

**Immanence, Indeterminacy, Relativity:
Towards a Post/modernist Reading of Samuel Beckett's *Watt***

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The avant-garde must find a direction in a landscape into which no one seems to have yet ventured . . . The new time consciousness . . . does more than express the experience of mobility in society, of acceleration in history, of discontinuity in everyday life. The new value placed on the transitory, the elusive and the ephemeral, the very celebration of dynamism, discloses a longing for an undefiled, immaculate and stable present.

-Jürgen Habermas "Modernity - An Incomplete Project"

A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant.

-Jean François Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition*

For since when were Watt's concerns with what things were, in reality?

-Samuel Beckett *Watt*

In Samuel Beckett's *Watt* (1953) the reader is introduced to a world that seems to be contingent upon relativity, indeterminacy, immanence, and in which the ability to achieve a true epistemological understanding of that world by the characters, as well as the reader, is impossible. However, as Rubin Rabinovitz notes in *Innovation in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (1992), what Beckett's mise-en-scène in *Watt* constitutes is not so much emblematic of the postmodern inability to know, but rather an attempt to display what little we are able to know: "In his fiction he tries to represent the world as accurately as he can, or as he might put it, to lie about it as little as possible" (10). While Beckett therefore is traditionally construed as a quintessentially postmodernist author, his attempts at circumscribing reality might therefore be located in the modernist's desire to accurately portray the psychological realities of the world in all its complexity. While the traditional novelist's view of external, everyday reality was based on the premise that the

world was essentially stable as it was apprehended through the senses, scientific principles introduced a universe ruled by relativity and indeterminacy, and as a result demonstrated the modernist view of an essentially unstable world in which things could only be apprehended by the human consciousness, but could never be fully known. As a result, while Beckett's *Watt* can therefore be seen as displaying a surreal world that does not adhere to the traditional formulae of realist fiction, Beckett's depiction of that world can, in fact, be seen as a realist attempt at describing the world in the light of these new scientific truths that had emerged:

The verisimilitude found in realistic literature insists on correspondences between the truths of time-space world and the descriptions in the created world of the writer. If such truths are based on obsolescent scientific ideas, however, the verisimilitude of the realists must be questioned. (Rabinovitz 13)

In aligning a universe determined by relativity with the workings of the fictional world presented within the pages of his fiction, Beckett therefore approaches reality through the meshes of liminal human experience (which can only apprehend the world through the human consciousness), while discarding the formulaic trappings of fiction-as-genre. As a result, as Beckett demonstrates in *Watt*, while the world can be seen as being located in a Heisenbergian universe that denies a true epistemological understanding by the human consciousness, that consciousness is the only way for us to achieve cognition and meaning in that world. In this sense, Beckett's *Watt* can be seen as operating from the threshold of the aesthetic principles of modernism and postmodernism, by displaying the modernist desire to make sense, through the human consciousness, of a world that is essentially unknowable, while also displaying the post-modernist self-reflexive notion of the futility of such a quest in fiction, as fiction can only attempt to circumscribe that reality but never entirely contain it. However, in order to display this difference, it is

necessary to distinguish the philosophical differences of modernism and postmodernism as aesthetic modes.

Modernism as an aesthetic mode is roughly associated with (among others) the art of Pablo Picasso, Francois Picabia, Henri Matisse, Marcel Duchamp, Vincent van Gogh, the fiction of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, the poetry of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams and was influenced by the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, Immanuel Kant, Georg Hegel, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and William James. What modernism as an aesthetic mode emphasized was the importance of the human consciousness in a world that had been culturally, socially, and psychologically destabilized as a result of World War I (1914-1918). As a result, the modernist crisis brought forth the importance of the consciousness of the modernist artist, which became the only means to adequately convey the chaotic reality and pathos of an indifferent world that was seemingly ruled by indeterminacy and entropy. In this, the modernist artists gained a new expressive mode which, as Francois Picabia put it, was the “objectivity of subjectivity”, in which the artist’s mental and psychological perceptions and personal style had gained importance in a world that had displayed itself to be only knowable through the subjective human consciousness.

As a result, modernist fiction displays not so much a concern for displaying a stable, outer reality with accurate, realist depictions of the world, as that world in its essence is unknowable, but rather, displays how that world is represented and reflected in the psychological realities in the artist’s work. In this sense, modernism can be seen as rejecting the mimesis of traditional, realist fiction in favor of a more psychologized reality, in which the object is not to encapsulate the (objective) world within the pages of

fiction, but rather to capture the subjective impression that world is making on the artist's individual psyche and thus convey its truths through artistic means. As a result, the modernist writer gained importance as the conveyor of a subjective artistic and stylistic experience of the world, but denied having the authority to convey an objective view of reality by not telling their readers how to interpret that world.

Indeed, as Beckett explains in his essay on Marcel Proust, Proust was scornful of “the literature that ‘describes,’ for the realists and naturalists worshipping the offal of experience, prostrate before the epidermis and the swift epilepsy, and content to transcribe the surface, the facade, behind which the Idea is prisoner” (*Proust* 59). Similarly, we can distinguish this modernist tendency in Beckett's writing, in that his writing is more concerned with capturing the creative moment that the human, artistic consciousness peers below the mere surface of the world in order to uncover its truths. Indeed, as he states, the only world that is knowable is that known by the evanescent human consciousness:

The immediate joys and sorrows of the body and the intelligence are so many superfoetations. Such as it was, it has been assimilated to the only world that has reality and significance, the world of our own latent consciousness, and its cosmography has suffered a dislocation . . . The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday's ego, not for to-day's (*Proust* 3).

In this sense, Beckett aligns himself with the aesthetic axioms of modernism by emphasizing human consciousness as a basis for epistemological understanding, in which the writer's individual style and use of language works to effect this understanding in the reader.

Indeed, as Tyrus Miller notes in *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (1999), what Beckett's fiction represents is an attempt to

expose the hidden layers of meaning underlying human experience, in which the creative use of language in fiction is operative in decoding the threshold of human experience that is traditionally obscured in fiction by the guise of mimetic reality:

Beckett champions works in which the text's meaning devolves on the material and formal properties of its artistic language, projecting a new form of hieroglyphic immediacy, a writing free of the codes and conventions governing ordinary signification yet marked by the deepest rigor of craft. (172).

As a result, in Beckett's *Watt* we can also see the modernist preoccupation with style, in which language is used in the Shklovskian sense, as Beckett defamiliarizes the familiar narrative use of language and thus makes the reader aware of its conventions and artistic creation. Indeed, as Beckett notes in a footnote, making the reader aware of the generation of the narrative, as well as its creative process: "much valuable space has been saved, in this work . . . by avoidance of the plethoric reflexive pronoun after *say*" (*Watt* 8). Consider, for example, the conversation at the beginning of *Watt*:

You remember the night that Larry was born, said the lady.
I do, said the gentleman.
How old is Larry now? said Mr Hackett.
How old is Larry, my dear? said the gentleman.
How old is Larry, said the lady. Larry will be forty years old next March, D.V.
That is the kind of thing Dee always vees, said Mr Hackett. (12-13).

As a result of this everyday conversation presented with extreme verisimilitude, Beckett's use of the emphatic, paratactic style in this passage makes the reader explicitly aware of the surrounding narrative structure that works to frame it, in which the conversation's trivial nature denies the reader any epistemological understanding. The fact that Larry was born and is at present forty years old does nothing to enhance the reader's experience of the story, which is about Watt. However, while the reader is therefore offered this precise rendition of a dialogue, its relevance to the narrative very

small, the narrative itself points to its own creation beyond the trivialities. Indeed, while Beckett's modernist use of language and fiction style might signal the preoccupation with uncovering new truths through a human consciousness structured in language, passages like this indicate that there lies nothing beyond that language but its generative creation.

In this sense, while Beckett therefore displays the modernist preoccupation with style as a means of revealing reality, in *Watt* he denies the possibility of language to mean anything beyond its everyday use as a semiotic system. Indeed, as Miller argues, in Beckett's later work, amongst which *Watt*, the modernist preoccupation with language as an epistemological means of uncovering (artistic) truth through consciousness is displayed to be problematic:

Beckett takes a step outside of the specular closure this value system [of awareness] presumes, an autonomy of both author and work from extra-artistic determination, to call in question the whole centering of literary value in consciousness and to unleash the 'idiocy' of language freed from the burden of intention and truth. . . [B]eckett breaks the modernist juncture between textual *figures* of subjectivity (whether tropes or larger-scale forms) and knowledge, the presupposition that aesthetic value and truth converge in such figures and that the author's task is to seek indefatigably to uncover them from their hiding places . . . and renew them for the present ('Make It New'). He aims instead to desubliminate, wholesale, such figures of consciousness straining after the fleeting beauty of anguished truth. (*Late Modernism* 180)

In this sense, at the same time that Beckett's modernist use of decoding truth through the idiosyncracies of language and style is in play in *Watt*, this use of language is displayed to be problematic, as language in fiction strictly pertains to a labyrinthine, fictive reality and cannot function as an epistemological means of understanding reality.

Indeed, as Beckett's narrative demonstrates, while we might be led to believe that fiction pertains to reality, it is in fact constitutive of its own exigent fictional reality. As a result, although we might deem the narrator an omniscient one, we learn that it is actually

a friend of Watt's from the insane asylum who is narrating the tale as it was told to him by Watt. The fact that there are footnotes to what is portrayed to be a verbatim recount of Watt's tale only serves to underline its fictional nature as text. Furthermore, while we are led to believe that the narrator (who, the reader learns, is insane) has memorized all of this to the point of knowing exactly the mental processes of Watt, the obvious *aporia* in the narrative (for how does Watt know the contents of the conversation between Mr Hackett and his wife when he was not present at that time in the narrative?) signal the parodistic (yet inadequate) attempts of a modernist author 'hiding' behind his narrator in order to convey the reality of the world through this protagonist. In fact, what Beckett's narrative inertia signals is his attempt at transgressing the boundaries of modernist discourse, in which language as a semiotic system in fiction is constitutive of its own reality apart from the reality of the outside world.

As a result, what can be deduced is that Beckett's relationship to modernism as a system of discourse is problematized in *Watt*, as his fiction adopts the criteria as delineated by Frederic Jameson in "Postmodernism and Consumer Society", in which postmodernism, through "parody", "pastiche and schizophrenia", tries to discard with modernism's aesthetic and philosophical precepts (113). Mostly, postmodernism is associated with the cultural theories of such post-structuralists as Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, and Roland Barthes, whose theories indicated a rupture in traditional, modernist ways of apprehending the world. Post-modernism is the name for the new cultural condition that was happening after World War II (1939-1945) and which was hence distinguished as being "other" than modernism by adding the "post" prefix. However, as its troubled etymology indicates,

postmodernism has a reciprocal relationship to modernism in that postmodernism attempts to rid itself of modernism's influence by parodying or mimicking it. As a result, postmodernism can be seen as a simultaneous continuing and distancing of modernism's influence, as it refers to these modernist structures at the same time that it tries to subvert them. In this sense, in the words of Jacques Derrida, postmodernism as an aesthetic mode is about displaying "the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of truth" ("Plato" 447). It is in this sense, then, that Beckett's *Watt* can also be seen in Lyotard's meaning of modernism at its "nascent state" by the fact that in it Beckett adopts the modernist's preoccupation with the writer's style as a means of displaying consciousness, while also adopting the postmodernist's skepticism towards any epistemological understanding of reality achieved through consciousness and style as it is displayed in fiction.

In fact, what Beckett's display of modernist/postmodernist modes of writing in *Watt* can be seen to reflect is not so much an adherence to the precepts of these aesthetic modes, but rather a synthesis in which he tried to determine the boundaries in fiction between the word inside the page and the outside world. As modernism argues, the word in fiction can accurately reflect reality of the outside world in so far as this is displayed by the individual writer's artistic and aesthetic consciousness. Conversely, postmodernism argues that no such hermeneutic relationship is possible in literature between the word and the world as literature is in itself self-referential and can only display its own (fictive) reality. It is in this critical space, then, that Beckett's *Watt* seems to operate.

As Beckett demonstrates, while Watt attempts to truly know the event of the Galls tuning the piano at Mr. Knott's house, that event starts to dissolve as Watt's *a priori* reasoning starts to alter it. In this sense, *Watt* paradoxically represents the impossibility to know something truly *through* the mind, as well as the impossibility to know something truly exists *outside* of the mind, as we can only apprehend reality through the mind without fully comprehending or approximating that reality. Therefore, as P.J. Murphy points out, in his essay "Beckett and the philosophers", what *Watt* seems to represent is Beckett's use of the ideas of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) which "offers the difficult and paradoxical situation of man as phenomenally determined but noumenally free" (230). Indeed, Kant's distinction between *phenomena* - objects of physical experience - and *noumena* - objects beyond physical experience, or what Kant termed, the *ding-an-sich* - is an important one to make when it comes to Beckett's *Watt*, as it represents the epistemological crisis in which Watt, as well as Beckett and ultimately his reader, find themselves.

After the Galls have tuned Mr. Knott's piano, Watt therefore starts the mental process that will lead to his mental undoing, as the event of the tuning of the piano by the Galls, we learn, "resembled them in the sense that it was not ended, when it was past, but continued to unfold, in Watt's head, from beginning to end, over and over again" (72). Once set, Watt's mental perceptions refract the experience into the interplay of light, motion and sound, and thus indicate the influence of this event by displaying it in the scientific *reductio ad absurdum* of physics, thus connecting the everyday reality to the larger significance of a macrocosmic universe comprised of light, motion and waves, yet finally ending beyond that: "Thus the scene in the music-room, with two Galls, ceased

very soon to signify for Watt a piano tuned . . . and became a mere example of light commenting bodies, and stillness motion, and silence sound, and *comment comment*” (Beckett 73; my emphasis). In the end, therefore, Watt only knows “that he did not know what happened” as he becomes aware of the “simple games that time plays with space,” only to end up with the epistemological need to *know*:

But [Watt] was obliged, because of his peculiar character, to enquire into what they meant, oh not into what they really meant, his character was not so peculiar as all that, but into what they might be induced to mean, with the help of a little patience, a little ingenuity. (Beckett 75)

However, as Beckett displays in Watt’s mental apprehension of the world, in turn, this leads to more confusion when Watt gets into the meaning of meaning: “But what was this pursuit of meaning, in this indifference to meaning?” (75). Indeed, confronted by a universe riddled with indeterminate complexity and a world colored by the anthropic principle introduced by Quantum mechanics, namely, that the world is the way it is because we *perceive* it as such, not as it is *essentially* as such, Beckett’s Watt is only able to turn his back on the abysmal proliferation of meaning generated through language in his mind.

In this sense, while Watt’s *a priori* deduction therefore leads him from the phenomena of the piano being tuned to the epistemological cul-de-sac of Kant’s *noumena*, Watt’s efforts to truly know the *ding-an-sich* are displayed to be impossible and his attempts at aligning the word with the world are frustrated. In this sense, as Lacan reminds us that man’s consciousness of the world is structured in language, Watt’s mental reasoning ultimately leads to his own mental undoing, as his realization of the impossibility of having language mean something beyond its linguistic properties ultimately obstructs his knowledge of the world. Indeed, after the incident of the piano

tuning, we learn that Watt “desired words to be applied to his situation, to Mr. Knott, to the house, to the grounds, to his duties, to the stairs, to his bedroom, to the kitchen, and in a general way to the conditions of being in which he found himself” (81). More than a mere functional pondering of a character in a novel, this passage can be seen as an ironic existential rumination on Watt’s fictional status in a book in which he is posited as protagonist/narrator, but whose author has taken away the opportunity to generate language that is meaningful, and thus, has highlighted the inability of fiction to transcend the status of mere “words” and contain the ineffable.

Indeed, as a result the ontological status of objects in fiction therefore become questionable for Watt when expressed in language. When Watt looks at a pot of Mr. Knott’s, he therefore is confronted with the inability of language to *mean beyond its linguistic limits* and achieve phenomenological content:

Looking at a pot, for example, or thinking of a pot, at one of Mr Knott’s pots, of one of Mr Knott’s pots, it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot. Well, perhaps not quite in vain, but very nearly. For it was not a pot, the more he looked, the more he reflected, the more he felt sure of that, that it was not a pot at all. It resembled a pot, it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say, Pot, pot, and be comforted. (*Watt* 81)

In this sense, while the pot might be signified by the word, it cannot mean something beyond its linguistic structure. As the above passage indicates, even saying it will not materialize the pot’s “potness” to Watt or the reader. As a result, as Watt indicates awhile later, while the signifier might be equated with a mental association, it can never convey the *ding-an-sich*:

For if the approximation had been less close, then Watt would have been less anguished. For then he would not have said, This is a pot, and yet not a pot, no, but then he would have said, *This is something of which I do not know the name*. And Watt preferred on the whole having to do with things of which he did not know the name, thought this too was painful to Watt, to having to do with things of which the known name, the proven name, was not the name, any more, for him. . . But he could not look forward to this in the case of *a thing of which the true name had ceased, suddenly, or gradually, to be the true name for Watt*. For the pot remained a pot, Watt felt sure of that, for everyone but Watt. For Watt alone it was not a pot, any more. (81-82; my emphasis)

Indeed, as we learn, Watt's inability to use language to generate meaning that transcends the mere word on a page and thus capture the object will ultimately lead to his own epistemological and ontological crisis, in which he loses the ability to connect Kant's phenomena - the objects of experience as signified through language - with their essential quality. In this sense, while Watt's *a priori* reasoning makes him aware that there is an essence of the pot, he thus also is made aware of its intransitive quality as a *noumena* - a thing that resists being known through the mind, and ultimately, through language. In this sense, Watt's mental crisis represents the postmodern inability to connect the reality of the word in fiction to that of the outside world, and thus one in which language as an accurate representation of reality resides in a crisis of the *logos*.

As a result, what Watt's inability to accurately express himself through language amounts to is the crisis of representation as experienced by the postmodern subject. As Lyotard notes, with the advent of capitalism and science, in which "there is no reality unless testified by a consensus between partners over a certain knowledge and certain commitments" (77), the loss of ultimate meaning, as that meaning becomes a fragile discourse susceptible to the interests of commercialism, science and art, leads to the fragmentation of meaning as language is destabilized as a ground zero epistemic means

of displaying reality. Using Kant's concept of the sublime, Lyotard therefore describes the postmodern crisis as one in which modernism's claims to truth through language and consciousness can be seen to be ridiculous:

[The sublime] takes place, on the contrary, when the imagination fails to present an object which might, if only in principle, come to match a concept. We have the Idea of the world (the totality of what is), but we do not have the capacity to show an example of it. We have the Idea of the simple (that which cannot be broken down, decomposed), but we cannot illustrate it with a sensible object which would be a "case" of it. We can conceive the infinitely great, the infinitely powerful, but every presentation of an object destined to "make visible" this absolute greatness or power appears to us painfully inadequate. Those are Ideas of which no presentation is possible. Therefore, they impart no knowledge about reality (experience); they also prevent the free union of the faculties which give rise to the sentiment of the beautiful; and they prevent the formation and the stabilization of taste. (*Postmodern Condition* 78)

As Lyotard's passage demonstrates, while we have the scientific means of conceiving of a universe in which light, waves and motion function as a means of understanding, we also have the Heisenbergian and the anthropic principle to contradict this epistemologically.

In this sense, language, whether expressing reality in mathematical or regular terms, still can only represent the point at which the human consciousness resides within the historical discourse of language as decided by science, art and culture. As a result, Watt's cosmological understanding of the significance of the piano being tuned does not result in any advancements towards understanding, as his apperceptive reasoning obliterates any significance of the event, as it is structured in language with "the notorious difficulty of recapturing, at will, modes of feeling peculiar to a certain time, and to a certain place" (*Watt* 75). Likewise, Watt's attempt at expressing the essence of Mr. Knott's pot is frustrated as it confronts him with a language that is inadequate to express its essence.

Indeed, according to postmodernism as an aesthetic and philosophical mode of understanding, language itself becomes problematic when the language that structures our understanding is shown to be inadequate for representing reality. As Derrida argues in his essay “Differance” (1968), what language’s natural “*de jure*” structurality hides is a paradoxical neologism such as “differance” that signals language’s deconstruction as a semiotic system. By using “differance”, Derrida critiques not only the inadequacy of linguist Ferdinand Saussure’s sound-image relationship in language, as “differance” indicates “sameness” (delay of meaning through deferment) and “sameness which is not identical” (difference of meaning) while phonetically being indistinguishable from “difference” (the *sine qua non* of meaning for Saussure), but also criticizes the lacunae in the “*de jure*” structurality of language that hides a neologism such as “differance” that indicates its shortcomings as a system of signification (“Différance” 385-386). As Derrida explains, if meaning is based on “difference” and “deference” there can never have been a solitary origin, an *arche*, as meaning, through “differance”, denotes difference and deference and thus fraction. Therefore, as the notion of presence is obliterated by a denial of unity, there can only be *absence*, as language no longer denotes presence, as it is “not a presence but it is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself” (“Différance” 403). As a result, in Beckett’s *Watt* we see this after Watt has had the epistemological crises of the piano-tuning event and the intransitive pot of Mr. Knott. Confronted with a world comprised of negativity, in which meaning is immanent, indeterminate, relative, and evanescent and can only be deduced with great effort before it changes once again, Watt’s consciousness

can only rebel against the language which both encourages as well as ultimately denies him an understanding of the world.

As we learn, from the narrator, who, as mentioned before, narrates the tale as told to him by Watt, Watt spoke with “scant regard for grammar, for syntax, for pronunciation, for enunciation” to which he ironically adds, “and very likely, if the truth were known, for spelling too, as these are generally received” (*Watt* 156). The fact that the *arche* of Beckett’s text therefore is obscured, as this leads to questions on how the tale of Watt has ultimately made it to the reader (as Watt supposedly, without using traditional language has related this tale to the narrator in this fashion, who, in turn is narrating it to the reader), demonstrates Beckett’s parodic use of modernist fiction’s claim to reality. Rather than offering us fiction that reveals the world to us in the style of a *Bildungsroman*, Beckett offers us a text in which the obvious aporia of the text reveal its obvious fictionality. As Watt cannot use traditional language and therefore his tale cannot be told in the way it is told to us now, the reader concludes, then it cannot be truthful. Moreover, as traditional language use in *Watt* fails to accurately capture the noumenological experience of Watt, Watt’s experience cannot be accurately mediated by it. In this sense, Beckett’s *Watt* obstructs any clear linkage of the word to the world, by clearly pointing out its fictional self-referentiality and uncertain origin.

Indeed, as Watt’s friend indicates at the beginning of the last chapter, even the order in which the reader has read the tale cannot be accepted as self-evident: “As Watt told the beginning of his story, not first, but second, so not fourth, but third, now he told its end. Two, one, four, three, that was the order in which Watt told his story” (*Watt* 215) As a result, in the end its unclear *arche* therefore also points to its eschatological denial.

As there is no clear point in time and space for the narrative to begin - nor are there any indications of place, which Beckett took care to erase - the reader questions the telos of the narrative as well. Rather than offering us the satisfaction of an ending, Beckett lets Watt ironically proclaim, in the fashion of a *Bildungsroman*, after leaving Mr. Knott's house, "now I am at liberty . . . I am free to come and go, as I please" (*Watt* 238). In fact, while this might seem to be the revealing ending dictated by traditional fiction, in which Watt regains his freedom, near the end Beckett has Watt demand a train-ticket for the eschatological "end of the line" (244), which ensues in a humoristic demand by the ticket dispenser for even more enunciation and clarity: "the round end or the square end?" (244). Indeed, what Watt's request for the "end of the line" can be seen as is a request to leave the Western rational order of language, in which his escape from the order of *logos* is made impossible by virtue of his fictional status as contained in language. In this, Watt is simply erased in the narrative process, only to return as an unsuspecting subject in the addenda. As a result, while the reader is therefore given the parodic traditional pastoral scene of nature restored at the end, in which Mr. Case ironically proclaims "And they say there is no God" (*Watt* 246), that scene is immediately followed by an addenda, which negates the whole closure of such an ending.

Seemingly filled with discarded material intended for the narrative, the addenda emphasizes, once more, fiction's inability to contain the world: not only does it negate the concept of a narrative closure, it also emphasizes the creative process of narration, in which material is omitted in order to enhance the artist's vision of the world. In this, Beckett ironically demonstrates modernist fiction's inability to refer to a fully-fleshed out reality, as fictive reality is part of the author's selective and discriminatory process of

writing, as well as to the fact that fiction, as postmodernists argue, should be seen as self-referential, and thus can only adhere to its own fictive status, and can, in fact, thus contain its own complete (fictive) world if it includes the whole process of writing (omissions included). Indeed, at the end of the narrative, or of his “writing”, Beckett (the narrator?) ironically writes “no symbols where none intended” (*Watt* 245), and thus underlines the modernist’s proclamation that the artistic work can be seen as complete in its view and treatment of the world through the artistic consciousness, while at the same time negating this by the irony of this statement in the light of the world (and universe) of negativity encountered by Watt, which resists the meaning of these symbols, and thus advances the postmodernist view of fiction’s inability to align the reality of the world with that of the discursive reality of words. In this sense, what can be really constructed as the “real” “end” of Beckett’s *Watt* is the fact that no more language is generated, in which language as a means of epistemological understanding cannot offer the reader any closure, as the language of fiction is contained within a symbolic order that can only refer to reality in inadequate ways, but can never transcend this order in its pursuit of containing reality.

As a result, while Beckett’s *Watt* therefore complicates the impossibility of the human consciousness to know the reality of the world through language, Beckett’s narrative demonstrates that it is still our only way of knowing. While our mental processes as readers, along with our reading of Watt’s mental processes, are therefore constantly within the causal framework of time in narration (which Beckett’s narrator, paradoxically tries to frustrate as well), we might actually transcend not-knowing, as we, as Roland Barthes put it, “[play] the text in the musical sense of the term” (“Work to

Text” 290) and thus constantly re-create the universe which we view and exist in. While Watt’s mental ruminations therefore can be seen as the impossible attempts towards meaning, what Beckett’s *Watt* leaves the reader with is the possibility of knowledge that resides outside of the hackneyed epistemologies presented in fiction, as the reader is constantly called upon to be constitutive of their own epistemological understanding. Therefore, as Beckett plays within and outside of this epistemological framework, this might help explain as to why he seems to reside in between the critical watershed of modernist and post-modernist literature. In this, Beckett operates in the sphere of finding a synthesis between the modernist perspective that fiction can, through artistic means, comment on reality, as well as the postmodernist perspective that fiction, in its artistic pretenses, can present itself as a counter-discourse towards the inclusive epistemologies of the Western world of commercialism, science and art, and thus should resist, through parody and pastiche, in presenting a totalizing and normative representation of reality.

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