Foucault finds in science its own principle. It is in this sense that, in principle, *The Lost Ones* might be said to be a scientific text. It is, however, important to keep in mind that the neutrality of the voice is a produced effect that strikes the reader in moments when it holds up, but perhaps even more so when it breaks down.

Notable in the text are just those moments when the neutrality seems to break down or lapse into a mode that no longer seems strictly objective. For example, it is remarkable that the neutral and repeated fact of the oscillations and their frequency should be compared to the moment of death, a final, unrepeated occurrence. The “restlessness” of the omnipresent light is periodically “stilled like panting at the last,” the last breath of someone about to die. The light going out makes the bodies “go dead still,” but after a few seconds all move again, “all begins again.” What Beckett suggests is that extinguishing the cylinder, its light, its bodies, is impossible, as they are doomed to a relentless repetition. The impossibility of coming to a standstill or end is certainly a theme encountered elsewhere in Beckett (*Endgame*, for example), but here it is not so much a theme as a *fact* – an ontical fact, to borrow a term from Heidegger. The fact of not being able to come to a standstill is repeated again in a curious, ironic fashion after the temperature oscillations are described: “Then all go dead still.” Granted, one detail

that needs stating is just how fragmented time might appear in its experience by the bodies dwelling in the cylinder and subjected to this stop-and-go rhythm, and as there is no fragmentation greater than that brought by death, the latter is invoked here: “dead still.” But to draw a comparison between death and the going still could be said to put the description on the side of hyperbole. It is an exaggeration to say that the bodies go dead still because manifestly they spring back to life every time. This suggestion that the bodies are moribund can then be said to be a purely subjective impression of the narrative voice, a lapse of dispassionate narration that I am claiming for this passage, indeed for this text. It is a lapse that requires careful explication because, rather than cancelling the effect of neutrality that, as mentioned above, animates this text, it works in paradoxical fashion to maintain it. In other words, the lapsing or break down is built into the functioning that produces the effect of neutrality.

On the one hand, the seeming voicelessness at work in the cited example is achieved through the narrative device employed to produce it as effect, rather than being already built into the text at the outset as a neutral, preexisting element of textual framing (certainly, scientific texts would lay claim to such a framing of the narrative voice, if they even recognized it, which for the most part they do not.) Thus, if one notices that the effect of neutrality does not always hold, that there is slippage, this, too, is a calculated and necessary effect of narration that points to its own constructedness. Indeed, that is what is happening in the example above. There are subtle lapses into “passion,” if one might ironically refer to something like feeling and interpretive color manifesting itself in the narrative voice. There is a slippage into the terrain of a restrained feeling, if not exactly of passion, that would stand as opposite to the dispassionate voice of science, and

which permits itself to invoke death with regard to the bodies when it is not strictly necessary to do so. The reader sees, through the slippage of the voice into terrain of speech where it does not strictly speaking belong, the sheer constructed quality of that so-called neutral voice. On the other hand, there are lapses *of* passion where one might expect some kind of feeling from the narrator who nevertheless remains unperturbed in his faithful narration of the cylinder. The narrator recounts the brute reality of bodies that rub together like dry leaves with the same even timbre of voice as he tells us about oscillations in temperature. Taken together, these lapses into subjectively colored impressions and the significant lack thereof do not call into question the objective neutrality of the voice, its constituent voicelessness, as one might expect. This is because the neutrality of the voice has less to do with absence of passion, or its presence, which ought in a different, commonly-held view to take away from neutrality. Passion, what little there is left in the bodies described and the voice describing them, functions differently here than one might initially conclude. The subjective inflection that the slippage I invoke brings to the speech is here less a diminution of objectivity than an affirmation of an ineradicable presence of subjectivity in so-called objective speech, which this is framed as being, thus likening it to the purportedly neutral speech *par excellence*, that of science. In this, it would seem that Beckett agrees with Foucault: even texts and discourses that appear devoid of a speaking “I,” such as scientific ones, are precisely the ones where a speaking I *cannot* not arise. Indeed, the speaking I, with its degrees of passion, is precisely that which Foucault does not banish from the scientific mode of speaking, but rather posits as its necessary if undisclosed element. From this perspective, raising the question, whether a text can be altogether dispassionate or

voiceless, as this text does from the very beginning, does not undermine its nature as an instance of such scientific discourse, but rather emphasizes it all the more in a way that problematizes the nature or *mode* of scientific speech by science or any other discourse.

Let us take another example from *The Lost Ones*. We are told that the bodies inhabiting the cylinder are subjected to radical shifts or oscillations in temperature. This is of course an important fact worth mentioning as part of the description, but there seems also to be a question of what happens in the intervals that exceeds the issue of scale of representation and which details deserve notation, and which is subtly suggested by the following sentence: “It [the temperature] too has its moments of stillness more or less hot or cold.” (8) There is a kind of seepage or mixing of hot and cold invoked that necessarily occurs as the temperature is radically changed. This suggests that there is thus a gap between the ideal temperature programmed by the cylinder’s functioning (its settings?) and the actual temperature felt by the bodies, for whom the interval of stillness will be “more or less hot or cold” rather than decidedly one or the other. This slippage in gauging and measurement, and the difference between what scientific instruments of measurement decree to be the state of affairs as opposed to the real state of bodies, immeasurable with any precision in a constant state of flux, is also significant and suggestive. It points to a kind of porosity within the interval between one element and another – moments of stillness are more or less hot or cold because there is mixing going on. The intervals when “all go dead still” are porous to both hot and cold, rather than holding a specific temperature. It also suggests that borders in general are not enforceable with any precision or assurance, as cold or hot bodies grow hot or cold in a way that blends hot and cold rather than keeping them distinct. Similarly, the narration itself

oscillates between hot and cold, between dispassionate and impassioned, between (fictional, framed, unframed) scientific mode and a more avowedly subjective mode of narration. Similarly, but with a significant difference: this text is situated in what, by analogy to the interval of oscillation, amounts to the interval of narration, never quite or exclusively in one mode or the other. In other words, the scientific mode is tainted by its purported opposite, subjective speech, in a blending or mixity that *cannot* not arise.

The voicelessness or neutrality of the narrative voice speaking in *The Lost Ones* is thus paradoxical because it is both a calculated effect of narrative framing in this particular text – lapses of the effect included – and a constitutive neutralized speaking “I” that cannot not arise in a text – any text, scientific text included. In the case of the text in question here, *The Lost Ones*, the almost-voicelessness, near-neutrality of the text raises the issue of whether an artistic text can achieve a *rapprochement* with the scientific text, and this not simply by calling into question the principle of the scientific text, but by adopting that principle for itself in its very work of framing and narrative function.

As I have attempted to show through the preceding examples, this is precisely what is happening in *The Lost Ones*, where the reader finds none of the markers of self-reflexivity of other Beckett texts, as I have already said, but instead finds the problem of subjective speech reformulated in a different terms, those of neutrality. In this text the reader is no longer confronted with the paradoxes of the self-reflexive speaking “I” of the author-function caught in its speculative mirror. There might even be a non-speculative perspective on the subject *tout court* to be found at its issue, as I stated in the previous chapter. The attentive reader will notice that the absence of the problematic of subjectivity framed as a speculative problematic gives rise to certain consequences in this

text, consequences having to do not only with the question of the scientific text, but with the practice of reading as an ethical imperative, as invoked by Foucault in his essay on the author-function, and by Barthes in his essay on the death of the author. Let us consider the consequences for the reader, or *scriptor-witness* as she deserves to be called.

2. The Scriptor

The question “What matter who speaks?” posed by Beckett and directly cited by Foucault certainly animates and orients a significant moment in the latter’s thought.⁴ In the case of Roland Barthes, the matter of who speaks it is also apparent that in the fragment of *The Unnamable* by Beckett, a certain notion of *écriture* gets its “expression.” The problem is that expression is no longer the mode of literature according to Barthes himself, who claims, rather, in the essay “The Death of the Author,” that literature speaks in an *intransitive* mode, where intransitive needs to be understood in strictly Barthean terms, that is, as a properly literary mode of intransitivity.⁵ This mode of intransitivity might best be understood using Foucault and Barthes as examples: In Barthes there is a militant thrust, while in Foucault there is a critical import, both being properly theoretical writers engaged in polemics; Beckett’s writing is truly intransitive and figurative in the sense of being a closed fictional universe that is not embarked upon expression of ideas, influencing of fellow literary critics or delivering any explicit, propagandistic critique, but without thereby losing relevance to the world that houses or contextualizes the text. It thus cannot be claimed that Beckett “expresses” ideas that find a more explicit formulation in Barthes. Even if we abandon the notion of expression and speak of an

⁴ Foucault, “What is an Author?,” 101. Foucault, “*Que-ce qu’un auteur?*,” *Dits et Écrits I*, 817.

⁵ Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” *Image, Music, Text*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1977, 142.

affinity between the two and say that the question of the speaking, authorial voice might not be against the neutrality that in Barthes' terms has replaced the deceased author does not mean that it is *for* it either. The literary text, in its intransitive mode, as Barthes call it, does not have an object, a "for," for which it might speak. Neutrality, a concept whose meaning I propose to hone here, puts in an appearance in *The Lost Ones* by Beckett, not by way of figuration in a voice as in *The Unnamable*, but as sheer *voicelessness* of the figures ambling through the text. To better understand the neutral voice and the neutrality of the bodies in *The Lost Ones*, it is necessary to consider again what Beckett is doing in *The Unnamable*, this time in terms of Barthes' writerly reader and scriptor.

The scriptor is the author reconceptualized in a very different paradigm. As already discussed in chapters two and three of my analysis, the author is a genius held to be the origin of the text who says the last word on it, owning it with the intention and expressive power of a quasi-divinity. To paraphrase what Barthes writes in "The Death of the Author," the author is pure fiction, that is, ideological construct. It is the death of *this* ideological construct rather than the person of the author that Barthes has in mind. The death of the untenable construct is performed in literature even before criticism gets wind of the scope of the scandal that is the maintaining of an untenable concept of the author. Barthes is the critic who, as he sees it, calls, with literature, for a reconceptualization of the author. That reconceptualization involves a rethinking of the reader, as it is the latter who is "ransomed" by the death of the author. It is as if the reader had been kept hostage up to now, and it is *he*, not the author, who will enjoy a greater degree of liberty. To understand how Barthes develops the idea of the reader, one must turn to a text that performs the very thing he wishes to communicate.

In his text *S/Z: An Essay*,⁶ Barthes becomes the reader he is announcing in “The Death of the Author.” Reading is the act, or better process, that Barthes’ analyzes, and of which he demonstrates an exemplary case through his own forceful reading of Balzac’s *Sarrasine*. But Barthes does not simply tell his readers what this reader is as if he existed “out there.” From Barthes’ perspective, there is neither an “out there” nor a “he” of which to speak *yet*. The risk is that in talking “about it” one destroys the very thing one is attempting to make come to light. Barthes thus instantiates a practice of reading in which the reader arises out of the matrix of the text under consideration shaped by the discourses coursing through it, and bringing “his” discourses, those that in turn shape him and without which there would be no “he” to speak of, to bear upon the text. The reader is a creature of time, not a divine instance of transfer of sense from one point to another. Neither is he a parasite⁷ who settles on the text and disturbs its functioning and delicate balance. The transfer of sense if there be one is neither directed from above nor determined ahead of time. It is in fact hard *work*:

Yet reading is not a parasitical act, the reactive complement of a writing which we endow with all the glamour of creation and anteriority. It is a form of work (which is why it would be better to speak of a lexeological act – even a lexeographical act, since I write my reading), and the method of this work is topological: I am not hidden within the text, I am simply irrecoverable from it: my task is to move, to shift systems whose perspective ends neither at the text nor at the “I”: in operational terms, the meanings I find are established not by “me” or by others, but by their *systematic* mark: there is no other *proof* of a reading than the quality and endurance of its systematic; in other words: than its functioning. To read, in fact, is a labor of language.⁸

⁶ Roland Barthes, Trans., Richard Miller, *S/Z: An Essay*, New York: Hill and Wong, The Noonday Press, 1974.

⁷ Barthes of course means the traditional sense of parasite as that which disturbs the system, comes from the exterior, does not belong, works against the system’s smooth operation as attack and as resistance, counteracting its programmed pull to incorporate it. The parasite in the sense that Michel Serres develops in his eponymous book, *The Parasite*, could be said to be in line with the reader. In this view, the reader is the parasite of the system, performing the very function, writerly reading, that lay in the exclusive purview of the system. In other words, the reader, a parasite through and through, *is* the system. This is a point that would need further development elsewhere. It could well be that Barthes means parasite already in this sense, and the reader would thus not be such a parasitic site of the text.

⁸ Barthes, *S/Z*, 10-11.

First, the reading Barthes invokes here is a forceful, properly *writerly* reading (“I write my reading”). Such reading risks failure and is open to a degree to chance and alleatory encounter that is not possible in the traditional passive reading. Significantly, it is not “open to proof,” which would mark it as irredeemably subjective (and therefore untenable) with critics coming from a different paradigm (also invalidating the practice of writing as Barthes sees it). However, the very notion of subjectivity (and objectivity) is used differently by Barthes than the would-be critic of this subjective turn. As Barthes puts it in the lines that precede the passage on the labor of reading: “Reading involves risks of objectivity or subjectivity (both are imaginary) only insofar as we define the text as an expressive object (presented for our own expression), sublimated under a morality of truth, in one instance laxist; in the other ascetic.”⁹ In other words, reading is beyond subjectivity and objectivity because the text is not an object “presented for our own expression” and, one ought to recall, is not an object *of* our expression, as Barthes states in “The Death of the Author.” This kind of reading is subjective in the sense evoked in chapter three, in the discussion of the author-function, which becomes a proper author-function in a paradigm shift in which subjectivity and neutrality are on a chiasmic path of collision.

Furthermore, reading, being the labor that it is, is not easy, and it is in the consideration of its difficulty that we must reconsider scriptorial writing, which never ceases to be close on the horizon of reading, but whose similarity in difference must be remarked. Writerly reading, the kind that is disabused and persevering also flags and becomes tired, risking slippage into the other kind of reading. In that, it is like its obverse,

⁹ Barthes, *S/Z*, 10.

“scriptorial” writing, which also flags and slips into its “other,” the reification into an object of what needs to be rendered with integrity as itself. The passage to the scriptor is a difficult one, or even one of unceasing approach to a position that remains one part ungraspable. Barthes might be premature in seeing this passage already accomplished, or about to be. This critique of Barthes is legible in the analyzed passages from Beckett’s *The Unnamable*. One could say that in some of the turns the cited passage takes, there is even a tone not in keeping with the militant thrust of Barthes’ manifesto for literature. As I have already shown, the speech of Beckett’s narrators bears witness to the peculiar state of affairs not only as regards the author, but also the subject, the three being caught up together in their trifold scheme. It is the very neutrality of this subject that deserves scrutiny because in depicting it, Beckett’s writing seems to “designate an operation of recording, of observing, of representing, of ‘painting,’” – in short, of everything that Barthes tells his readers modern literature does *not* do. While it might be true that in Beckett the author is dead, his avatars continue to mutter in an outdated mode about the incommensurability of the author with the task at hand, as evidenced by *The Unnamable*. When Barthes says that “the modern writer, having buried the Author, can therefore no longer believe, according to the ‘pathos’ of his predecessors, that his hand is too slow for his thought or his passion, and that in consequence, making a law out of necessity, he must accentuate this gap and endlessly ‘elaborate’ his form,”¹⁰ we ought not jump to the conclusion that the passage in Beckett to the “scriptor,” as Barthes calls him – the un-author of/in the text whose “hand, detached from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of

¹⁰ Barthes, “Death of the Author,” 146.

inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin”¹¹ – is a smooth or easy one. It would be hasty to say that when Beckett’s narrator says, “It is I who write who cannot lift my hand from my knee,” he is somehow simply approximating that gesture of the Barthean scriptor. He is *and he is not*. He *is* a scriptor to the extent that he “accentuates the gap” in Barthes’ sense, which is the gap between the paradigm within which he speaks and the one he has left behind. He is not a scriptor, however, to the extent that he performs a paradoxically expressive act: he stands as evidence of a lack of unity that even the reader, that inheritor of the author’s force, cannot effect. Barthes does say that the vein of modern literature to which Beckett certainly belongs is one where the Author absents himself, but the filling of the void is easier said in theoretical terms than done. This void becomes the ground of a different problematic that emerges and to which Beckett seems uniquely attuned: the subject remnant, the one who does not inhabit the subjective trousers, the “lost one” of that subjective Bermuda triangle. Even as the overwhelming impression the reader forms is that of a neutral voice speaking, neutral because tending toward an impersonal mode that it never quite reaches, the remnants not of the author, but of the subject substrate that Barthes seems to have buried alongside the author, continue to speak and to write in a mode of non-identity to a self who cannot be at the root of the act of writing (“cannot lift my hand from my knee”). In other words, Beckett does approximate the scriptor’s gesture through the speech of his narrator, but he does it on and in his own terms, those of an utterance or “recording” function that witnesses to the crisis of the split subject.

¹¹ Barthes, “Death of the Author,” 146.

Thus, Beckett, who as I have shown critiques the concept of the speculative author function developed by Foucault, also delivers a critique to the neutral writer or “scriptor” who in Barthes’ account succeeds the Author. It is in the slippage from neutrality that the scriptor becomes a scriptor-witness. But before turning to Beckett and the exemplary instance of the *scriptor-witness* found in *The Lost Ones*, let us consider what Foucault has to say regarding this neutrality and Barthes’ premature smoothing over of the problematic of the author function, as Foucault claims. The discussion is useful for understanding in what sense the scriptor-witness is the double of the author-function, and why the reader, that inheritor of the author’s force, cannot effect the necessary unity of the text, and yet *must do it*.

3. Barthes/Foucault: Neutral Scriptio

Foucault in his essay “What is an author” does not mention Barthes by name, but he does levy criticism against *écriture*, a concept that Barthes develops in the essay, “The Death of the Author.” It seems, then, that Foucault argues precisely against Barthes when the former says that the notion of writing (*écriture*) upon which depends a certain school of literary criticism (or better, literary ‘militantism’ when Barthes is concerned) reintroduces the concept of unity into the picture. Unity, the underlying basis and guarantee of originality that forms an important feature of the authorship against which Foucault argues because it is what the author essentially brings to the work to make it a work, finds a way back into the discourse, according to Foucault. Indeed, Barthes himself does not shy away from speaking in terms of unity when he says that “the unity of a text

is not in its origin, it is in its destination,”¹² and presumably it is to this that Foucault objects.

But we may well ask whether putting the unity on the side of the reader simply repeats a familiar pattern of an outmoded authorship that ought to be relegated to the past as another item for the archaeological dig through the history of ideas. Foucault seems to think that entertaining unity in any sense is just such a repetition, but one could argue that this ‘repetition’ brings an important difference or variation. As I argue, the fact that unity should appear in Barthes’ discourse does not mean that a dangerous term has been introduced to ‘undo’ the work of dismantling the author; on the contrary, the repeated unity reappears on the side of the receiver of the text, the reader, who is not simply a “hypostasis,” to borrow Barthes’ own term, of the author. Despite Foucault’s reservations that the reader might be just such a “hypostasis” of the author, I argue that the receiver of the text, the *writerly* reader to call him by his Barthean name, is implicated in the text in a way that shifts the unity of the convergence under consideration to a very different terrain that bears little resemblance to the unity of the authorial origin against which Foucault directs the force of his critique.

There is of course the risk of making Barthes sound like another Foucault, which he is not and which is certainly not my intention here. Barthes and Foucault have distinctive discourses, and their readers would do well to analyze them carefully in their differences, visible and more subtle. There is, however, another risk that one runs in exaggerating the rift between them for the sake of keeping their discourses “pure.” In preserving an integral Barthean perspective and an integral Foucauldian perspective, one

¹² Barthes, “Death of the Author,” 148.

risks overlooking in what sense they share common philosophical ground, and in what sense they employ sometimes-flawed or misleading terms in a struggle against a common enemy: an outdated paradigm of the author, which, when examined under a certain angle, opens a new perspective on subjectivity, as I have already shown in chapter three. Some clarification is thus in order. Perhaps in the terms of scissioning, already mentioned in the context of Foucault, one could put Foucault and Barthes on a common terrain, which is not the same as leveling their difference, in order to do justice to the concept of textual unity upheld by Barthes.

To do so, I invoke another philosopher, one who typically is seen as occupying a different philosophical sphere or tradition in France than either Foucault or Barthes, but whose thinking on movement and *in* movement allows the bridging of a false conceptual gap between Foucault and Barthes so that a greater “gap” might be addressed: the utterly evacuated, neutral perspective of *The Lost Ones* and what I later call the *scriptor-witness*. A detour via the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari is pertinent precisely here as another theoretical voice because they proposes a reconceptualization of the concept in their book, *What is Philosophy?* Only if we understand that concepts are formed in fluid fashion, are movement-concepts, can we envision such a thing as a reader-function, a term that becomes useful in the return to *The Lost Ones* in the next section of this chapter.

The unity in question as employed by Barthes is a term that bears only a shadow resemblance to the concept of closure, wholeness and pre-established unity to which Foucault objects as he rightly claims that the author-function remains unaccounted for by Barthes. And while one might entertain the idea that Barthes has declared the death of the

author somewhat prematurely, burying the author-function with it to “ransom the reader,” it would be a mistake to see nothing behind the *demythologized* concept of unity that he is employing in his discourse, and especially given the tersely phrased language of the essay under consideration, “The Death of the Author,” that leaves much unsaid, or virtually said. Reading Barthes, especially in this essay possessing the rhetorical force of a manifesto, the reader must beware. One must be sure not to read a term or concept in Barthes strictly at face value, treating it as a kind of philosophical *idée reçue*, or treating it as a flat signifier that represents a pure idea, which then becomes the real operative term in understanding the proposition at hand. The demythologizer of Platonic ideas revamped by ideology in the sphere of the everyday (Barthes writing *Mythologies*) would not, I think, be guilty in this later text of using a term like unity as if it still possessed a Platonic pedigree, as if it had not received a re-reading at the hands of Barthes and as if it did not deserve such an active re-reading at the hands of Barthes’ implied reader, the very one invoked by, for example, the following fragment of the essay:

In this way is revealed the whole being of writing: a text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination; but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted. This is why it is absurd to hear the new writing condemned in the name of a humanism which hypocritically appoints itself the champion of the reader's rights. The reader has never been the concern of classical criticism; for it, there is no other man in literature but the one who writes. We are now beginning to be the dupes no longer of such antiphrases, by which our society proudly champions precisely what it dismisses, ignores, smothers or destroys; we

know that to restore to writing its future, we must reverse its myth: the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author.¹³

Reading Barthes one senses that the terms he employs are like shifting sands under the feet of the reader, that they have a double or multiple meaning, and that they are allusive and hypertextual *avant la lettre*, where hypertextual should be understood not in the common-sense way the term is deployed today that does nothing to reverse the linearity imposed on the text, but precisely as a non-linear quality that frees the text from the sovereignty of linear teleology.

Reading the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari it is also the case that one must read the term or concept not as a static term with a fixed meaning, just as it has “always” been employed by traditional philosophy; one must keep in mind the old meaning and the field in which it is inscribed and remember that the term has come to replace, in a sense, a defunct concept in the field of problems it was meant to address. One must thus read it as a dynamic concept in keeping with Deleuze’s ethical injunction to philosophize in a manner where thought has the form of movement to which I alluded earlier in the chapter.¹⁴ It is not enough to say that the concept is still “under development,” tentatively proffered, pending a clearer statement, as this presupposes a succession of static concepts to come and does not get at the heart of the movement *within* the concept. A concept in movement is one that not only recalls the absence of an old concept that has departed, as it were, and calls to mind the need to rethink the traces left behind; a concept in movement is one that, furthermore, marks a categorical refusal to arrest thought within a static concept and asks instead for an active engagement by the

¹³ Barthes, “Death of the Author,” 148.

¹⁴ This is the argument Deleuze makes in his *Cinema* books, where the discussion of film in relation to movement and time, which it makes appear, is not simply limited to film studies, or even primarily for film studies, as it is a call to philosophizing in a way very different from the dialectical norm.

reader in the thinking process itself, on the very page before him or her. A concept in movement becomes a kind of “ground zero” of conceptuality, to borrow a term from another ground-breaking book by Barthes that fits quite well here, as the concept as it is employed by Deleuze and Barthes invites the reader to think it critically from the ground up, from its most basic structural elements, and to see it embedded in its history. Only through such a reactualizing of the past standing open and *reactualizable again*, as Deleuze might put it, only through such an act of reading can a concept acquire a new “meaning,” if only temporarily. It is thus this movement into the past, and also this movement of thought on the page that the concept not so much masks as it instigates when one actively reads and interprets, that warrants the use of the term “movement.” To say that a concept is in movement is also to insist on conceptual overlap and contiguity, and to claim that the fixed “continuity” or unity that is a concept is really a contiguity of conceptual elements that have been put into a sweeping, *uniting movement*, much like the frames of a film that succeed one another and give the illusion of movement on the screen, an illusion that Deleuze claims actually *is* movement.¹⁵ Thus, rather than designating a conceptual purity at a standstill, the concept *must* be a movement, according to Deleuze. It must be added that the term “movement” itself is reconceptualized in this discussion of the concept, as it is in Deleuze (its special author-function), because movement as a concept is not immune to the very conceptual shifting and reframing that it designates. Indeed, movement as employed by Deleuze, and here in my argument, bears little resemblance to movement “in the world” as it is typically understood, and yet it designates both the slippage of concepts viewed in a historical or

¹⁵ See esp. chapter 4 of Deleuze, *Movement-Image*.

genealogical manner and, more importantly, the continuity *after the fact* – after the concept has been isolated but not altogether arrested – and that is at work in philosophical concepts that only appear monolithic at first glance.

To come back to Barthes, the term “unity” as he uses it in the essay is just such a concept in movement, except that one needs to see the Barthean specificity of the movement as well. The concept of unity is in movement because it is a *composite* concept as outlined above, already “containing” a measure of constitutive movement at its heart. Its function in Barthes’ discourse is to designate a unity on Barthes’ unique terms: The text has unity insofar as it is a bringing together of forces or of signs on a page, not by a subject-author whose intention animates the text, but by a neutral subjectivizing force free of the author and animating the body of the text. Perhaps one could call it a unity-function, or the “unity effect” produced after a certain encounter of the writerly reader with the text. In any case, the textual “unity” that Barthes has in mind is really more of a unifying and subjectivizing force unique to a particular text rather than an “object” unity given once and for all and identifiable from the outside. Emphasis must be placed on the element of encounter and of subjectivization, which implies a constitutive split in the “unity.” What has been termed by critics and Barthes himself as subjectivization of the reader by the text is thus effected via this special instance of the unifying force seen *as fragmenting or fracturing*.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the unifying force paradoxically bears a closer resemblance to dispersion in the Foucauldian sense than either Foucault or Barthes might care to admit. Textual unity becomes for Barthes a way of designating a space that *suspends* discourses and authorship. It should be added that this suspension happens in a

moment where the *hors cadre* discussed earlier – the ‘hidden’ virtual contour of the discourses – becomes visible, making oppositions and similarities appear in a new light. Discourses come back to a kind of ground zero where everything is possible again. Further, in the suspension the terrain of the writerly reader becomes the site where a chiasmic convergence of a multiplicity of discourses occurs such that the reader constituted by that multiplicity comes to bear a real responsibility for what happens next. Another way to put it is that he or she is subjectivized or *fragmented* as a witness in an actualized and actualizable (thus political) present that an intransitive literary text like this opens up.

To sum up, in the process of reading Foucault and Barthes, it becomes clear that Foucault’s author-function as dispersion actually serves as a *unifying* tool for a discourse, while Barthes’ textual unity occurs only through a dispersion of forces that have traditionally been perceived as unified in the figure of the Author. Paradoxically, Barthes’ and Foucault’s terms are best understood if their discourses are put through a process of scissioning of one by the other, whereby it becomes apparent that the terms of their discourse that were in seeming opposition are not irreconcilable. The author-function *preserves* the specificity of a given discourse, sometimes residing within a text, when, in a chiasmic move of dispersion, the speaking egos acquire an author function. Barthes’ textual unity is an intertextual suspension and a dispersion of authorship into separate forces, the writer and the reader: (at least) two multiplicities that make a multitude. Foucault and Barthes are thus not dialectically opposed, and neither is the process of scissioning a dialectical encounter between these two thinkers. No new term comes

about, while existing terms come to be seen on a common terrain new only in the sense that it was not previously seen as distinctly shared by the two thinkers.

It is precisely the seeming absence of the speculative subject-witness in a text like *The Lost Ones* under consideration in the next section of this chapter that warrants positing a pure reader or *scriptor-witness* who records in “neutral” fashion the “events” of the cylinder depicted in the piece and which itself is the result of a dispersion of forces. It is here that the reader-critic encounters a truly neutral voice – in the manner of neutralized scientific objectivity that has passed over into the subjective sphere, as outlined above – that is, significantly, *not* embarked upon marking its own absence, but rather “reads” the situation of subjects in the cylinder. The challenge is to see – having put in place the right concept of ethical reading or *appareil de lecture* that is constituted by the scriptor-witness able to witness to or read the *hors cadre* of the subject – that the seemingly objective depiction is actually *subjective* and bears on subjects whose subjectivity is in crisis. As I show in the next section that returns to Beckett’s text directly, subjectivity turns up in an unexpected place, one that critics have not addressed as bearing the marks of subjectivity *because it does not really bear them*, but which one is warranted in seeing as *purely subjective* in the neutral sense that owes everything to Foucault and Barthes – that is, if one has adopted a somewhat different perspective on the matter of subjectivity and subjectivization, as outlined above. The *scriptor* who records in “neutral” fashion the “events” of the cylinder depicted in the piece is itself the result of a dispersion of forces, a dispersion of the subject into the three terms encountered in *The Unnamable*. To return to the figure of the trousers, the scriptor, like the author before him and whom he “unseats,” might be said to be dispersed over three terms: neutral scription

and subjective writing mediated by the *reader*. For the real double or obverse of the dead writer is not the author-function, in Barthes' perspective. It is something like the writerly "reader-function" that we might call the *scriptor-witness*.

4. *The Lost Ones: the Scriptor-Witness*

To return to Beckett's text, let us begin by saying that this text is not written. It is not written by the narrator of *The Unnamable*, or by any other narrator of Beckett's. It is recorded by a distant narrator, the author-function who speaks in *The Unnamable*, who, as we have seen, is interchangeable with any other narrator. His specificity is perhaps only that he works a little harder on the text, not missing anything, or close to anything, as he labors in the process of naming. Naming, however, is also, according to Barthes, the "name" of the reading game. He states this in the passage that follows immediately after the passage on reading being a form of work: "To read is to find meanings, and to find meanings is to name them; but these named meanings are swept toward other names; names call to each other, reassemble, and their grouping calls for further naming: I name, I unname, I rename: so the text passes: it is a nomination in the course of becoming, a tireless approximation, a metonymic labor."¹⁶ For Barthes, reading is an unceasing process of naming, "un travail métonymique."¹⁷ The names shift, change, and, it seems, take or name the part for the whole, rather than naming the whole, since this is a "metonymic labor." Significantly, the work of naming that the narrator is performing when he invokes the names of other known Beckett narrators puts him in the curious position of metonymic, rather than metaphoric, placeholder or representative for the

¹⁶ Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 11.

¹⁷ Roland Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes, III Livres, Textes, Entretiens, 1968-1971*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002, p. 127.

others. Being metonymic, he is just like they are. Further, given that the labor of this author-function is *reading* according to Barthes, he seems to be no different from the reader, a reader put in the same position. “It is precisely because I forget that I read,” Barthes says in the same essay.¹⁸ One ought to add that it is precisely because the author-function in *The Lost Ones* *reads* that it is able to write. The scriptor, this writing function that writes in neutral fashion, is part writer, part reader, split over scriptorial writing and scriptorial reading. In Beckett, the fits and starts and plurivocity perform this very split of the writing function that is as much, if not more, a reading function. In that perspective, it is the double of the author-function, indistinguishable from it in the very difference that draws them together in their shared metonymic labor. Their meeting point would then be the *scriptor witness*, this fixed, static observer/recorder who takes everything in and renders it again, whose metonymic labor seems to exceed metonymy, but without acceding to metaphor and representation.

The approaches of Barthes and Foucault might be different in some regards, and similar in others, as I show earlier, but one important point of convergence is the important status accorded to the reader who assumes an active role that up to that moment had been denied him and who, by virtue of that active role, becomes an ethical actor. The attentive reader must notice that the problematic of *The Lost Ones*, the one encountered first and which is precisely the question of the voiceless text – the markers of the presence of the speaking “I” rendered in non-speculative fashion – puts on the reader the ethical burden or imperative to do what the voice itself seemingly is not doing: to consider and judge what is being dispassionately described. In other words, the work

¹⁸ Barthes, *S/Z*, 11.

of interpretation acquires a new contour, that of ethical act of judging. Just as the “I” cannot not arise, so the reader cannot not judge or interpret when confronted with the cylinder described in highly, albeit paradoxically, neutral fashion.

This convergence of reader and writer, of author-function and scriptor into scriptor witness is theoretically possible. Just how the text of *The Lost Ones* accomplishes the subjectivization of not only the narrator, but the reader into scriptor witness needs a clear explanation. It is not enough to say that this ethical imperative can be seen as arising from the text, just as Barthes and Foucault in their different ways claim, because in the case of *The Lost Ones* it is as much a question of narrative parameters as it is of parameters of the cylinder or abode described: “cylinder” must be understood as both cylinder or abode described *in* the text and as cylinder *of* this text, the closed abode of narrative parameters that houses the reader and impels him or her to ethical reading as judgment. This, however, is blurring the line between the space of the text and the space of the reader, who like the narrator is not in the space described, but a space *hors cadre* to the cylinder. It must be stated clearly in what sense the reader is able to approach the space of the cylinder of the text. Understanding this has everything to do with the *scriptorial reading*, Barthes’ scriptor viewed as active writerly reader. The imperative and the reader arise together in and of the cylinder, in and of their respective “parameters.” And while it is these parameters specific to the text in and of which they arise that enable the reader to witness not so much to the speculative subjectivity, which here is invoked by its very absence, but to act as witness to that other subject, the one who does not speak but is clearly caught in the mechanisms of biopower of the cylinder, the question of just how Beckett’s text subjectivizes its reader remains to be answered. In

other words, it remains to be shown how the forceful reading by the writerly reader of the textual cylinder that renders the place and the situation of those bodies found within the cylinder in the text must make the chiasmic cross into *readerly writing*.

One point that needs emphasis, and which can only be stated at this point in the discussion, is that the doubles, author-function and scriptor witness, are in fact one and the same, precisely because they are positions and not reified things or beings, that mark the different moments of the moving image that is the figure of the subjective trio, the trousers. They are, in Barthes' sense, pure *names* that result from a reading that might have accorded them different names. The figure of the trousers is thus a metonymy, the result of "metonymic labor," and not a metaphor that refers to something else. One of these metonymic names, the author-function, names the moment where writing takes precedence and "reins" in the two elements or "legs" of split subjectivity. The scriptor-witness names the moment where an unceasing reading takes precedence and cannot rein in the legs of subjectivity. At neither moment, however, is the "opposite" ever completely extinguished. Reading and writing are not opposites, and therefore author-function names the moment when writing is already slipping into reading, while scriptor-witness names the moment when reading is already slipping into writing. Whether "seated" or "unseated," the trousers are always tattered and restless.

In *The Unnamable*, the narrative voice is the split voice of the author-function, which necessarily passes into scriptor-witness mode, when we see on the page sentences of the kind analyzed in chapter three that are infinitely readable because they are the product of reading, not writing. In *The Lost Ones*, the counterpart of the author-function, the scriptor witness, also produces curious sentences that are not "written." For example,

the sentence in the text that states the rule of the ladders that the bodies occupying the cylinder are to obey is itself structured like one of the ladders, with rungs missing and requiring leaps, acrobatics almost, if one is to climb them: “But devised for the convenience of all there is no question of its applying without restriction or as a license for the unprincipled climber to engross the ladder beyond what is reasonable.”¹⁹ In a later section I return to an exhaustive reading of this sentence, but here, it stands as an example of a sentence at the origin of which lies a reading, not writing, operative function. It gives itself to so many different ways of understanding its words, which are interspersed with gaps that require leaps in reading, that it begs the very question of writing as productive of the sense on the pages of *The Lost Ones*. To read these sentences one must cut them up into what Barthes calls *lexias* – “a series of brief, contiguous fragments, which we shall call *lexias*, since they are units of reading.”²⁰ The cited sentence is just one example among many such sentences that make this text truly a plural text in Barthes’ sense and the product of an implied scriptor-witness.

The reader is also justified in positing a passage of the scriptor-witness into author-function mode of the narrator, and this not simply because there is a non-identical identity posited between the two according to the reading I present here. From a certain shift in perspective – one which demands that the reader follow through to the end of her reading, and which therefore produces a remarkable change in the reader – the scriptor-witness is in fact and has never ceased to be one and the same as the failing, almost-extinguished, infinitely interchangeable author-function of *The Unnamable*. While it is easier to see the narrator of *The Unnamable* as slipping from one to the other, the same

¹⁹ Samuel Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1970, p. 22.

²⁰ Barthes, *S/Z*, 13.

slippage in *The Lost Ones* is invisible, given the “voiceless,” neutral voice speaking. However, looked at from a certain perspective, the reader experiences a shock of discovery on a par with the shock produced in *Film*, as discussed in chapter one, that the two have been and remain the same, and that the one who has effected a noteworthy passage is none other than *the reader herself*.

In *The Lost Ones*, the reader finds none of the markers of self-reflexivity of other Beckett texts, or of the (implied) author-function that speaks in *The Unnamable*, as I have already said. One finds instead the neutral voice, but the latter cannot be considered outside the confines of the problem of subjective speech reformulated in different terms in this text. In other words, we cannot consider that the speech of the voice is somehow *outside* the cylinder, as we might be tempted to do, but rather must consider the cylinder to itself be the figuration of an impossible outside, an *hors cadre* to revisit this filmic term. We should pose the question whether the cylinder is an *hors cadre* space to the space of literature from whose vantage point one can then see the narrator of *The Unnamable* and the voice of *The Lost Ones* as one and the same, not just in principle, but in *textual* fact.

Reading *The Lost Ones*, one notices the remarkable slippage from author-function to scriptor-witness of the voice, but equally remarkable is the lack of placement of the voice in the cylinder. From where does “it” speak? That is the slightly reformulated question posed to the reader by this text. Nothing in *The Lost Ones* suggests a place, and the ambitious reader might be tempted to invent a “metaphoric” one suggested by the text: He speaks from an impossible position, that of witness to a brutal law-abiding contingent of bodies from whom he is radically removed, as he must be since he is able to

speak and they are not. “He” would thus be a classic omniscient narrator speaking from the God’s eye view, and by sheer miracle. However, the reader could refuse to accept explanations that search for “a” place, some nameable point from which the voice speaks. The reading that seeks to uncover a specific place attempts to “reconstitute a singular theological meaning,” as Barthes puts it. The reader ought also to reject the easy, metaphorical answer that would have it that the voice, who represents us, speaks from the space of literature as such, which only works if we accord that this space is *like* our space, a metaphor for ours. This is still in the closed, theological mode that refuses the pluralism and openness of texts. Instead, the reader could say that he speaks radically *from nowhere*, which is to say, he speaks from the same space occupied by the bodies, being in essence no different from them.

This, however, entails a shift in perspective that has done with both metaphor and artificial boundaries between texts. In this view, the neutral voice of the implied scriptor-witness is no different from the implied author-function in *The Unnamable*, being situated also in the same place as the latter. Let us return to a passage that I analyze in chapter three that establishes the author-function’s situation between the two poles of subjectivity, and which here appears in a new light:

From centre to circumference in any case it is a far cry and I may well be situated somewhere between the two. It is equally possible, I do not deny it, that I too am in perpetual motion, accompanied by Malone, as the earth by its moon. In which case there would be no further grounds for my complaining about the disorder of the lights, this being due simply to my insistence on regarding them as always the same lights and

viewed always from the same point. All is possible or almost. But the best is to think of myself as fixed and at the centre of this place, whatever its shape and extent may be.²¹

This passage, being a plural text, gives two answers to the question of the narrator's situation. The entire reading, an operative distance has been maintained between the narrator and the scriptor witness, a distance that also maintains the distance between the space of the cylinder and the narrator's undetermined space. In chapter three it is a question of centrality of the subject who speaks viewed in the perspective of speculative, split subjectivity, which is answered by the text as "somewhere between the two." In that same passage viewed in the light of the present question regarding the position of the scriptor witness, the answer would seem to be the same, "somewhere between the two." However, here, "somewhere between the two" refers to the *hors cadre* of split subjectivity, that space that levels the difference between the speculative and the other half. He is "somewhere between the two," between the centre and the circumference, in a space that is manifestly the same as the cylinder and presents "the disorder of lights" that the scriptor-witness describes neutrally. Significantly, the neutral voice of *The Lost Ones* simply describes the lights as a brutal assault, *as if* disordered, but without qualifying that such a disorder might be the illusion of one positioned or situated in a particular manner. Here, however, the disorder is perspectively qualified: it is only a "disorder" viewed from the perspective of one fixed, come to a halt, of someone like one of the Lost Ones. It is only when the two texts are viewed together that the neutral perspective of *The Lost Ones* comes into relief, and its neutrality assumes the contours of a properly *subjective* speech. In this view, the speculative narrator is in fact no more

²¹ Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 295.

subjective, and the scriptor-witness is no less subjective, than the obverse. The narrator of *The Unnamable* occupies the properly speculative phase of the moving image of subjectivity *in the cylinder*, while the scriptor witness occupies the other phase, that of decomposition or dissociation of the author-function from the other terms of subjectivity. In other words, the narrator of *The Unnamable* is one of the Lost Ones, is no different from the wandering, banished bodies. The only difference is that he is in a different phase of the process. He is the lost author-function come undone from the rest of subjectivity. In other words, his speech *is* the lost, impossible speech of the bodies described and residing in the cylinder. And significantly, it is the shift in readerly perspective operated *by the reader* that makes visible the fact that this is a *shared* perspective of the two voices who are in fact *one*.

The shock of the realization that the two narrative voices are one parallels the shock experienced in *Film*, analyzed in chapter one, and deserves to be considered alongside it. Whereas *Film* is the occasion to open the discussion of the split subject, positing an *hors cadre* space through which the problematic unfolds, here at the issue of the problematic, at the issue of the subjective trousers, we are in a position to posit the true double of the split subject of literature: *the reader*, that other split subject who is subjectivized by the text, that is, turned into a writerly-reader function who takes the step and *names* the narrator, that is, points to the place from which he speaks and renames him as the scriptor-witness. In other words, *The Unnamable* remains “unnamable” provided that we continue to regard reading as an activity that searches for metaphoric meanings and treats the text as representation. It only becomes “unnameable,” with missing “e” reinserted by the writerly, subjectivized reader, when we renounce the limited, alienated

labor of reading for metaphor and embrace instead the infinite reading as naming in metonymic mode. Another way of putting this is that the reader thus subjectivized realizes that she herself is none other than the narrator, who is none other than the neutral voice, who is none other than one of the Lost Ones. And therefore the task of reading has only begun: It is this kind of subjectivized reading that takes one more step into the abyss of reading and realizes that the task of reading the subject remnant is what remains. The reader is herself – in essence, not metaphor – no different from the Lost Ones because “their” space *hors cadre* is the anamorphic image of her space *hors cadre*. The reader must consciously choose the trousers of subjectivity and wear them. That is, she must *read*.

5. The Reader

It is only at this point that we can begin to read, that is, return to the text of *The Lost Ones*. Before proceeding, however, it is useful to briefly summarize what other critics have said about this late work by Beckett and how my approach differs from theirs.

To put it in the words of Garin Dowd, one of the commentators, “Of all of Beckett’s Spartan late works *The Lost Ones* has invited the most spectacular critical feeding frenzy when it comes to the vexed question of allegorical interpretation.”²² For example, Peter Murphy looks at the cylinder as a “quincunx”: “*The lost ones*, like *The Garden of Cyrus*, takes as its fundamental principle of order the quincunx (an arrangement of five objects set so that four are at corners of a square or rectangle and the

²² Garin Dowd, “The Abstract Literary Machine: Guattari, Deleuze and Beckett’s *The Lost Ones*.” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 37.2 (2001): 205.

other at its centre) [...]” At first arguing for a figurative principle and against allegory in this text, Murphy returns to allegory:

In Section 15 Beckett’s narrator abandons his realistic critique of the hermetic tradition and imposes a solution that actually is equivalent to Browne’s. To say that all will never awake is just as allegorical as to say that all will certainly awake. The rage for order in Section 15 is as much in evidence as it is in Browne’s concluding fifth chapter. To achieve his own ‘mystical harmony,’ Beckett abandons his realistic premises and commits himself to allegory.

He concludes that “*The lost ones* is a fascinating work in that its conclusion shows Beckett driven towards an allegorical solution that goes against his preoccupation with the ontological issues that underlie fiction.”²³ Karine Germoni also performs an allegorical reading. In her view, Beckett presents a fragmented nature, one plagued by absence, but which is ultimately an allegory of (disappointed) Romanticism: “*Le dépeupleur* montre, pourtant, que la nature, même dans l’univers beckettien, ne se laisse pas facilement évincer et avec elle, la coloration plus ou moins forte de la vision romantique.”²⁴ She also remarks upon the expression “if a man,” which is a direct citation of Primo Levi: “L’expression “si c’est un homme”, qui renvoie au titre du roman de Primo Levi, *Si c’est un homme*, pose en effet la question du caractère humain ou encore humain des corps.”²⁵ However, Germoni does not analyze any further why this citation should find its way into the text. Garin Dowd in his own analysis avoids allegory, seeing in *The Lost Ones* an “abstract machine” whose functioning he reads along Deleuzian lines while putting the text in communication with different philosophers from the western tradition: “*The Lost Ones* configures a machinic edifice which on one level

²³ Peter Murphy, “The nature of allegory in ‘The lost ones,’ or the Quincunx Realistically Considered,” *Journal of Beckett Studies*, no. 7, Spring 1982 (<http://www.english.fsu.edu/jobs/num07/Num7Murphy.htm>).

²⁴ Karine Germoni, “The Theatre of *Le Dépeupleur*.” *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui: An Annual Bilingual Review/Revue Annuelle Bilingue* 18 (2007): 194.

²⁵ Germoni, “Theatre,” 194.

stages the human as it interfaces with a cybernetic dystopian terminus. However, on other levels the text provides the immanent conditions for a literary abstract machine, machinic phylum and proliferating machinic thresholds.”²⁶ Yoshiyuki Inoue sees in *The Lost Ones* a rapprochement of sorts with the eighteenth century, positing “animalcules” that inhabit the cylinder.²⁷ Inoue’s concept of this animal life comes close to a notion of bare life. Indeed, David Houston Jones in his article “Neomorts et faux vivants: Communautés dépeuplées chez Beckett et Agamben,”²⁸ is the only scholar who establishes a link between *The Lost Ones* and Giorgio Agamben’s figure of the *Muselmann*. Like other readings, Jones seems to be content with establishing an allegorical reading.

In this second part of my own reading, I propose a rapprochement with Giorgio Agamben, whose concepts of the witness, bare life and state of exception prove useful to understanding *The Lost Ones*, not as an allegory of something else, but as an anamorphic image of the subject remnant that I posited earlier. The latter becomes visible only through a sustained reading in the sense that Barthes understands reading: a work of metonymic naming, not of metaphoric representation. I begin with Agamben and the witness to return to *The Lost Ones*, a text of witnessing *par excellence*, because it witnesses to the *subject* remnant, and not an object of witnessing. After that, I continue with the reading of *The Lost Ones* as the space of law and possible reversal, and the crucial role in it played by something that is perhaps even more abstract than an “abstract machine,” human or literary, because it is the meeting point of these two: the subjectivized reader, none other than the subject remnant itself.

²⁶ Dowd, *Abstract Literary Machine*, 127. Dowd extends this article for his book on Beckett (Garin Dowd, *Abstract Machines Samuel Beckett and Philosophy After Deleuze and Guattari*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007.).

²⁷ Yoshiyuki Inoue, *Borderless Beckett, Beckett sans frontières*, Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi Press, 2008: 223.

²⁸ David Houston Jones. "Neomorts et faux vivants: Communautés dépeuplées chez Beckett et Agamben." *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui: An Annual Bilingual Review/Revue Annuelle Bilingue* 17 (2006): 249-263.

6. Agamben's Concept of the Witness

Giorgio Agamben's third book in the *Homo sacer* series, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, offers a thorough, unflinching account of witnessing and the witness in Auschwitz. In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Giorgio Agamben rigorously analyzes the duty of witnessing and its inherent impossibility. The event to be witnessed is one that, by its nature, has no witness, as the witness, the *testis* who has lived through the event from beginning to end is the one who is subsumed or overtaken by the event. The witness in Agamben's account is not the bystander of juridical witnessing, but the one embroiled, the one who lives and dies at the issue of the experience.

Agamben's important point is that the full event is not centered on the positivity of the concentration camp, but on the negativity that is its ultimate experience, its issue. The fullness of witnessing is achieved only, and paradoxically, at the end point of annihilation. Thus, there is only one type of witness entitled to speak about this event, the only one who could tell, the *integral witness*, and this witness is irrevocably absent. Survivors, however, live under an *exigence du témoignage*, the necessity to witness. These former prisoners are sentenced to the responsibility to speak and witness even though they are not the integral witnesses, and therefore paradoxically witnesses in that they must *not* speak. They are thus required to do the impossible because the witnessing that is required of them is impossible. To put it very succinctly, for Agamben witnessing becomes the act of remembering and pointing to the absence of the integral witness who could speak, rather than recounting events or bringing to presence those who are irrevocably lost.

For Agamben, Auschwitz is fundamentally for its victims, whether they survive or not, an experience that brings to the fore absence, not presence. Therefore, because Auschwitz is a liminal ‘experience,’ the witnessing that is required entails pointing to the absence of the one who went through the experience from beginning to end, the absence of the one who witnessed the event. Witnessing is at a remove, secondary, and thus it must accomplish the impossible. Political and historical reflections on their own do not accomplish this task because they inevitably lose that fundamental absence at the heart of Auschwitz by obscuring it, or by bringing it to presence in a manner that can only be false.

However, we must not misunderstand the rigorous approach to witnessing articulated by Agamben as an injunction to remain silent issued to surviving, non-integral witnesses. Indeed living witnesses, such as Jorge Semprun, have commented on the counterproductive effect of removing the all-important event from the sphere of discourse when non-integral witnesses fall silent. In his book, *Le mort qu’il faut*, Jorge Semprun addresses the issue of the witness, the *other* witness, the non-integral surviving witness vis-à-vis the integral witness. This secondary, second-class witness is invited, even required to speak, but he is at the same time an encumbrance:

Certes, le meilleur témoin, le seul vrai témoin, en réalité, d’après les spécialistes, c’est celui qui n’a pas survécu, celui qui est allé jusqu’au bout de l’expérience, et qui en est mort. Mais ni les historiens ni les sociologues ne sont encore parvenus à résoudre cette contradiction: comment inviter les vrais témoins, c’est à dire les morts, à leurs colloques? Comment les faire parler? Voilà une question, en tout cas, que le temps qui passe réglera de lui-même: il n’y aura bientôt plus de témoins gênant, à l’encombrante mémoire.²⁹

²⁹ Jorge Semprun, *Le mort qu’il faut*, Paris: Gallimard, 2001, 16.

We hear clearly through Semprun's testimony that there is a risk involved in insisting too much on the integral witness, and that is losing the valuable witness accounts of surviving witnesses. We run the risk of fetishizing the absence that is said to remain at the heart of Auschwitz to the point of diffusing any political lessons we might still be able to draw from the event. For here Semprun is pointing to a type of commemoration that does not really commemorate, but rather turns Auschwitz into a museum in the worst sense. Memory, after all, encumbers us in the form of the surviving witness, and actually, Semprun more than hints, we are not really interested in what the integral witness would have to say, either. We are only interested in sealing off the experience from our everyday, embalming, burying, and forgetting it, and the fancy funeral rights in the form of colloquia should not be mistaken for the work of mourning. Semprun's is a harsh critique, but not unjustified given that survivors have much to say regarding the other experience of the camp, not the one lived "au bout de l'expérience," but the one of living in a state of dehumanization that knows no boundaries or limits.³⁰ The inflexible adherence to this concept of witnessing results in an unfortunate and paradoxical silencing of witnesses who do have a story to tell. Simply because they are alive, inconveniently so, says Semprun, they do not pass the test of the integral witness and become second class witnesses. In what amounts to the effective fetishization of the integral witness, the living, inadequate witness and his or her living memory of the experience become obscured, suppressed and silenced. Their stories are seen as irrelevant or secondary at best compared to the aura of impenetrable, reverent silence surrounding the integral witnesses who have passed through the experience of death and to whose

³⁰ I will come back to the dehumanization practiced in the camps in the discussion of Agamben's *bare life*.

absence the others must henceforth point. This concept of witnessing thus evinces an inflexible aspect whose counterproductive result is the loss of pertinence of precisely that which was seen as the most pertinent and in need of careful preservation. What is ultimately at stake is losing the impetus for thinking through the political means that make the human indestructible and therefore destructible without limit, to invoke the often-cited Blanchotian dictum: “Yes, I believe we must say it and retain it an instant: man is indestructible, and that means that there is no limit to the destruction of man.”³¹ What is at stake is losing the account of this infinite destruction perpetrated against man who, paradoxically, does not simply disappear.

It is in this frame of reference that one must consider Agamben’s concept of witnessing developed in relation to Auschwitz, and whether the concept might be useful for the reading of Beckett’s *The Lost Ones*. One obvious objection to its applicability here that we can eliminate right away is that the bodies that Beckett shows have not yet lived through their experience, and therefore the reader is not dealing with integral witnesses. This objection, however, fetishizes the idea of the integral witness. Further, at stake is not the applicability of concepts to an aesthetic production. The real question is whether *The Lost Ones* even constitutes an instance of witnessing, which is an easy but dangerous assumption. these figures in fact are integral witnesses already, having been stripped of their subjectivity, of the markers of the speculative subjective function that is the traditional marker of the human. These almost-integral witnesses that figure in Beckett’s text are, viewed under a certain angle, *already* integral witnesses to the extent

³¹ Maurice Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969, 200. The translation is my own: “Oui, je crois que nous devons le dire et le retenir un instant: l’homme est l’indestructible, et cela signifie qu’il n’y a pas de limite à la destruction de l’homme.”

that their possession of the markers of speculative subjectivity is, if not highly doubtful, then certainly suppressed to the extent where they are figures of “bare life.” In this account, we *must* point out the absence that is their distinguishing feature, the absence of subjective markers that, as I stated earlier, is a distinguishing feature of this text featuring an almost voiceless voice without a body and bodies without a voice. The question that immediately arises is the following: Should Agamben’s concept of witnessing serve as the exclusive frame of witnessing that can be envisaged here? Is pointing out that constitutive absence all that should be done by witnessing? Most importantly, what does it mean to uphold an absence, and what would the aesthetic means to do so effectively look like?

In an effort to respond to this question, it is necessary to reiterate what I have proposed earlier, but this time also taking into account the frame of witnessing. Agamben’s concept of witnessing *would be* counterproductive if all it advocated were lingering on the paradox of the witness and stopping there. In that view, this kind of witnessing has no story to tell about the context of the predicament of the witness, and thus cannot accomplish even the possible element of its impossible task, that possible element being the task of drawing a circle around the constitutive absence of the absent witness as throbbing, profaned absence. It also has nothing to say about the structure of politics or the political element in which, from which, the integral witness necessarily disappears. Given Agamben’s interest in, precisely, the political underpinnings of the integral witness, Agamben’s concept of witnessing is indeed advocating what amounts to an image in movement of that absence.

Seeing the task of witnessing as essentially creating an *image in movement* of a paradoxical absence to which one is bearing witness throws a new and different light on witnessing and how one might interpret the word “impossible” that lies at its heart. Let us acknowledge that evoking the impossible entails the evocation in the mode of the possible, or even go a step further and argue that evoking the impossible can only be accomplished through the tainted sphere of the almost-impossible and the possible. In that understanding, the figures such as those seen in *The Lost Ones* whose speculative subjective function is as good as absent present the riddle of the subject-remnant still wandering about rather than already stilled by death. The subject-remnant confronts the reader in a most tangible manner with what has been subtracted from these figures even before they have died (and death is surely on their horizon, as it is on the horizon of every human subject). The real tragedy is not that they will die – or in the case of the disappeared integral witnesses who were camp inmates, that they have died. The reader becomes aware that the absencing is in a sense divorced from death and the real tragedy, or better, outrage, is that the absencing is perpetrated earlier. In this account, the passage through death appears to lose some of its power and privilege for witnessing, as it is not the constitutive element of the integral witness, whose very humanity is already under attack and subtracted from him before he dies.

To put it in slightly different terms, the substance of the debate receives a necessary clarification, and with it, it also becomes clear that the problem seems to be that the good, desirable negativity (the “absence sustained” of the integral witness) must inevitably spill over into a bad, undesirable positivity (witnessing that does less than sustaining the absence by doing more, by speaking in the voice of the integral witness, by

representing him or her). The question is whether sustaining absence, if it is to be more than an empty abstract statement, requires representation, and whether a mode of rendering cannot be carefully constructed such that the integral witness is seen already as stripped of humanity even before death engulfs him, and as integral not because death engulfs him per se, without spilling over into bad positivity, speaking for the other, and any number of flawed, though well-intentioned representations.

It is noteworthy that Agamben does not develop in a vacuum the concept of witnessing being discussed here. That concept works in tandem with the figure of the *Muselmann*, the limit case of the already marginalized camp inmate who is nearing the point of death, who is no longer able to hold his head up and resembles, according to the morbid humor of the other inmates, a Muslim praying. The concept of witnessing must be understood through the threshold figure of the *Muselmann*, the walking dead who is dehumanized before he is dead. Only through this emaciated figure does the impossibility of the task of witnessing receive its most forceful, cogent formulation. Through this figure, the impossibility of the task of witnessing is redoubled and its nature comes into relief: one must sustain an absence, and the absence encountered here is that of voicelessness, a voicelessness that must be represented, not by speaking for it (one cannot speak for the other), but by a voiceless speech about the ones who have seem to have no voice before that absence, too, is taken away. In this mode, the impossibility of the task of witnessing comes into full focus only through the figuration in a sustained narrative, through a movement image in which the reader beholds bodies under extreme conditions narrated by a neutral witnessing voice, as in Beckett's *The Lost Ones*. And just as the narrative voice in *The Lost Ones* slips into subjective mode, as explained earlier, so the

mode of witnessing moves outside the circle it draws around the integral witness to depict the *hors cadre* of this witness. And just as the slippage into subjective mode was seen to enhance rather than take away from the neutrality of the narrative voice, so the expansion of the field of witnessing to draw the errant bodies into the circle of figuration “sustains the absence” by putting a new emphasis on the paradoxical nature of the impossibility of integral witnessing rather than enforcing that impossibility in an absolute, rigid, and ultimately fruitless manner.

To put it in other words, the impossibility inherent in the task of witnessing is also the inability, by the other witnesses, the narrator and the reader, to reverse the situation at hand. That impossibility can be expressed as the inability to restore the properly human subjective function to these figures who remain silent, and yet who also never cease to be human. If one looks closer at the problem of witnessing, as Agamben does through his engagement with the concept, and as Beckett does through a sophisticated figuration, the debate over representation – how one might adequately represent the experience of the integral witness – is suddenly upended. The human is not only, as Maurice Blanchot puts it in *Entretien infini*, infinitely destructible because it cannot be destroyed; the human or subject remnant is also *infinitely representable* because it cannot be represented. Further, the human remnant *must be represented*, brought into the open, precisely because it is fundamentally unrepresentable. It is thus programmatic to have the figures in the cylinder repeat gestures that can never be completed because, being figures for whom one fundamentally cannot witness, they belong to the regime of unfinished, unrealizable representation that must, nevertheless, take place. And it is in their voicelessness that the lost bodies of the cylinder speak in a manner that upholds both the impossibility of

representing the absence that animates them, as well as the paradox of their very appearance on the page of the text. The impurity of their absence, repeated and recounted, must be taken, not as an unfortunate accident of narration, but as its constitutive principle. In the words of Maurice Blanchot regarding the impossibility of understanding, forgetting, remembering and speaking of the event, paradoxically, it is speech itself that must convey it without saying it: “[...] c’est la parole seule qui doit le porter sans le dire.”³²

The speech of the neutral voice of the scriptor-witness in *The Lost Ones* does just that: it never speaks the name Auschwitz, but conveys the event to the reader. It is the latter who might read that name in the process of reading, which is a metonymic process of naming. Further, if that name does come to the mind of the reader, it is not because *The Lost Ones* is an allegory, that is, a representation of the camps. As we have seen, representation is not the aesthetic mode of ethical witnessing required, nor is it the mode of the writerly reading of the text of *The Lost Ones*. According to the shift in perspective developed in the previous section, there really is no difference in the end between the neutral voice and the kind of narrator encountered in *The Unnamable*, and we must take seriously the very notion of reading, which is the operative mode of the scriptor witness, and of the writerly reading shared by this textual function and the interpellated, subjectivized reader. It is the latter who, through a profound shock that exceeds anything that representation could produce, is faced with the reality of the situation of the Lost ones: it is not so much that their subjectivity has been taken away from them, and therefore they are dehumanized. They are dehumanized because, like the narrator of *The*

³² Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, 200.

Unnamable, the double of the scriptor-witness, all they have left is empty subjectivity that heavy burden of the ineluctable condition of having a perspective, even if this perspective is reduced to looking at one fixed point. Thus, the ex-searcher, that analogous figure to the *Muselmann*, only appears absented or reified to the other, for it is the other who reifies him, who refuses to acknowledge that this ex-searcher could, potentially, still be a searcher, and is in essence *no different from the searcher*. In figuring the Lost Ones, who are not *like* camp inmates, but who in metonymic fashion recall that which is essential to any subject who might be put under the same conditions, no matter his or her name, Beckett gives the reader the rare opportunity to turn a different gaze on the lost ones. He offers the reader, the one willing to go through to the end of his or her experience, the chance to “see” these figures with a new “I” that does not reify them as objects without subjectivity, or, what is worse, fetishize them as objects of witnessing, but instead, in a gesture of reading, maintains the anamorphic surface on which their time-image appears and accepts it as its own.

7. Reading the Subject Remnant

I have tried in earlier passages to invoke the ethical imperative, so to speak, that subtends a representation bound to fail. Here, it is time to address how the very *gesture* of scriptorial writing or witnessing, abstracted from any success, failure, adequacy or inadequacy taken as a whole, must be considered in the abstract, in its gestural nature as such. What does it mean to undertake the gesture of scriptorial witnessing? Is it not a reversal in a very different sense that bears no resemblance to the reversal (of history, of what has come to be) that representation cannot possibly accomplish, and which should therefore not be undertaken by representation? In other words, the scriptorial gesture

must be understood not as representation but as a mode of unrepresentation, as the mode of metonymic naming shared by the reader. One way of addressing this problem is through a slightly different question, namely, whether the mediating voice of the narrator simply repeats the gesture of the sovereign – who bans himself and the bare life to the outside of the law in what is simultaneously an *inclusion* in the law – and, by virtue of speaking about the bodies, holds them in a state of exception as bare life, or whether the repetition does not somehow *profane* that constituting gesture of the sovereign, reversing through profanation the constitutive status of bare life.

How to profane the sovereign's gesture is precisely the question rephrased in the terms of Agamben that Beckett submits to his artistic analysis. In figuring the Lost Ones in the cylinder, Beckett poses the question in a form that is, at once, not immediately recognizable as Agamben's question posed in the abstract. It is the reader who can read the Lost Ones *as if* they were figures of bare life, and not as a representation of bare life. In the perspective that such a reading opens up, Agamben's question is not imposed from the outside, but appears as "internal" to the text in the sense of being one of its facets readable on its surface.

Rereading Beckett closely is in order at this point. The text entitled "The Lost Ones" in English has, as I mention at the beginning of this chapter, a very different title in French, "Le dépeupleur," a title that insists on the depopulating function of the cylinder whose mechanical brutality certainly recalls not only the space of the concentration camp, but more significantly a neutralized space of post-camp exception where bodies sustain the weight of a sovereign power. This is something that is carefully developed in the text, where it becomes progressively clear that the power operational

within the cylinder must be a sovereign power that has the capability to ordain the circulation and activity of the bodies staying within the space of the cylinder, that creates the space of banishment or exception. First of all, the reader learns that two things are “in vain”: the search and flight. There is no escape because the cylinder is “narrow enough” for flight to be in vain, but at the same time it is “vast enough” for the search to remain fruitless. Thus, Beckett sets up a kind of threshold space, one that is in between vast and narrow while remaining neither one exclusively. There is thus already in Beckett, from the opening lines of the text, a gray area of exclusive inclusion and inclusive exclusion constituted by the cylinder, conceptual ground shared with the state of exception. This state of exception harbors the bare life figures that are found there as much by accident as they are created by the very conditions of the cylinder that wear away at them. If each body searches for its lost one, or its “dépeupleur” as one reads in French, this too is because each body is in a direct relation with the sovereign power that acts upon its body, holds sway over it, directs its every movement.

“Abode where lost bodies roam each searching for its lost one...” The “abode” of the cylinder is a limited, closed space from which escape is meaningless rather than strictly impossible. The narrative voice says that there are rumors about a half-completed tunnel that leads out, and that there are factions among the inhabitants, those who believe and those who have given up believing in that or any means of escape. The parameters and settings of the cylinder are such as to try the physical and affective resistance of the bodies, their “staying” power. In fact, the “bodies,” as the narrator calls them, who inhabit the cylinder are of four kinds: those in perpetual searching motion, those who pause in their searching motion, those who are sedentary and must be driven from their

post, and finally the non-searchers, or ex-searchers, who seem to have given up all-together, not really occupying any post of their own anymore. One can already read in these fluid categories the successive wearing-down of the lost one, who can inhabit in a slow degeneration all four positions, ending in the position of Agamben's *Muselmann*, the one who has seemingly given up and no longer even inhabits the space of the human community, if by that one means communication, following laws, volition, etc., in short, the trappings of the human. One can thus read the bodies as if they were bare life figures that slowly succumb to the hopeless conditions of the cylinder.

There is, however, a more compelling reason than simple resemblance that warrants reading the bodies as bare life in a state of exception, and this has to do with the way the law, understood in the strict sense of the sphere of law and rights, is said to order the space of the cylinder. For the space is far from being chaotic. In fact, as the narrative voice goes to great trouble to recount, there are strict rules to which each one must and does adhere. There are many examples. The transport of ladders is also ordered: "Similarly, the transport of the ladders is not left to the good pleasure of the carriers who are required to hug the wall at all times eddywise. This is a rule no less strict than the prohibition to climb more than one at a time and not lightly to be broken."³³ The regulation of the zones of the cylinder is also subject to the rule of law:

The bed of the cylinder comprises three distinct zones. [...] One example among a thousand of the harmony that reigns in the cylinder between order and license. Thus access to the climbers' reserve is authorized only when one of them leaves it to rejoin the searchers of the arena or exceptionally those of the intermediate zone. While infringement of this rule is rare it does none the less occur as when for example a particularly nervous searcher can no longer resist the lure of the niches and tries to steal in among the climbers without the warrant of a departure.

³³ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 27.

Whereupon he is unfailingly ejected by the queue nearest to the point of trespass and the matter goes no further.

Searchers must wait in line to join the zone of climbers, where they wait in line again for their chance to climb a ladder. This rule is respected as another law of the cylinder, and notably represents just “one example among a thousand of the harmony that reigns in the cylinder between order and license.” If the disposition of the ladders throughout the space of the cylinder does not immediately suggest harmony, that harmony is achieved through the application of law.

The reader learns that the cylinder is well-ordered, the searchers and the climbers possessing each territories to which access is regulated. There are thus boundaries to be crossed. The entire cylinder is referred to as “the teeming precinct,”³⁴ suggesting order and law. Even the golden rule of ethics is invoked (in the context of “inspection” to which I return later): “It is enjoined by a certain ethics not to do unto others what coming from them might give offence.”³⁵ Although he uses language suggestive of ethics and the rule of law that is supposed to maintain some form of justice – “the rule forbidding them to exceed a single circuit,”³⁶ “its right to the ladder,”³⁷ and, in a questioning mode, “What principle of priority obtains among the watchers always in force”³⁸ – the narrator expresses doubt as to there being a real rule of law in the cylinder. He refers to the rules at one point as simply a “code,”³⁹ and speculates about the sustainability of the system in place in the cylinder. With regard to the rules ordering the use of ladders, access to zones, etc., the observant voice remarks upon the infinite application that could conceivably

³⁴ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 29.

³⁵ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 58.

³⁶ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 48.

³⁷ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 49.

³⁸ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 51.

³⁹ “So much for a first aperçu of the climbers’ code.” Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 27.

grind to a halt, and which therefore has finitude inscribed within itself. The voice also suggests that the law of the place, as it is written, is fundamentally unjust to the bodies engaged in searching to varying degrees: “And so on infinitely. Whence theoretically the possibility for those among the climbers never to leave and never to arrive for those not yet. That there exists no regulation tending to forestall such injustice shows clearly it can never be more than temporary. As indeed it cannot. For the passion to search is such that no place may be left unsearched.”⁴⁰ This suggestion by the voice, which speaks in a scientific manner that thinks through the notions as they are maintained⁴¹, that what seems infinite has in fact a finitude inscribed and might not run smoothly or serve justice as it is meant to do, opens up a perspective on the cylinder and on this text that is at once profound and unexpected. For what is concerned is nothing less than the question of politics and the law that is then reiterated when the narrator asks, more directly this time, whether the logic of the cylinder – approximated by its laws or something that resembles a law – will not at some point break down: “Is there not reason to fear a saturation of the intermediate zone and what would be its consequences for the bodies as a whole and particularly for those of the arena thus cut off from the ladders? Is not the cylinder doomed in a more or less distant future to a state of anarchy given over to fury and violence? To these questions and many more the answers are clear and easy to give. It only remains to dare.”⁴² Indeed, the question of the rule of law in the cylinder and its impending slide into anarchy or lawlessness is Beckett’s way of posing the question of law in his and the reader’s time, and it deserves a close analysis.

⁴⁰ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 50-51.

⁴¹ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, p. 63. The words “if this notion is maintained” are repeated through the text and appear most notably as the closing statement, posing the question of whether such a system based on these notions can and should be maintained.

⁴² Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 51-52.

In a passage that might at first appear deceptively innocuous and descriptive, the very structure of the law – understood in a strong Agambenian sense as the law of the sovereign that includes through exclusion – is invoked in an image of monstrous verisimilitude. The structure of the law is invoked in the form of the law that is in effect in the cylinder: the law governing the use of ladders disposed throughout the space. The ladders are disposed without regard for harmony as they are randomly propped up against the walls. They often have rungs missing, a condition that sometimes renders them unusable. Their use is nevertheless governed by a very strict law that none of the bodies contravene, or do so rarely eliciting undesirable consequences. What is significant is that the countenance of the law that is represented here is not only the one that one might expect – the law that *regulates* – but also the one that one might not expect, and which is monstrous – the law that in fact *bans* the bodies to incessant movement.

The use of ladders is regulated by conventions of obscure origin which in their precision and the submission they exact from the climbers resemble laws. Certain infractions unleash against the culprit a collective fury surprising in creatures peaceable on the whole and apart from the grand affair so careless of one another. Others on the contrary scarcely ruffle the general indifference. This at first sight is strange. All rests on the rule against mounting the ladder by more than one at a time. It remains taboo therefore to the climber waiting at its foot until such time as his predecessor has regained the ground. Idle to imagine the confusion that would result from the absence of such a rule or from its non-observance. But devised for the convenience of all there is no question of its applying without restriction or as a license for the unprincipled climber to engross the ladder beyond what is reasonable. For without some form of curb he might

take the fancy to settle down permanently in one of the niches or tunnels leaving behind him a ladder out of service for good and all. And were others to follow his example as inevitably they must the spectacle would finally be offered of one hundred and eighty-five searchers less the vanquished committed for all time to the ground. Not to mention the intolerable presence of properties serving no purpose. It is therefore understood that after a certain interval difficult to assess but unerringly timed by all the ladder is again available meaning at the disposal in the same conditions of him due next to climb easily recognizable by his position at the head of the queue and so much the worst for the abuser. (21-23)

First, on the surface of it, the rule of ladders is an instance of law as benign and regulatory, but a closer reading, especially of the last sentence and of the middle sentence that I analyze here in detail, reveals a reading experience that is very much like climbing the ladders of the cylinder with missing rungs: the progress is unsteady, requires mental acrobatics, and the result is dubious at best as the reader must resign him or herself to having to climb or read all over again. At first reading or climb, the law of ladders is a good law that allows the common use of property by all, without exception. One can certainly read the passage, “But devised for the convenience of all there is no question of its applying without restriction or as a license for the unprincipled climber to engross the ladder beyond what is reasonable,” as saying just that: The law, “being devised for the convenience of all” must never be questioned in “its applying without restriction” to all. One must not question the law or imagine that it represents the license to engage in unprincipled behavior. Such would be the classic reading of law as a Kantian limit placed on all so that all may enjoy a degree of freedom otherwise impossible because

encumbered by unjust infractions by some. The law as necessary and a guarantee of freedom.

However, the way the text is worded, a degree of interpretive uncertainty insinuates itself into the reading of a passage whose odd, highly equivocal formulation gives the reader pause. There is a logical gap – a missing rung – that must be bridged if one is to arrive at the classic meaning of the law.⁴³ Consulting the French “original,” *Le dépeupleur*, a similar effect is legible. As example, I cite here the last sentence of that passage: “Il est donc convenu que passé un certain délai difficile à chiffrer mais que chacun sait mesurer à une seconde près l’échelle redevienne libre c’est-à-dire à la disposition dans les mêmes conditions de celui dont c’est le tour de monter facilement reconnaissable à sa position en tête de queue et tant pis pour l’abuseur.”⁴⁴ The French sentences, like the English ones, are legible as *lexias*, the increments of reading of which Barthes speaks in *S/Z*, and which I discussed earlier. To come back to the *lexias* in English, one must simultaneously read the “no question” in two ways for the sentence to respect the law of non-contradiction, which it must do if it is to be taken seriously as a proposition regarding the state of the cylinder. The fact remains, however, that one arrives at the non-contradictory reading of the proposition only by way of an almost-imperceptible leap of logic that one might deem *unlawful*. That is, the “or” statement

⁴³ Beckett’s use of language deserves careful attention here. His refusal of the content/form divide here is manifested by sentences that resemble, in structure and function, the ladders that they no longer simply represent. Although the crux of his argument is quite different and related to explaining his own concepts of the virtual and real, and how one arrives at a new understanding of the two by abolishing the old notion of the real through a kind of exhaustion from within of the tired concept, Deleuze’s remarks that Beckett is exhausting language are pertinent here. As Deleuze puts it in *L’Épuisé*, Beckett embarks on a trajectory through language that produces new languages, an “atomic” language of names, and then a meta-language of voices, which is an exhaustion of words themselves, a step beyond the exhaustion of language. In a further study, it would be fruitful to see what role effects, such as the ladder sentences whose reading I perform and only begin to analyze here, might play in such an exhaustion of language. See Deleuze, *L’Épuisé* in Samuel Beckett, *Quad et autres pieces pour la television*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1992 (engl. Gilles Deleuze, “The Exhausted,” in: *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota P, 1997: 152-174).

⁴⁴ Samuel Beckett, *Le Dépeupleur*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1970, 20-21.

holds only if one understands “no question” as an interdiction in both instances, which leads to the curious statement that there is, in fact, no question of the law applying without restriction. That is, the law *does not* in fact apply without restriction, without exception, to everyone as one might have surmised in the classical model. The careful reader thus becomes enmeshed in an iteration of the law where something other than its universal and benign application is suggested: there is no question of the law being applied without restriction because it is, in fact, applied in a restricted way and thus serves to license unprincipled behavior. If on the other hand one opts to read “no question” as “no questioning,” then the proposition cannot hold as an “or” statement, because that would suggest another fallacious statement, that there is no questioning the law’s applying without restriction, or as, precisely, a license for the unprincipled, who apply it as absolute. The only way to read the proposition without stumbling over what it is really saying is to perform a sleight of hand, a delicate subterfuge of logic that mirrors, and even performs in analogous fashion, the very *exception* as restriction that the law is supposed to except or proscribe in its universal, unrestricted application. Thus, this proposition, in a subtle manner that is not at all playful in the Beckettian idiom encountered elsewhere, but which toys with logic in a dangerous manner, states, among other paradoxical propositions, the paradox of law as Agamben sees it: The law applied without restriction – that is, without exception and exactly as it was written by the tradition – is in fact tantamount to a law founded upon exception, a monstrous law that has been there all along, and which ultimately leads to the licensing of unprincipled behavior by those who wield it as sovereigns.

Another way of putting it is this: the sovereign law of exception that excepts in principled, and not *unprincipled*, fashion is the law that amounts to the law of the threshold, the biopolitical *nomos* of the planet. It is this condition or state of affairs that we encounter in the cylinder, not as a vague resemblance, but as another fact voiced by the narrator who repeats the letter of the law. And it is this law regulating the use of ladders and with regard to which “there is no question of its applying without restriction” that sets in place a state of exception across the board, because it does not apply without restriction, where restriction is understood as exception, while at the same time brooking no dissent because it is the law and *does* apply without restriction, because “there is no question of its applying without restriction.” (22)

To return to the instance ‘cited’ as example by the narrator in the afore-mentioned quote regarding access to the climbers’ reserve, “One example among a thousand of the harmony that reigns in the cylinder between order and license,”⁴⁵ the allusion to the law again insists on the law possessing two facets, that of order and that of license. The two facets recall the example analyzed above that more clearly states the paradox of the law as Agamben develops it, a paradox which is here only *alluded* to, order being application without restriction and suggesting the classic, noble sense of law, license being what permits benefitting from the law and suggesting the monstrous side that allows application in the state of exception where rule of law and lawlessness are indistinguishable.

⁴⁵ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 44.

To take another telling example, the state of exception of the cylinder is characterized by the narrative voice as “the ideal preying on one and all,”⁴⁶ a statement that can be understood in several ways. The “preying on one and all” might be seen as the preying by a sovereign force holding one and all in a state of banishment. Furthermore, the state of banishment is never achieved once and for all but, remaining “ideal,” that is, the ideal horizon of the cylinder, it must be repeatedly and unceasingly enforced through application of its laws. Hence the unceasing movement and “teeming of the precinct.” One can also understand the word ideal as a noun and not simply an adjective, in which case it is the very ideal of the two-faceted law that preys upon those it is supposed to protect. That is, its protection is in the mode of preying upon their bodies, thus constituting it as a form of biopower. The phrases “on one and all” recalls that if the excepting law holds for one, it must also apply as exception to all the bodies, not just one, in the cylinder. And having analyzed the rule of law in the cylinder, which through the logic of the cylinder’s own law creates a state of exception where a monstrous and unjust sovereign power reigns, one should consider the condition of the bodies living in the state of exception of the cylinder, and whether they are indeed an instance of bare life as Agamben understands it.

One telling passage is the following:

The effect of this climate on the soul is not to be underestimated. But it suffers certainly less than the skin whose entire defensive system from sweat to goose bumps is under constant stress. It continues none the less feebly to resist and indeed honourably compared to the eye which with the best will in the world it is difficult not to consign at the close of all its efforts to nothing short of blindness. For skin in its own way as it is not to mention its humours and lids it has not merely one adversary to contend with. This desiccation of the envelope robs

⁴⁶ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 21.

nudity of much of its charm as pink turns grey and transforms into a rustling of nettles the natural succulence of flesh against flesh.⁴⁷

The reader learns that the effect on the soul “is not to be underestimated,” but the passage immediately cuts from the question of the soul to the effects on the flesh, for which the skin, its envelope, becomes the metonymic stand-in. The latter “loses its charm” and shrivels, becoming devoid of “natural succulence” and any possibility of normal bodily interaction. The passage continues stating that the sexual act has been proscribed by the condition of the flesh. That the skin should be the metonymic stand-in for the flesh makes sense, as all that is left of the body in the end is a dried-out shell. The ravages on the skin are still not as bad as those effected on the eye, which tends to blindness. The eye, of course, could be seen as the bodily stand-in for the mind, which of course must be affected in a grave manner by the deterioration of the body. Perhaps what is most notable about the passage is the fact that the suffering of the flesh as skin is in the mode of *defense and resistance against an adversary*. It is the skin’s resources as defensive system that come under attack, as when one reads that the “entire defensive system from sweat to goose bumps is under constant stress.” Furthermore, the skin “continues none the less feebly to resist and indeed honourably.” It would make no sense to formulate the suffering in terms of defense and resistance if the suffering were not due to a struggle against adverse forces.

Indeed, the question of the adversary, its being not only one, is subtly posed in the passage and deserves to be analyzed: “For skin in its own way as it is not to mention its humours and lids it has not merely one adversary to contend with.” This sentence, another ladder with missing rungs for the reader to climb, presents a kind of puzzle. It

⁴⁷ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 52-53.

suggests that skin, as a result of its encounter with one of its adversaries, finds another adversary or opposing force in itself, in its own extension and relation with itself. Its adversaries, as one might expect, are not simply or even primarily the skins of others, which rub unpleasantly when they meet one another, but which do not represent the primary assault on the systemic function of the skin. Beckett seems to be suggesting that the metonymic stand-in for the body, the skin, acquires the aspect of a body in its own right whose systemic components or organs – its humours and lids – are made to function in disordered fashion as a result of the repeated encounter with the real adversary, sovereign power that acts directly on the skin. Furthermore, that skin might be regarded as a body in its own right, given that it is the organizing organ that encloses like an envelope a system of organs in a body, thus assigns to it a kind of sovereign power with regard to the organs it encloses, but a sovereign power that no longer holds sway over its own organs, which suffer the onslaught of the forces of the cylinder. Finally, there is the adversary that is like the skin or envelope of all the other adversaries, which have been multiplied: the sovereign power of the cylinder that envelops all who sojourn in it. To say that every relation in the cylinder is structured by the fragmenting force of biopower, being fractionated to the smallest instance and most minute detail, is to see that the functioning of every *skin* – where skin must be understood as an abstract organizing principle and a principle of relation – has been disrupted by a sovereign power that subordinates it to a different, highly ordered set of relations. Indeed, it is to recognize that relations within a body and without have been severely impeded, and that relationality itself has become a target of sovereign power, the new overarching logic or ‘skin.’

Bare life figures whose skins or relations with one another and within their own deteriorated skins have been disrupted are the order of the day in the cylinder, whose rule of law applied without restriction and therefore as exception, as I have already shown, banishes them to a ceaseless searching and climbing. Beckett's text also presents the bodies of the cylinder as abandoned: "Eyes cast down or closed signify abandonment and are confined to the vanquished."⁴⁸ And again, "They may crawl blindly in the tunnels in search of nothing. But normally abandonment freezes them both in space and in their pose whether standing or sitting as a rule profoundly bowed."⁴⁹ While bare life figures for Agamben are banished and abandoned by power the better to be subjugated to it in an inclusive exclusion, Beckett seems to emphasize that power never abandons one, except perhaps at the moment when power has achieved its purpose and one is vanquished. Being ever-present in the onslaught of the yellow light and the temperature shifts that try the skin, power always operates and never abandons. It is more likely that the subject, the vanquished, finally takes abandon of himself. In the cylinder, abandonment is thus a renunciation by the searcher of the searching movement – whether searching by walking and climbing or searching with the eyes – and also of himself, of any care of or relation to the self that he might have had. Taken together with the fact that for Beckett there are four categories of bodies in a continuous and reversible spectrum of increasing debilitation, ending with the vanquished, who has given up, the ultimate form of bare life for Beckett would be the few vanquished ones who are abandoned, and about whom the narrator has this to say: "They may be walked on without their reacting."⁵⁰ What is

⁴⁸ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 30.

⁴⁹ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 31.

⁵⁰ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 29.

suggested is that the other bodies have a right to treat the vanquished as pure, inanimate objects that may be walked on or mistreated with impunity, and certainly without any consequences in the form of reaction or resistance coming from the vanquished himself. This mild formulation might suggest more than it states, but it certainly calls to mind the formula from Roman law invoked by Agamben, whereby anyone may kill the *Homo sacer* without consequence.

Furthermore, there is also another rule that gives searchers the right to examine faces and bodies, which they must do as they conduct their search, and this entails the right to forcibly inspect the face of the vanquished, who are slumped over or bowed:

It is of course forbidden to withhold the face or other part from the searcher who demands it and may without fear of resistance remove the hand from the flesh it hides or raise the lid to examine the eye. Some searchers there are who join the climbers with no thought of climbing and simply in order to inspect at close hand one or more among the vanquished or sedentary. [...] Direct action with a view to their elucidation is generally reserved for the persons of the sedentary and vanquished. [...] There are times of course when a body has to be brought to a stand and disposed in a certain position to permit the inspection at close hand of a particular part or the search for a scar or birthblot for example. [...] To be noted finally the immunity in this respect of those queueing for a ladder.⁵¹

The searching bodies have the right to inspect one another, which they seem to do routinely, but their desire to look and manipulate without limit finds an outlet in the bodies of the vanquished who must submit and who may be manipulated at will. What is

⁵¹ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 57-59.

striking is the sheer prurient interest satisfied by what are close inspections of the most intimate and minute details of the bodies of the vanquished under cover of purposeful inspection. The searchers in their quest for knowledge are licensed to commit acts not so much of violence, as of cold, calculated violation on those who are helpless against them. Significantly, these are referred to as persons in this instance, while elsewhere there is only mention of bodies. To call them persons is to underline the status they no longer possess, being *Homo sacer* who may be manipulated at will. Thus, the searchers only form of relation with the vanquished and the almost-vanquished is in the mode of violence. And although the well-ordered state of exception of the cylinder is so well-ordered that there are seemingly few acts of violence – counted among these are the few occasions on which searchers queuing for ladders rise up in a collective fury against the searcher who has overstepped the bounds and attempts to inspect one of their cohort – this evaluation does not take into account the more pervasive, insidious and systematized form of *violation* that is sanctioned by the law and upheld as a right.

8. The Political Space of the Subject

Having put the thought of Agamben and of Beckett alongside one another, it should be noted that one comes away with a rather grim impression of the cylinder as current political space of subjects reduced to bare life. Agamben's account is not very optimistic on the question whether this situation can be reversed. Beckett also closes his text on an oddly foreboding note with the image of the last, solitary searcher left in the cylinder as it and the bodies come to be extinguished:

So on infinitely until towards the unthinkable end if this notion is maintained a last body of all by feeble fits and starts is searching still. There is nothing at first sight to distinguish him from the others dead still where they stand or sit in abandonment beyond recall. [...] And sure enough there he stirs this last of all if

a man and slowly draws himself up and some time later opens his burnt eyes. [...] So much roughly speaking for the last state of the cylinder and of this little people of searchers one first of whom if a man in some unthinkable past for the first time bowed his head if this notion is maintained.⁵²

The last searcher, who is paradoxically last *and* first because only his final gesture is definitive and therefore is primary, finds the first vanquished and looks into her eyes. This is then the hauntingly depicted moment of death for these living dead, who only now are truly “beyond recall.” Up to now, they were inscribed in the sliding scale of passage from one state to another in the continuum of bare life, in which they were still able to revert to searcher mode from sedentary mode, and even in principle from vanquished mode. What is noteworthy here is the fact that the narrator speaks of the “unthinkable end” that is presumably to come in the future as if it already had happened, and this makes sense within the logic or parameters of the cylinder and the text. In the cylinder, as mentioned above, the last is primary and therefore first because conclusive. Furthermore, the past of the cylinder is elided with its future, but only “if this notion is maintained,” that is, only if the notion of the cylinder is maintained here and now. It is in fact the present that is in the end at stake here, for it decides on the past and the future as it maintains a certain logic, or perhaps puts an end to it. In the logic of the narration, the representation of course harkens back to the “unthinkable past” of the camps but in eliding that past with the political future via the present of this best of all possible worlds, that of the reader, it is the readers own present that looms before him as the real question needing to be addressed.

The hypothetical mode of the narration and the inconclusive character of the report on the cylinder – its repetition of “if this notion is maintained,” – is worth

⁵² Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 60-62.

analyzing in detail. Beckett appears to leave certain gaps and loopholes – again, missing rungs in his ladder-like, skinless sentences – that open the text to a nascent, pale form of optimism, slim though its chances might be. The crucial question that arises is whether the Western concept of sovereignty cannot itself be profaned, to use Agamben’s term, returned in some fashion to the use of all political subjects. Or is this threshold that houses the political element irreversible by definition? In other words, once the subject remnants that one sees in the cylinder fall under sovereign power and live a living death under its monstrous law, is it possible to envision a different state of affairs? It is worth looking at what Beckett’s narrator has to say on the matter alongside a careful consideration of Agamben’s thought.

The passage regarding the end of the cylinder quoted above already poses the cipher of the end of the cylinder as a *hypothesis* based on the continued adherence to the logic of the cylinder, the maintenance of its law. The law of the cylinder is thus *not* given once and for all, as the passage makes clear, but must be maintained and repeated because it exists solely through the faithful execution of the required gestures, of the adherence to the law which is meaningless without its being obeyed. I am not suggesting that the entire report on the cylinder should be reconsidered based on a retroactive reframing that comes as a revelation at the end to proffer a glimmer of hope in a place where glimmering can only be a sustained and destructive gloaming. That indeed would be a cheap and tawdry aesthetic effect to be met with the reader’s general distrust and disdain. If anything, that “reframing” is only possible as the last step in a steady work of framing that has been the sustained reading of the text up to the end. If there is reversal of textual framing possible, it is so only because the very possibility of reversal as such has

been built into the logic of the text, and thus into the logic of the cylinder, which *is*, as I have mentioned elsewhere, tantamount to the text.

Here, reversing would have to be understood not as an undoing, a going back to a time preceding the existence of the sovereign/bare life political element. Agamben's point is that such a "time" does not exist in the Western frame of reference for the political *in the past*, but rather lies as an untapped, dormant potential *in its future*, if we consider his work on messianism and St Paul in which Agamben operates a shift in perspective from the end of time, to the time of the end, precisely that interval of reversal that is not a going back, but rather shift forward. For Beckett, there is also no going back to a time when the cylinder was still the best of all possible worlds. Indeed, that naïve idea already ridiculed by Voltaire comes back here in the form of philosophical acid reflux because, as Beckett puts it, while the cylinder is still teeming with bare life and the "twofold vibration" is still to be felt, "all is not yet quite for the best."⁵³ That is, the point of "best" is reached when that world extinguishes itself, and not when it returns to its "best" normal. On this point, Beckett is mercilessly firm: there is no going back, but there is a potential for a going forward, a potential that is put in relation with the reader, that double of the scriptor-witness. The reversal is rather a potential or possibility inscribed within, as an interval, in the logic of the cylinder, but it must be activated by the reader. To put in Agamben's terms, the reversal ought rather to be understood as locating a time *in between* the two poles in the relation that is the political element. One would have to arrest the force of the sovereign that arrests the movement between the two poles. In other words one must acknowledge that there is a constituent power that could

⁵³ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 61.

counterbalance the sovereign, and then one must locate the point of constituent power *within* the monstrous threshold and *not* as somehow existing there as a possibility despite it, as a miraculous supplement.

The concept of constituent power has been a sticking point for Agamben in the disagreement with other theorists, such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for whom constituent power is a defining moment possible only because of the primacy of the force of resistance. But if one looks closely at Agamben's argument, especially in the light of *Profanations*, the essence of the quarrel between Agamben and proponents of constituent power might be resolved, since constituent power is not necessarily nullified by Agamben's scheme, and this despite statements by Agamben himself that constituent power as another exception has no place. Indeed, one could read the latest books by Agamben as an attempt to give a more felicitous reading of the Western political element and the (im)possibilities it unfolds. It would then not be a question of the end of constituent power, as one might have surmised, but rather the time of constituent power at the end of an arrested movement within the threshold that is the political element. The reversal would then be a kind of resurgence of a primary force, an exception to the exception called for by bare life, who is after all the mirror image of the sovereign who himself is also above or outside the law. The two occupy a shared space just outside the margins of law rather than having an insurmountable gap to bridge one between the other. Reversal would then be a kind of acceptance of the status of bare life yet within the frame of the dual-ended political element as a whole and taking into account the potential for *movement* that makes it what it is. It would be a mute revolution of repetition and exhaustion of the exception without the heroic trappings of revolt, possessing instead the

primary force of resistance seen as an inexhaustible potential to *profane* the space of the threshold, to set its constituent movement back into motion.

It is not my purpose here to resolve or even unfold this argument in the context of Agamben, but merely to suggest it for the following reasons. The primary question is whether Beckett, not Agamben, envisions something like a constituent power in the cylinder. Second, the lost ones, whether we see them as bare life in a state of exception or not, are not being *represented* by Beckett. It must be emphasized that the figures of the lost ones are only readable *as if* they were bare life. Reading Beckett's text for representation of Agamben's bare life in the state of exception fails on several accounts. Beckett figures time images of the subject remnant that are not representations or illustrations of anything, but which are understandable according to a logic whose workings are a shared concern with Agamben (and also Foucault and Barthes). Agamben's terms are useful in the discussion provided we keep in mind that the lost ones become, through reading, an image of an ontical political potential *hors cadre* to traditional political discourses, and not a representation that one might set in opposition to them, or to Agamben.

To reiterate, it is not my purpose to employ Beckett's text to deliver a critique of Agamben, whether in a mode of opposition, exhaustion or profanation of Agamben.⁵⁴ It is necessary to look at Beckett's text at this point and what the narrative voice has to say about what is possible in the cylinder, its peculiar mode of possibility, and whether a moment of constituent power, or of primary resistance that folds sovereign power in on

⁵⁴ This is another project. I suspect that Beckett could be read as a profanation of Agamben.

itself, is not already envisioned in Beckett's text, remote though it might be at first glance.

One ought first to consider the possible. Speaking in reference to the resurgence of the searching spirit, which can always resurface even when it seems to have been altogether extinguished, the narrator says: "The spent eyes may have fits of the old craving, just as those who having renounced the ladder suddenly take to it again. So true it is that when in the cylinder what little is possible is not so it is merely no longer so and in the least less the all of nothing if this notion is maintained."⁵⁵ In what is perhaps the most enigmatic sentence of the text, the reader is given the chance to grasp possibility in two iterations. First, that which in the cylinder is not possible is merely no longer possible, meaning that it was once possible, and therefore, as the second part of the sentence suggests, the tiniest kernel of possibility – "the least less" – can be said to accompany the impossible from within – "the all of nothing." Within the pessimism of the impossible, there does stir the tiniest, almost negligible element of the possible that would have to be wrought from it, and it is not likely that this will come to pass, as the narrative voice suggests here.

The reader can certainly read the sentence this way, especially taking into consideration other passages like the following regarding forbidden zones and unsanctioned use of ladders that clearly suggests that the impossibility is only theoretical and is "in no wise so." This passage from the text is also the point at which the narrative voice makes the clearest invocation of something that resembles constituent power as a gesture of primary resistance by the climbers, but whether it really represents constituent

⁵⁵ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 31-32.

power as primary resistance is a question best considered with the logic of the (im)possible alongside it:

On the same ladder planted perpendicular at the centre of the floor the same bodies would gain half a metre and so be enabled to explore at leisure the fabulous zone decreed out of reach and which therefore in theory is in no wise so. For such recourse to the ladders is conceivable. All that is needed is a score of determined volunteers joining forces to keep it upright with the help if necessary of other ladders acting as stay or struts. An instant of fraternity. But outside their explosions of violence this sentiment is as foreign to them as to butterflies. And this owing not so much to want of heart or intelligence as to the ideal preying on one and all. So much for this inviolable zenith where for amateurs of myth lies hidden a way out to earth and sky.⁵⁶

One way to understand this passage is to read it as a denunciation of the ideals of revolution, the stuff of “myth” and disappointment as history shows. Another, more powerful reading would insist that violence without fraternity and even with it, under closer scrutiny, does not pass the test of relationality, the necessary element of primary resistance, and not passing it remains the stuff of myth removed from the real problem at hand, the political question of the law of the cylinder. Let us look closely at the passage.

The bodies have forgotten, in the manner of butterflies, having become the flightiest of creatures. The bodies thus border on animality in their lack of the defining human characteristic, the gesture of politics, of taking power that is simultaneously a law giving. They have been worn down by the sovereign law such that the political gesture that is their ontological right is almost absent from their horizon. There is no question of the “instant of fraternity” that would lead to their liberation. But it is not simply that the sentiment of fraternity is foreign to them. What is noteworthy and even surprising here is that violence should be counted as an instance of fraternity, but in the logic of the cylinder this makes sense. What has been made the order of the day is repeated

⁵⁶ Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, 20-21.

systematic violation of one and all, and not violence, as I have already stated elsewhere. The phenomenon of violence would require a relation not just among co-perpetrators, but even between perpetrator and victim. Some kind of relation is necessary, whether it be fraternity or its opposite. Outbreaks of violence, which do happen occasionally, are then a positive sign of a resurgence of relationality among the bodies, for whom the order of the day is violation pure and simple. The violation in question in the cylinder is a mark of the non-relationality that holds sway for the most part, but here one is reminded that its seemingly unbreakable hold is not in fact unbreakable.

The problem is that violent outbursts, as long as they remain inscribed within the logic of this state of exception, as long as they are in defense of this law, will only serve to “maintain the notion,” to uphold the logic of the cylinder. Even if the bodies did assemble in a fraternal movement, they would be fighting against the system but without touching its logic, which is the real adversary. What makes a moment of primary resistance that would be truly fraternal unthinkable is the larger frame of the pernicious logic of the cylinder, its monstrous law, “the ideal preying on one and all.” That is, even a seemingly relational fraternal moment of violence, if it were thinkable, would not be enough, as it remains the stuff of myth, or the solution of “amateurs of myth” because as long as the primary relation that holds sway is the relation to the law, there is only the appearance of relation but no real relationality between the bodies. As long as the bodies are looking for escape, or simply to revolt against a draconian rule that forbids access to a certain area, they have only revolted against the law, but not taken measures to *reverse* the law. Reversal, as understood in the sense invoked earlier in the context of the discussion of Agamben, would be the mark of a real moment of constituent power, which

is here invoked in the mode of a *pouvoir factice*, a kind of simulacrum, that which passes for it but is not. The real moment where relation would be grasped anew would be a moment of sovereignty otherwise known as constituent power.

The question would be whether Beckett's text envisions such a moment. If one reads the passage in a consistent, powerful way, the answer would, I argue, be yes. One must distinguish between two very different moments being invoked, one as simulacrum, and one as the "real" but nearly eclipsed, nearly proscribed moment of constituent power. The nearly unthinkable but still *possible* moment of fraternity – possible according to the cylinder's own logic of possibility invoked above – must be rejected as inadequate because it is futile within the larger frame of logic. This, however, does not proscribe as impossible a real moment of primary resistance, or constituent power. There remains the question of this other moment invoked as the obverse of the *moment factice*: constituent power as structural necessity that emerges from within the logic of the cylinder framed as the pressing choice to uphold its logic to the end. To say that it remains structurally folded into the logic of the cylinder is thus to insist on the fundamental reversibility of the moment when sovereign power and bare life appear together in their threshold space of the exception. The moment of primary resistance would entail a necessary reversibility of the sovereign gesture, and the gesture of primary resistance would thus have to be actualized or grasped in a fundamental reversal, not revolt against or simple renunciation, of the law.

Let us come back to Agamben, whose biopolitical *nomos* of the planet lodged within the city's interior has at its interior a power to except that is already and necessarily split from within itself. Lodged within the city's interior is the constitutive

gesture of splitting, the exception understood in its strongest sense as *unexceptionable*. Furthermore, within its exception is the inexhaustible power to except that can be invoked or summoned by anyone. In principle, anyone can become sovereign. That is to say, anyone can occupy the sovereign's position, just as any sovereign can declare bare life in a state of exception. To claim otherwise is to except the exception, formally weaken it such that it cannot become the rule in the first place. That is, it cannot be irreversible unless Agamben is willing to accept an absolute exceptionality and thereby simultaneously erode the explanatory power of the threshold. There must therefore be a return to use of sovereignty as well, if not for the particular doomed *Homo sacer* seen as one individual or instance of sovereign power, then for other political agents living in the political *nomos* of the camp. In other words, an exception across-the-board is untenable if one accepts the absolute exceptionality of the originary political threshold as irreversible. The claim that we are living in the *nomos* of the camp is what *already* profanes the seeming irreversibility of the threshold of the originary political element. That is, we might be living within the *nomos* of the camp, the *nomos* of an exception become the rule, but that exception become the rule still depends on the grain of *exceptionality internal to it that cannot be excepted*, splitting it from within, dividing it from itself. It is this inexhaustible capacity to divide and to except that is at the heart of sovereign power, simultaneously identical to it, and yet already different from it to the extent that it exceeds it as pure gesture of exception.

Another name for this is the primary force of *profanation* that cannot be done away with or restricted if the exception become the rule is to be understood as exercising its hold in the first place in the Agambenian scheme. In other words, absolute

exceptionality cannot *be excepted*, but must rather be held, fully internalized and *accepted as exception* active within, not just without or outside. One must accept that exception is none other than the primacy of profaning resistance that splits the sovereign gesture *from within*, and not without residue: it produces the bare life that is its shadow, *son semblable, son frère*, equally capable of its own sovereign gesture of *profanation*.

To come back to Beckett, it is precisely this moment of profaning primary resistance that is liminally inscribed within the logic of the cylinder. Only it can reverse that logic, even if this possibility is remote, if the notion is maintained. The very logic of sovereign power expressed in the monstrous law that wears the bodies down is the same form of exception that makes the profaning gesture of resistance not so much possible, as never impossible, never structurally proscribed. Just as for Agamben the exception in the strong sense depends on its unexceptable status and thus paradoxically resides within what must be a reversible threshold, the entire structure of the cylinder also depends on exception in the strong sense and its necessary feature, reversibility as the pure gesture of exception as profanation that exceeds sovereignty.

One could of course object and say that Beckett only mentions the moment of resistance as simulacrum, banishing the possibility of real resistance forever. Furthermore, one could object that the reversibility being claimed for the logic of the cylinder is never even a theme raised by Beckett, and therefore the rapprochement of the two writers has overstepped the boundaries prescribed and devolved into an appropriation of one for the other, of Beckett for Agamben. These objections, however, hold only if one presupposes a simplistic form/content divide that no longer holds in Beckett, that one separates the logic of the cylinder from the logic of the text. It is therefore to have read

inattentively and missed the gestural quality of the text, which is to say not only the fact that its speech points to something that cannot be said because it must be conveyed gesturally; it is to have missed, in the very process of active reading, the process of textual reversal in force. It would however be remiss to say that the text, itself in a state of exception, simply resembles or mirrors the political state of exception of the cylinder. One must also acknowledge that there is an important difference between the parameters of the cylinder and the parameters of the text, which, as I mentioned earlier, needed equal consideration, and which should not on account of this difference be understood as separated along the fault line form/content. The difference is the crucial one of time: the events of the cylinder come to the reader through the text, whose time is other than the time referenced in the cylinder. The crucial difference is that while the cylinder is the space of a state of exception put in place by a sovereign power and where the moment of reversal is yet to come, the text is already engaged in the process of reversal.

The process of textual reversal can be read through several important textual markers: the very structure of sentences and how they may be read, the neutral narrative voice, and the aesthetic choice, not to represent, but to unrepresent through a saying rather than remaining silent. To take as examples any of the passages already cited, it must be acknowledged that the reader can only speculate as to what the enigmatic sentences mean, given that they can be read in several different ways. The entire text contains no punctuation except for periods, imparting a fluidity to the syntactical as well as semantic aspects of the sentences that is only enhanced by a choice of words that one might, with Deleuze and Guattari, refer to as a minor language. This puts an immense burden on the reader, who must engage in interpretive acrobatics, as stated earlier. In the

end, one impression holds fast: the sentence, which was first compared to a ladder with missing rungs, is actually more like a sentence without a skin, without any overarching sense, without the organization of a steady, permanent relation encasing it and permitting one to read it one way rather than another. The 'skinless' sentence thus performs the very breakdown of the skin that the text is reporting and testifies to a linguistic state of affairs that is also in break-down. And yet, there is no descent into unintelligible linguistic chaos of the text, something that of course is in keeping with the logic of the cylinder, which has its strict logic. What is significant is that the text, in presenting the active reader with the cipher of the skinless sentence, and of a skinless text, performs a gesture that not only exhausts this logic by applying it to the very form of the text, but in that application reverses this logic because the ends of the text are not those of sovereign power. The ends of the text have to do with the pure gesture of profanation that remains inexhaustible.

What I have earlier called the neutral voice can now be called by its proper name. As it neither speaks for the sovereign power, nor is in the mode of sovereignty but rather reverses that logic by insisting on the primary force of profanation, the narrative voice of this text warrants being called the non-sovereign voice. In a paradoxical twist, the narrator's is a non-sovereign voice that meditates, repeats, gives aperçus, and which is infinitely interpretable. The text bears the marks of the non-sovereign voice reporting faithfully all important aspects of the cylinder, and especially its pernicious logic, rather than seeking mastery over the text and the reader by imposing on the latter a unique interpretation in the mode of intentionality. As already stated earlier in this chapter, the text is already only a version, one telling, rather than a text possessing the status of original, and it is the active reader's duty not only to interpret it, but to be taken over by

the peculiar movement of its gesture of reversal. In fact, if we take subjectivizing reading seriously, the movement of the gesture of reversal depends on the reader, the one who comes after the lost ones in time, and who is that non-sovereign double of the subject remnant rendered in the text.

The possibility of the moment of resistance in question thus does not come about as the result of an afterthought or a disingenuous last-ditch effort, or even of a last-minute effect of retroactive framing; it is already virtually inscribed within the logic of the cylinder, but *actualized* by the reader as a possibility only at the end, only at the end point where everything, as one reads, *begins*: only when the system is exhausted, if such a point might be reached, and thus only at the point where “the notion” has been maintained through and through. One ought to add that this point is only reached with the reader’s active and effortful participation, such that the reader’s activity is also a reversal of sovereign power, be it the sovereign power of textual practice or the logic of the cylinder. Beckett seems to suggest that such a point is inevitable rather than a remote possibility that tantalizes from a distant, unreachable future. As this text makes clear, the possibility is now, it is to be seized in the present, which only appears foreclosed from a selective and limited perspective. A conscious choice must be made, not so much whether one is to maintain one notion or another, but rather to maintain consistently and in an exhaustive manner the notion already in place, such that its hidden or virtual potential, namely that of a resurgence of constituent power, might also be made to emerge.

Finally, in the inventory of textual characteristics that constitute its gestural nature, its force of profanation, one ought to include Beckett’s aesthetic choice to have

the scriptor-witness render these bodies in the first place, rather than simply abstaining from the gesture of writing. Recalling what was said in an earlier section about the dangers of witnessing to Auschwitz, or its later or even imaginary avatars, as the cylinder in question undoubtedly is in one possible reading, it should be emphasized that Beckett navigates the dangerous waters of representation not so much with poise, as with unflinching consistency in his attention to the logic of the state of exception. What is more, Beckett also evinces a strict adherence to the logic of representation that I invoked earlier through Blanchot's dictum, "The human is indestructible, and that means that there is no limit to the destruction of man"⁵⁷: not only is the human or subject remnant *infinitely representable* because it cannot be represented, but the human remnant *must be represented*, brought into the open, precisely because it is fundamentally unrepresentable. One could also restate this paradox in a slightly altered form as the paradoxical law of representation to which Beckett adheres: the human or bare life camp inmate is infinitely representable, and that means he cannot be *unrepresented*. Restating the paradox this way emphasizes that in fact the subject remnant must be *unrepresented*. What would this mean? For one thing, restating the paradox this way casts light on the gesture of reversal operated by Beckett as being one that *unrepresents* the subject remnant. It is, as the logic of the cylinder shows, both too late and too early to not represent, therefore the gesture must be one of unrepresentation, of reversal of representation. The representations are there, whether as virtual images in the memories of survivors or in the collective consciousness. The work of *unrepresenting* in this case is a kind of paring down or exhaustion of representation to its basic, minimal, constituent elements. This is the paring

⁵⁷ Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, 200.

down of narrative, of description, of the very bodies seen in *The Lost Ones*. Again, it is a paring down that is only approximate, that seeks to reduce the narrative and suggests the paring down to essentials that is also impossible, since that which has been represented cannot be unrepresented, undone, reversed, if by those gestures one means a return to a time or state preceding. To return to the problematic of the integral witness, one might thus also restate things this way: absence is not what qualifies the witness as integral. What qualifies the witness as integral is the very crushing and oppressive presence of the subject remnant to which he has been reduced and to whom absence is paradoxically denied. As for the unvoiced subjectivity, it has not disappeared for being erased; its crushing weight has been exacerbated in the form of the subject remnant. The subject remnant is the integral witness rather than the object of witnessing. The unrepresentation, undoing and reversal would have to be understood as a kind of gesture of *profanation* that accepts what has come before and what exists in place and mobilizes those very forces into movement, into a resistance against the forces that are, even if these forces be *sovereign*.

This gesture, however, is passed, like the baton or *témoin*, into the hands of the *reader*, the lost one of the lost ones, their double who looks at the anamorphic image that is the text and sees that the *hors cadre* of the figures who appear, though radically separate, is his own space.

V. Conclusion

1. *The Remnant Reader*

In the process of reading four different texts, something new, different arises. The space of literature, the “enceinte,”¹ gives birth to it (in a way that film alone perhaps could not). It might be said that Malone is its name, but any name would do. It is the subject remnant, the one who does not speak, but who could in principle, in that postulated reversal. It is the obverse of the author-function and the scriptor witness *unfigured* in *The Lost Ones*, except to the extent that it is readable in the sentences on the page. Malone is the name of something that could not be named in *Film*. In *The Lost Ones*, paradoxically, it is named, but not as “itself,” through a careful framing and distancing as the other, the same as radically different – the subject remnant. It is this subject remnant that stands as if at the center of the “quincunx”² of subjectivity. The latter, lozenge-shaped, is another name for the figure of the subjective trousers seen as two moments or phases, the author-function and the scriptor witness, of a time-image of subjectivity. In the center, *hors cadre* to the figure, stands the subject remnant. And along with the subject remnant is born its double, the subjectivized reader. It is the latter who sees the anamorphic image of subjectivity in all its volatility, its becoming, its ineluctable duration.

¹ To reiterate, this term comes from *The Unnamable*, where the narrator says: “But I am certainly not at the circumference. For if I were it would follow that Malone, wheeling about me as he does, would issue from the enceinte at every evolution, which is manifestly impossible.” (295)

² I am referring to Peter Murphy’s study cited in chapter four. The figure of the quincunx is not a metaphor or allegory for anything other than itself. It *is* the figure of subjectivity.

But what is the *use* of seeing this image? And who is the subjectivized reader who emerges as non-identical and yet the same as the subject-remnant? These are all questions that touch the very heart of the matter of the subject vis-à-vis subjectivity and deserve to be answered here, at the end of the analysis.

The reading in the previous chapters is not done in the vacuum of a purely academic debate looking back at Beckett, Foucault, Barthes and Rivette, important thinkers in different media of the sixties whose different problematics have their footing in the paradigm shift of the author, and whose perspectives are made to converge in the figure of the subjective trousers. The levity of the figure should not obscure the seriousness of the task that underpins this project: to deliver an analysis of subjectivity as it comes down to us articulated by these thinkers so as to *actualize* it for the present day. In other words, there is a pressing need to reiterate or rearticulate the subject today, because it is in as much danger as the lost ones in Beckett's text. To begin to see the pressing need for such an actualization, we must understand that reading is much more than communing with books; reading has everything to do with our rapport with the other in our sphere, and thus with *politics*. The subject-remnant that emerges at the end of my analysis is the *reader* in the strongest sense. The reader is modeled on none other than the narrator, who is a lost one who has become an ex-searcher, and who refuses to play by the rules of the cylinder. Thus, the reading invoked is unceasing and potentially a tool for *disobedience*. Further, it is not simply that the subject must be subjectivized by the text. The text is an *inert* thing until a subject, weak, downtrodden, harried and split though she or he might be, in a felicitous moment reactivates it, subjectivizes it. The reader stands

and falls with the text. As Beckett shows, the text stands and falls with *the reader who writes*. It is the reader who writes, the subjectivized reader, that adopts a certain stance with regard to the others in his or her sphere, refuses to reify them, encounters them. In other words, the *other* stands and falls with the subjectivized reader, who is the only thing that can maintain him, being another non-reified, unrepresentable, substitutable “I.”

The pressing issue today is the glaring lack of a real subjective perspective, of a real speaking “I,” of the active *reader* who, through reading, adopts his or her own perspective on the material of analysis and thus accesses subjectivity, if only briefly, which does not attend him or her like a shadow. Today, speech “belongs” to the chattering, “speaking” contingent of “Is” the way a pair of shoes belongs to the buyer – it has been dearly paid for, but in the case of subjectivity, it has been bought by a renunciation or abnegation of the very thing the speaker thinks he or she possesses. It seems the more the “I” speaks, the more it is parroting discourses that are not its own, being spoken by them, as it were, but we have not thereby arrived at the dawn of a post-Beckettian age in which the matter of who speaks has been settled in favor of neutrality. The matter has been settled, but in favor of a recalcitrant, psychologized, dangerous subjectivity that thrives on an “anything goes” relativism and refuses any encounter with a perspective different from its own, professions of respect for difference in the multicultural society notwithstanding. What do these wired, chattering “Is” have in common with the lost ones? Like the lost ones, these are subjects who have parted ways with *subjectivity*, or who suffer from the burden of seeing always from one and the same perspective, something that only subjectivizing reading can cure. For it must be

remembered that it is the subjectivizing force of reading that neutralizes subjectivity in the limited, univocal sense, and opens up the subject to the plurality of voices around him or her, to the multiplicity of perspectives in whose continuum he or she dwells. It opens us up to encounter the other, not in the mode of representation, taking the subject for an object that means something in relation to “me,” but in the mode of metonymy: ceaseless reading of the part for a whole of the other subject that never concretizes as such because it cannot. This reading takes *work*, as Barthes tells us, but we are systemically and systematically alienated from all forms of work, whether by the structure of work or the unceasing search for “fun.”

Reading, understood as the broad practice of a plurivocal perspective mediated by a particular reader, affords the opportunity and the means to search for something other than fun. It puts us in a position to potentially disobey, to potentially subvert the law that Beckett does not represent. We are naïve readers if we expect a subversion of the law “in” the text from Beckett. Beckett does not represent a subversion of the law, and we must understand exactly why this is the case according to the perspective I have adopted for this reading. He does not represent the subversion, not so much because the law is not subvertible (that is another question for the reader to decide), but because it is not a matter of *representing* the subversion. Represented, it is nothing but representation and remains in its closed, literary space *hors cadre* and thus “cannot help us.” The *hors cadre* space needs to be opened up. Or rather, the latter is radically continuous with our space when it subjectivizes us through reading, when our reading goes far enough to a point from which our perspective can see it and the question of the law it holds up as an image.

At stake is thus also our ability to be political subjects, and this, again, not simply on the level of representation, but in a constitutive sense, as subjects who must find their own way in their world, who must read their world as a function of that image, who must become reading-function which, only then, might jump the level to disobey, to encounter the other.

We are mere products of our objectifying capitalist system and unethical non-subjects if we give up on our reading of Beckett, unhappy that he has not delivered a solution, or happy that he reliably reconfirms a comfortable cultural pessimism. Happy or unhappy, it makes no difference, as either way we continue to fetishize his texts as expressions of silence, allegories of the camp, performances of the unsubversibility of the law. Our expectation is a clear sign of our being products of representational politics, the kind that Agamben is critiquing. To stop reading for representative content is in itself a political act of the subject, an act of disobedience to the regime of representation that holds sway not *in* our books, but over us and our books, as well as every other sphere of life.

What Beckett does is different. He figures a subject, an unstable, vanishing subject who isn't and who only happens in that vanishing. This is not a subversive subject who overcomes, but the political potential of this being never leaves altogether. Rather, the political potential, the subjectivization, leaves only viewed from a certain (limited) perspective. The political potential *is* the very potential of the reader, who alone, in a reading that ventures out far enough, can perceive even in the ex-searcher the double of the voice of *The Lost Ones*, who is the very same voice as the narrator of *The*

Unnamable, who is a distant image of herself. Politics, or political potential tied to subjectivity, the only kind that matters, is unfolded and figured as something else by the image: it is an ontical potential *hors cadre* to ontology and to the reified abstraction that is the ideological flat image that has currency today, an ontical potential caught in between the text and the world, as Foucault says of the author-function.

To come back to the trousers, we must wear them to the extent that they do not fit. That is, in their distant resemblance to us, and non-resemblance, as we are not yet ground into the dust like the Lost Ones, through our reading that is a searching for names, and not simply a searching. If Beckett's is the non-representational writing that Barthes and Foucault in their different ways called for and understood as answering the new ethical imperative of literature, our reading must also enter this new paradigm of the ethical reader. We must take seriously the idea of the active reader and stop thinking within the bounds of the book, because in this view, one can always say that the active reader accomplishes a symbolic act that ultimately has nothing to do with the real situation in the world. The criticism that textual revolution has nothing to do with "the world" is an old, tired one and would be justified if it did not misread what writers like Barthes, Foucault and Beckett actually have to say about it. That is to say, how they figure subjectivizing readership rather than representing it. As long as we continue to think them in the paradigm of representation, we will have a fallacious understanding of the subjectivizing power of the text. The reader does much more, however. The reader needs to exercise her skill in the world to be subjectivized in it. The baggage of subjectivity might be something we carry around with us like a dead weight crushing and undoing us,

but subjectivization is not a reifiable thing, nor is it the same as the baggage of subjectivity. It is a gesture, our signature on the world. Subjectivization is the fleeting moment when the dead weight, carried through to the end or almost, or as far as possible, is lifted, that is, chiasmatically witnesses to itself – in the mode of neutrality and in maintaining the split, not healing or closing it over – and assumes its own truthful perspective, i.e. its authorship of speech, writing, gesture in time. Subjectivization is the third term in the pair subject-subjectivity, and which is not granted from above, but assumed from below at certain moments. It is somewhat like the *Dasein* that Heidegger goes to so much trouble to explicate, and which he does not talk “about,” and which is paradoxically the inhuman hallmark of the human, not being tied to it or possessed by it. We get along perfectly well in the world without “our” *Dasein*, but living this way we are lower than the animals, who might also entertain brief apprehension of their world that is non-communicable. The difference is that for Beckett subjectivization is tied exclusively to the ontic, not to the ontological passing into the ontic, as it is for Heidegger, therefore remaining on the level of representation despite his efforts to the contrary. The fact is, we are all walking searchers, or ex-searchers staring at projections on a screen, which is another way of stating the alienation of being, not because we resemble the camp inmates represented in Beckett, although we do that too, but because we ourselves, without being in an actual camp, are already *inhuman*. We lead a desubjectivized existence to the extent that we do not read – that is write, enter the author function, that third term of the split subject – do not exhaustively persevere in our search for our Lost One, which is another way of saying assume our paradoxical neutrality of perspective, our signature gesture.

In other words we must become ourselves by entering the CHASM of subjectivity, which only then becomes subjectivized, a CHIASM: a chasm with an “T” in the middle, or almost, a pair of trousers....which will never fit but we have no others, none perfect.

2. The Political Subject

In the introduction to *Democracy in What State?*, a volume of collected essays on the question of democracy and contemporary politics, Agamben writes:

Our Western political system results from the coupling of two heterogeneous elements, a politico-juridical rationality and an economic-governmental rationality, a “form of constitution” and a “form of government.” Incommensurable they may be, but they legitimate and confer mutual consistency on each other. Why does the *politeia* get trapped in this ambiguity? What is it that gives the sovereign, the *kyrion*, the power to ensure and guarantee the legitimacy of their union? What if it were just a fiction, a screen set up to hide the fact that there is a void at the center, that no articulation is possible between these two elements, these two rationalities? What if the task at hand were to disarticulate them and force into the open this “ungovernable” that is simultaneously the source and the vanishing point of any and all politics?³

This statement on the part of Agamben is a cogent plea for political subjectivity, certainly the most recent articulation of the continuing problem of the subject as it pertains to politics. In a volume that deals with failures of democracy concrete and formal, hypocritical or simply oblivious – Kristin Ross’s article on the European constitutional elections viewed in the frame of a loss of meaning of the term democracy is just one example⁴ – this statement stands out as the most forceful reminder of how far the unraveling of the political subject has progressed. He summarizes the setting on its head of the idea of democracy that the rest of the volume explores in its various instances: The

³ Agamben, “Introduction,” *Democracy in What State?* New York: Columbia University Press, 2011: 4.

⁴ Kristin Ross, “Democracy for Sale,” *Democracy in What State?* New York: Columbia University Press, 2011:

politeia, the community of subjects and their unrealized potential has been eliminated from the picture currently painted of democracy. Democratic community has largely become a fiction, but that is not because of a flawed praxis of democracy, or even because of a forgetful disregard for the meaning of the term, but rather because the concept of democratic politics, “the Western political system,” is itself flawed from its inception. Agamben speaks of the coupling of two heterogeneous elements. Just as there is no articulation between the two elements of the subject viewed as split – the subject and subjectivity – there is no articulation, according to Agamben, between the two terms that constitute politics today, viewed in its split nature as two separate, different rationalities. The problem is a profound dysfunction at the heart of democracy because the terms of sovereignty and community are believed to somehow, inexplicably and magically, to mediate between two things where no mediation is in fact possible. The dysfunction of democracy is a surface phenomenon or symptom of the lack of articulation between the elements that make up a composite political system. The “sovereign” and “community” are screens for the gaping void between the disparate elements or rationalities. They are the glue that will not stick. The task today, according to Agamben, is, on the one hand, to demythologize the ideal of democracy that still has currency and many defenders who, like so many Don Quixottes, joust with windmills in the name of an ideal. On the other hand, the task is to bring into the open the “ungovernable” trapped in a state of limbo, of “ambiguity.” This ungovernable would be, rearticulated, the political subject, or subjectivity understood as necessarily split from the

subject. Unlike the two rationalities, the subject can be viewed as a productive split subject, as *subjectivizable* and therefore “ungovernable.”

Having analyzed Rivette’s *La belle noiseuse*, and Beckett’s *Film*, *The Unnamable* and *The Lost Ones*, I suggest that this “ungovernable” is none other than the split subject, the *obverse* of that decent fellow, of that political subject who votes and even says “no” to the powers that be. What is in question is his obscene doppelganger, the very figure so artfully “disarticulated” from his other half by Beckett in *Film*, where one sees staged with rare clarity the solipsistic and disavowed “coexistence” of the two, if one can speak of coexistence of beings who inhabit radically different filmic spaces (hors champ for one, hors cadre for the other), and thus radically separate planes of being, and where one is not even a being, strictly speaking. A similar disarticulation is performed in *La belle noiseuse*, where it is a question of the disavowed coexistence of two paradigms of creation, two paintings, two models.

For Beckett, however, there is not just a split. There is a *continuity* that folds one element of the split into the other, unfolding them on occasion. There is a monstrous identity of disparate elements, a collapsing into one another of the two terms of the split. There is an insistence on continuity that does not admit the dialectical approach with its insistence on separate moments that I have already evoked and explained in context of filmic technique and film history in *Film*. To put that in slightly different terms, the split folded and unfolded is like dialectics not so much turned on its head or even eviscerated, as dialectics unfolded and sustained in a transparent allegory of nothing but itself, recognizable, yet utterly foreign to itself, possessing the movement or desire for

movement that is a distinguishing mark of dialectics, but none of the leveling of difference. The fact is that cutting these two elements apart is an impossible task, because they are already cut. Cinema, to the extent that it is the gesture of registering the real and cutting it, is dead, but its undeath lies in the continuity that it also registers. That is its distinguishing mark. They are folds, or even one fold, where fold should be understood in the Deleuzian sense. Insofar as they represent the figure for a continuity that emerges, on the other side of the *moebius* strip, as a profound fragmentation, they are already separated from one another. Perhaps knowing that one is dealing with two *enfants terribles* of governability, two “ungovernables” rather than just one, is a necessary step in the direction of a happier future for a most terrible, beautiful annoyance: the split subject.

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Biography

Margaret A. Ozierski was born on March 8, 1973, in Chrzanów, Poland. She moved to the United States at the age of seven and grew up in Chicago, IL. Margaret attended Northwestern University in Evanston, IL, and was awarded a B.A. in Philosophy in 1996. She then spent a transformative year in Paris and was awarded the M.A. degree “with distinction” in French Cultural Studies in 1999 by Columbia University, New York. Margaret currently teaches Film Studies and French at Virginia Commonwealth University in the School of World Studies, in Richmond, VA. She has a published article, “The Weak Origin of the Work of Art: *La Belle Noiseuse*, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Agamben, Vattimo,” *Australian Journal of French Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 2, May/Aug 2010: 196-207, and a work in progress, “The Cannibal as Ambassador: a Chiasmic Encounter.” Margaret studied at Duke University on a Department Fellowship in Romance Studies from 2001-2003, and from 2004-2005. In 2003-2004, Margaret was Graduate Assistant at the Study Abroad Office of EDUCO (Emory-Duke-Cornell) in Paris, France. She was awarded one of two Duke University scholarships to attend the 29th session of the School of Criticism and Theory at Cornell University in summer 2005, and a Graduate School Pre-Dissertation Research Funding Award for summer 2006. In 2007-2008, Margaret lived and conducted research in Paris, France, on a Department Fellowship for Research. Since her return in fall 2008, she has been teaching and advising students at VCU. Her position was changed to full-time collateral faculty in fall 2010. Margaret is a member of the Pi Delta Phi French Honor Society and of the IAPL.