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Stories of White World
Samuel Beckett's Posthuman Authorship

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Abstract

The article focuses on the posthuman authorship in the late short stories of Samuel Beckett in relation to the recent developments in new materialism and material ecology. Beckett's works insist on the distinctive signature of their author, joining together his trademark minimalist style with his persistence in retelling the same narrative situations over and over again. At the same time, hardly ever does Beckett cease to deprive his narrators of their voices, forcing them to stammer, to struggle with their speech, to be betrayed by it, or to remain completely mute. His hardly readable later short stories seem to abandon any form of the sentient narrator in favour of treating language as self-sufficient matter his abstract spaces consist of, albeit in a manner different from that adopted by the concrete literature. These circumstances interestingly correspond to Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's notion of storied matter which emphasises the textual capacities of non-human actors, blurs human and non-human readerships/authorships, and affirms the narratives embedded in the material, understood – after Jane Bennett – as the realm of vibrant entities. In my reading, I analyse how these concepts might allow us to rethink those "materialist works" of Beckett and the possible non-human agencies they are entangled in.

Keywords: new materialism; posthumanism; Samuel Beckett; author; end of the world

1. Intention and Randomness

Evidently, there is no sequence which underlies the intended organisation of paragraphs in Samuel Beckett's "Lessness." Even though this fact is widely acknowledged in Beckett studies (see, for instance: Cohn, 2005, p. 404; Brater, 2006, p. 173), I would like to begin with a brief reference to the commentary on this fact in Antoni Libera's *Godot i jego cień*. In this pseudo-autobiographical work, recalling Libera's lifelong fascination with Beckett, it is mentioned

that Libera struggled with the Polish translation of "Lessness" for many years, tampering with its cracked syntax and chant-like repetitions. When he announced that most probably he had finally figured out the logic behind this short story, Beckett replied that there was none, claiming that the order of the sentences had been chosen at random (Libera, 2013, p. 374). What is particularly interesting in this case is not necessarily the ingenuity or originality of the claim itself, but rather its attribution to the conversation between two authors: one who ascribes the primacy of the author's intention in the distribution of sense within the literary work (Libera) and the other who challenges such a paradigm altogether and, simultaneously, discloses the chief principle of composition of his own literary work under the sign of lack (Beckett). Yet, does "Lessness," indeed, become an "authorless" work? What would that mean? Far from being simply a Dadaist, Beckett merges his methodological poetics with the power of surprise which breaks with the order, linearity, or hierarchy of the work, thereby suspending the author's control over the literary matter (cf. Brater, 2006). Moreover, Beckettian "death of the author," tailored in such a fashion, does not necessarily cede the creation of sense onto the reader (Barthes, 2010), as this perspective is stifled by the hermetic syntax, semantics, and logic of the work. Having eliminated these two instances, that is, the author and the reader, can we, therefore, assume that in this peculiar configuration Beckett's work *has to* author itself? In a way, it is difficult to find a more suitable premise for exploring Beckett's own attitude towards authorship with regard to his own works, which persistently balance between the acts of depriving authors of their power and control, and their sudden restitution.

This article offers a preliminary reading of Samuel Beckett's struggles with authorship. As I argue, his short stories from the late 1960s reveal peculiar agency which might be called *posthuman authorship*. As posthuman authorship I understand the uncanny capacity of Beckett's texts to undermine the subjectivities of both the *human author* and the *human reader* (who might serve as a convenient decoy for the author) in favour of the constellations of *matter* and *meaning* – if not *textural* and *textual* transformations – as if they aimed to constitute themselves on their own terms. Although I am not entirely convinced that it is possible to think of the posthuman authorship in such highly anthropocentric and "authorcentric" writings, I would still advocate to regard Beckett's works within this thought-experiment, keeping in mind his own re-negotiations of the position of the author. In this sense, this text attempts to put forward the theoretical underpinnings for such a speculative turn; yet, it does not aspire to identify a definite turn in Beckett's *oeuvre* or to provide a general overview of his fiction.

Meticulous and coherent, Beckett's works insist on the distinctive signature of their author, joining his trademark minimalist style with his persistence in retelling the same narrative situations over and over again. At the same time, hardly ever does Beckett cease to deprive his narrators of their voices, forcing them to stammer, to struggle with their speech, to be betrayed by it, or to remain completely mute. His later short stories, such as "The Lost Ones" (Beckett, 1995c), "Ping" (Beckett, 1995b), or "Lessness" (Beckett, 1995a), seem to challenge (if not abandon) any form of the sentient narrator in favour of treating language as self-sufficient matter his abstract spaces consist of. As Peter Boxall argues, "the shining landscapes of the late prose […] offer pictures of the minimal conditions that are required for narration to occur, to give the starkest account of the way that these conditions work" (2015, p. 42). These circumstances interestingly correspond to Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's notion of storied matter (Iovino and Oppermann, 2012; Oppermann, 2013), which merges human and

non-human readerships/authorships and emphasises the textuality embedded in the material and the non-human, which – after Jane Bennett – turn out to be the realms of vibrant actants (Bennett, 2010, p. 38).

2. The (Un)dead Authors

Before we proceed to the posthumanist transformations of Beckett's fiction, it might be useful to anchor our considerations in a slightly earlier text. Even though the figure of the "white world," selected for the title of this article, predominantly refers to the instance of posthuman authorship I identify in "Ping," the figure itself is already envisioned in Beckett's *Embers* from 1959 (Beckett, 1990a), a work which – as it is worth noticing – tackles the issues of authority and authorship. The protagonist of this radio play, Henry, suffers from unresolved issues with his own father, and later with his own failures as a husband and a father himself.[1] In the course of the radio play, it turns out that just as he delves into unrelated stories he so eagerly tells, the whole reality of this work is dependent not only on his narrative, but also, if not predominantly, on the way he bends the capacities of the medium – that is, radio – to his own will from the inside of the play. In fact, the other characters – just as the locations and events – materialise on the reel summoned by Henry's commands; this authority over scattered plots, however, by no means provides him with a suitable working-through, leaving him solitary and bewildered on what might be equally the shore by the roaring sea, as he claims, or the inhospitality of the reel with its buzzing noise. What we are left with is "white world not a sound" (Beckett, 1990a, p. 255), that is, the strange *sphere of undecidability* resisting the protagonist – the speaker, the narrator, perhaps the author as well. In this sense, the "white world" constitutes excess that remains outside of language and haunts its users because of the seeming proximity to the spoken matters. Located beyond meaning, noise is the counterpart of words which despite acoustic resemblance to the latter are already distorted, partly hidden, or confused. "White world" relies on acoustic co-dependence as well; the image of the sea is constituted by Henry's performative decision which transforms an otherwise blank reel and white noise evoked by the radio medium into a sonic landscape. Since the blankness of the tape is manifested by the unpleasant sound, absence gains an almost material presence in the world of the play, allowing us to include it in the world of the play; simultaneously, it happens to be an uncanny or excessive remnant of some distant materiality that can never be entirely grasped.

In *The Unnamable* (Beckett, 2009), we encounter a frail yet self-reflective being who unfolds his or her narrative into various and often digressing plots that at the end of the day only emphasise the impossibility of beginning and ending the tale, and, thereby, placing it within strict borders of a finished work. Therefore, Beckett's novel offers us another allegory of author/work relationship, which – similarly to *Embers* – recognises the former as incapable of controlling the latter. What is at stake in *The Unnamable* is not necessarily a pursuit of an idolised form, but rather a desire to inscribe the storyteller's subjectivity in the flow of words. Language employed seems to mislead its users and depart from their intentions. Yet, when the importance of either beginning or ending the tale is recalled, the focus shifts from the mere identification of "I" with its expression in words to the greater question of an "unnameable"

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[1] For an analysis of father–child relations and paternal power in Beckett's *Embers*, see: Kisiel (2017).

exteriority. Even though *The Unnamable* does not comment upon social or cultural implications of authorship/authority, this novel emphasises the tension between the author's and the narrator's claims to the foundational decisions of any written form. Because the storyteller is not only the narrator of the novel, but also the author of the stories concerning the "vice-exister[s]," that is, Mahood and Worm (Beckett, 2009, p. 309), his or her story allegorically reflects on the elusiveness of the author's control over language of the tales. In this sense, we might argue that Beckett's novel stages his own "death of the author" (cf. Barthes, 2010) relying on the ongoing renegotiations of "the said" and "the intended," and the accumulating negative acts stemming from the abyssal gap between the two.

The incongruity between the storyteller and language, which I understand as the allegory for cracked authorship, is most intensely presented in the closing part of *The Unnamable*:

> He who neither speaks nor listens, who has neither body nor soul […] he must be somewhere, he is made of silence, there's a pretty analysis, he's in the silence, he's the one to be sought, the one to be, the one to be spoken of, the one to speak, but he can't speak, then I could stop, I'd be he, I'd be the silence, *we'd be reunited*, his story the story to be told, but *he has no story, he hasn't been in story, it's not certain, he's in his own story, unimaginable, unspeakable, that doesn't matter the attempt must be made, in the old stories incomprehensively mine*, *to find his, it must be somewhere, it must have been mine, before being his, I'll recognize it*, in the end I'll recognize it, the story of silence that he never left, that I should never have left, that I might never find again, that I may find again, then it will be he, it will be I, it will be the place, the silence, the end, the beginning, the beginning again. (Beckett, 2009, p. 406, emphasis mine)

Contrary to the realm of words the storyteller inhabits, silence is ascribed to the transcendent being who, although without a story (or rather a story reflected in the story of *The Unnamable*), does not seem unreachable at all. The silence of the author is visible in the all-embracing aspirations of the narrator's monologue in the very moment it shakes, cracks, and unfolds unspeakable desires, that is, when the story reaches its inherent impossibilities. Moreover, the aforementioned silence happens to be equally desired and feared. The possible reunion can only be achieved in the end of the novel and the annihilation of the storyteller; still, such a spatialised silence holds the promises of homecoming and regaining the possibilities of "ending" and "beginning," that is, the fundamental decisions which in this context make the author who he or she really is, when this power is inaccessible to the narrator. Finally, this fragment shows that in Beckett's novel there is a surplus of materiality of the literary work beyond plot and language, fuelling the constant play of reduction and negation that meshes with the intentions and actions of the author, the narrator, and perhaps the reader. The storyteller continues his speech:

> I'll wake, in the silence, and never sleep again, it will be I, or dream, dream again, dream of silence, *a dream silence, full of murmurs*, I don't know, that's all words, never wake, all words, there's nothing else, you must go on, that's all I know, they're going to stop, I know that well, I can feel it, they're going to abandon me, it will be the silence, for a moment, a good few moments, or it will be mine, the lasting one, that didn't last, that still lasts, it will be I, you must go on, I can't go on, you must go on, I'll go on*, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me*, strange pain, strange sin, you must go on, perhaps it's done already, perhaps they have said me already, *perhaps they have*

> *carried me to the threshold of my story*, before the *door* that opens on my story, that would surprise me, *if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence*, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on. (Beckett, 2009, p. 407, emphasis mine)

As these phrases of *The Unnamable* show, the final decision to continue writing – or story-telling – reaches its own *aporia* in the end of the novel. Then there is silence; is it silence, nonetheless, if it is indeed "full of murmurs" (Beckett, 2009, p. 407)? After all, it becomes extremely demanding not to return to these passages, to contemplate and re-read them. Even the end of the novel, the presumable threshold and opening, does not stop the work of difference which has already been unleashed due to the extensive re-negotiations of meaning presented in the text.

As the earlier comments on *Embers* and *The Unnamable* might have already suggested, Beckett tends to place his works in a self-reflexive framework, which gradually overloads their textual or semantic possibilities. *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Not I*, *Play*, *Ohio Impromptu*, not to mention "The Lost Ones," "Ping," or "Lessness": all of these texts, even though each in its unique way, mobilise the act of writing against itself. Krapp's memories recorded on the tape are superimposed so that they enter mutual self-depreciation and suspension, negating his own control over the accumulated reels. In *Not I*, a one-act play consisting of a neurotic monologue, Mouth finds it impossible to articulate her "I" in language (Beckett, 1990c). Contrary to it, the only moments in which she might be getting closer to leaving the shelter of being the eponymous "not I" are the brief intrusions of ominous buzzing. In "The Lost Ones," the unknown storyteller describes the weird society of the seekers roaming inside the rubber cylinder. The scientific aloofness and clinical precision, however, are employed only to unmask the narrator's hidden subjective agenda. Because of that, the rushing account happens to rely on presuppositions and inconsistencies which are clumsily concealed. Diachronically far from the postmodernist and post-structuralist tendencies of the late 20th century, Beckett seems to precede them in his own poetics of distrust in any "strong" subject, including the "speaking subject," capable of carrying fixed meanings. Beckettian realms consist of the misspoken and the unintended, of the misleading and the disguised, finally, of the disappointed and the unsettled, which partly contribute to his fascination with failure as a means of "what we can, after all, designate as artistic expression" (Bersani and Dutoit, 1993, p. 17) Importantly, because we are referring to the characters whose speech betrays them and uncovers its own inexplicability, the figure of the author cannot be subtracted from this relation. Perhaps all of these failures are in fact iterations and re-stagings of the very same situation in which the artistic work remains excessive in meanings, receptions, and revisions that have not been precluded by the author.

Minimalist reduction Beckett inclines to might be read, indeed, as an eradication of the traces of real world, as Greg Garrard perceives it (2012, p. 391). This withdrawal against all odds contributes to the tangible and distinctive signature of Beckett's and his unique artistic mimesis. We should, therefore, pose a question whether it is achievable for Beckett at all to reach such a poetics that can entirely get rid of the authorial control. Contrary to that, we should simultaneously call the very same poetics into question, as it might be possible that the most *exhaustive* and *exhausted* passages from Beckett's works (to anticipate Gilles Deleuze's reading discussed later in this article) in fact correspond to his position of the author the most;

in other words, is it possible that his persistence in wiping away all the stable points of reference, including the storytellers and authors themselves, immunises his own "authority" to such critical strategies rooted, after all, in the decision of the author?

3. Stories Matter

Recently, a considerable attention has been paid to the posthumanist potential of Beckett's *oeuvre* (cf. Saunders, 2011; Borg, 2012; Kisiel, 2019; Boulter, 2020).[2] Beckett's rhetorical and aesthetic renegotiations of human subject, struggles with finitude, or delineations of liminal spaces – informed by the late 20th century literary and cultural theories – contribute to the growing academic interest in nonhuman agencies, capture the "dissolving" (Alaimo, 2016, pp. 1-2) world of the Anthropocene, and respond to the urgency of (re-)framing humanities in the times of climatic instability. These burning issues equally necessitate ecocritical approaches within Beckett studies (cf. Davies, 2006; Garrard, 2012). As Marc Farrant notes, "Beckett's grappling with human finitude, which is fundamentally entwined with a perceived crisis in representation following the Holocaust and Second World War, provides a way of processing the unrepresentable forms of the ecological apocalypse, seen as both imminent yet abstract and hard to capture meaningfully in terms of everyday experience" (Farrant, 2020, p. 1). A corresponding urgency might be found in Carl Lavery's "Ecology in Beckett's Theatre Garden: Or How to Cultivate the Oikos," in which he "argue[s] for an *oikology* that undoes the human subject by placing it – *the anthropos* – in an immanent world that it is unable to dominate" (2017, p. 12). Lavery continues:

> From this perspective, homecoming, the search for the *oikos*, would be a paradoxical process, something that is doomed, in advance, to failure, a realisation that human being, contra its designated place in western metaphysics, is always a deferred or impossible being. In ecological terms – and this is why Beckett's work is so important – there might be more to be learnt in accepting our absence than in clinging to our presence. (2017, p. 6, emphasis in the original)

This article aims to situate itself among the aforementioned approaches, yet by means of different theories. Similarly to the readings advocated by Borg and Boulter, it adopts the possibility of thinking in terms of liminal categories, epitomised by the nonhuman. At the same time, it draws inspiration from Lavery's and Farrant's perspectives, which point to the correspondence between environmental criticism and Beckett studies that is not necessarily rooted in the description of any relatable environment, but in the abstract representations of the world. Yet, instead of emphasising the role of finitude in the posthumanist potential of Beckett's works, my reading clings to infinity, marked by the transformative potential of matter and meaning introduced by Karen Barad, and cherished and expanded by new materialist scholars.

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[2] This term might be also visible in the proliferation of corresponding academic events, including *Beckett and the Nonhuman* (Brussels, 2019), *Samuel Beckett and the Anthropocene* (Dublin, 2020), or upcoming *Samuel Beckett and Nature* (Batesville, 2022), or release of a special issue of *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui Samuel Beckett and the Nonhuman / Samuel Beckett et le non-humain.*

As I do believe, they might help us grasp the possibility of posthuman authorship beyond authorial control yet not beyond agency.

Barad proposes a narrative of the world immersed in intrinsic creative dynamism, applicable even to the void itself. For them, reality with its time and space consists of phenomena, that is, primordial relations between objects and their measurement. Objects belong to the all-encompassing and undifferentiated mass which can never become present to us on its own; instead, it is agentially cut into the particular material and discursive assemblages (Barad, 2007, p. 148). Influenced by Niels Bohr's discoveries in physics, Barad identifies the underlying ontological level characterised by its constant and radical metamorphosis, according to which the very relations precede objects, and not merely bind them (Barad, 2007, pp. 136-137). Informed by the laws of quantum mechanics, such vivid dynamism makes it possible for material and meaningful phenomena to emerge through intra-actions. Hence, meaning is no longer a typically human trait, but rather emerges directly from the indeterminate reality as its vivid transformation. As Rebekah Sheldon comments upon Barad's reinterpretation of meaning in agential realism:

> meaning is the incessant call and response of the universe taking its own measure, of touch touching itself. Thus it is not the case that reality is nothing – void or meaningless – but that reality is everything – void of determinacy and for this reason productive of meaning. Indeed, meaning loses its connection to a particular subject's intention and takes on the qualities of a verb. The world is mattering meaning itself into new form. (2016)

Temporally speaking, there is no "before" or "after" of such emergence; spatially speaking, there is no "outside" or "inside." In the intra-acting reality, all of these distinctions, similarly to the differentiation between matter and meaning, fall apart in favour of the fluidly (re-)emerging world which – to use Barad's recurring and famous wordplay – simply "comes to matter."

The possible correspondence between Barad's views on meaning and matter and Beckett's poetics might become more evident if we take a brief theoretical detour through the unconventional re-interpretation of deconstruction.[3] For Barad, deconstruction relies on the interplay of absence and presence, deferral and difference, which by means of Derrida's rigorous style and formal consistency makes it possible to extract and momentarily suspend the logocentric cores of concepts and objects. Since for Barad quantum "[m]attering is about the (contingent and temporary) becoming-determinate (and becoming-indeterminate) of *matter and meaning*, without fixity, without closure" (Barad, 2010, p. 254, emphasis in the original), Derrida's method and its ongoing inscriptions of difference can be perceived by them in similar optics. Consequently, Derrida's writings – as read by Barad – emphasise non-human performativity of the texts themselves. If non-human performativity is turned into the mode of deconstruction, then it becomes its own "author." The question which I would like to pose at this stage is whether Beckett's use of reduction in *The Unnamable* and materiality in *Embers* repeats the very same gesture. After all, as H. Porter Abbott notes in case of the former work, "the paradox

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[3] The correspondence between Beckett's works and deconstruction might gain importance if we recall Derek Attridge's conversation with Jacques Derrida, in which the French philosopher emphasises his reluctance to delve into Beckett's *oeuvre*, which supposedly resists deconstructive reading due to its stylistic rigour (Attridge, 1992, pp. 60-62).

of apophatic narrative takes shape as an urgency of pursuit that resides in the language itself. This is still action, indeed frenetic action – a headlong rush of words – but it is action that draws much of its *energy* from the impossibility of narrative and the absolute absence of a story world" (2012, p. 186, emphasis mine). If we provisionally follow the trope of the energy fuelled by impossibility, we might note that both in *Embers* and *The Unnamable* the author's position is undermined by the movement of difference that emphasises the agency of the text itself and the creative displacements inside it. Whereas earlier I intended to point to the critical manoeuvres Beckett inscribes in his works, the fact which provides us with his own "death of the author" strategy, now I would like to pose the question of an affirmative project in his *oeuvre* that allows the non-human performativity to be glimpsed along the persistent reduction.

New materialist scholars – Jane Bennett, Stacy Alaimo, Serenella Iovino, or Serpil Oppermann – widely relate to Barad's theory, adopting the conviction that as humans we "are intermeshed with more than human world" (Alaimo, 2010, p. 2), where human and non-human agencies vibrantly intra-act (and not interact). Focusing on environmental humanities, Iovino and Oppermann propose to begin to think of material instances as sites where stories and textual content are stored. Material ecocriticism, which both academics endorse, calls for revising our own reading strategies, supplementing the understanding of the text bequeathed by the Linguistic Turn with the idea of nonhuman authorship. Oppermann clarifies:

> Material ecocriticism proposes that these stories, in the form of active creativity, emerge through the interplay of natural-cultural forces, trajectories, and flows, forming constellations of matter and meanings. Elements, cells, genes, atoms, stones, water, landscapes, machines, among innumerable others, are embodied narratives, repositories of *storied matter*. Inhabiting not only the material, but also the discursive spaces spawned by human agency, these variously agentic material formations as narrative agencies create meaningful "choreographies of becoming." (2013, p. 59, emphasis mine)[4]

I would argue that Beckett's short stories from the 1960s might be analysed from this perspective, even though they realise the aforementioned strategy inversely. What does it mean? The narrative vulnerability of "Ping" and "Lessness" divides its aesthetics into the series of intra-acting, powerful yet disparate images of the passing world whose physical decay can only be reflected in the collapse of linguistic cognition. These tremendously detailed yet reductive short stories, along with the inhospitable spaces they construct, tempt one to resist meaningful interpretations because their interest in signification gives way to their formal coherence. Beckett, therefore, invents such a storied matter, to use Iovino and Oppermann's term, that does not stem from any actual material whatsoever. Deprived of any verbs, both short stories remain peculiarly dynamic; they trigger metamorphing trajectories which pierce through one another and form the cartographies consisting of provisory images. Such cartographies are only possible after the end of the world if we do not want to be enclosed in a speculative bubble of its lone survivor – the objective and indifferent narrator. "Ping" and "Lessness" abandon such a sentient figure in order to become self-contained narrative sites; they cannot transcend their connection to Beckett himself as their author, nonetheless. Still, by drifting off the tan-

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[4] Oppermann derives the notion of "choreographies of becoming" from Diana Coole and Samantha Frost. See: Coole and Frost (2010, p. 10).

gible world and language he relies on, they turn out to be the most radical statements of being detached from his control. Paradoxically, these most advanced manifestations of his unique style challenge traditional or linear practices of reading.

4. After the End of the World

The theoretical underpinnings for posthuman authorship in Beckett might be found in Gilles Deleuze's famous essay "The Exhausted." Deleuze argues that Beckett's style might be divided into three distinctive types of language. The first one, typical of his early novels, is the language of names that represents literary worlds as "disjunctive" or "atomic" structures; syntactical logic is substituted with one based on enumeration, whereas amassing words mirror the coexistence of objects (Deleuze, 1998, p. 156). The second language "no longer operates with combinable atoms but with blendable flows" (Deleuze, 1998, p. 156). In fact, it is the language of voices, mastered in plays and later novels, which embraces the cacophony of Beckett's protagonists, whose stories frequently tend to respond to and undermine each other, so that the solid boundaries between the stories and their authors are no longer discernible. Finally, Beckett advances the most radical and aporetic language: the language of spaces and images. It "relates to […] immanent limits that are ceaselessly displaced – hiatuses, holes, or tears that we would never notice, or would attribute to mere tiredness, if they did not suddenly widen in such a way as to receive something from the outside or from elsewhere" (Deleuze, 1998, p. 158). Jean-Jacques Lecercle argues that we can still call it a language since "there is still an addressee, the audience, and there is still something going on, the process of emergence of those images, which, reflexively, is the process of emergence of language itself, when art takes it to its limits, closer and closer to silence, to which it aspires, and which it achieves with this 'language'" (2010, p. 149). According to Deleuze, Beckett develops the progressing aesthetics of turning language against itself in order to omit all those redundant elements that divert its signifying work. Simultaneously, it is not a strategy based on the solipsist vision of the world; the stripped languages Beckett employs, as Lecercle rightly assumes, aim at recovering the uncanny event in which "the" language comes to being.

Not quite a historical perspective, Deleuze's classification revolves around the eponymous category of the exhausted. Beckett's individual style and peculiar aesthetics create a counterintuitive space of literature in which his protagonists suffer from physical exhaustion, and so does the language they use (Deleuze, 1998, pp. 152-153). Exhaustion thus is not embedded in an entirely abstract process but rather its origin is fixed in the worn out embodiments. It is worth emphasising that exhaustion in this case is an entirely different state than tiredness. The latter phenomenon embraces such a situation in which the particular possibility – of moving, acting, or speaking – remains intact, whilst it is its realisation that is no longer possible (Deleuze, 1998, pp. 152-154). Contrary to mere weariness, exhaustion empties the very possibilities, but in doing so it becomes also a process of hollowing *possibilia*: things (Deleuze, 1998, pp. 156-158). Because of that, images and spaces might be exhausted when the principles of the third language apply. Importantly, space becomes "any-space-whatever" (Deleuze, 1998, p. 160), a well-known place in Beckett's universe that – even if provisionally delineated as a cylinder in "The Lost Ones," a cuboid in "Ping," or a refuge in "Lessness" – is actually a locus of indeterminacy. Any-space-whatever belongs to a negative cartography

pointing to *somewhere* which is not exactly *here* and not quite *there*, but always marks a slipping point between the two. Temporally speaking, Deleuze's reading calls also for new units when time is no longer possible in the exhausted spaces. Flashes, blinks, or sudden outbursts of darkness, they do not refer to the specific representations; rather, these images are linked with temporariness that preserves their vivid emergence. Whilst space is "extenuated," images rely on "dissipation," exhausting the possible within the irruptive release of energy.

If we were to evaluate the intensity of exhaustion that takes place in the third language, "The Lost Ones" happens to be the least exhausted work of the aforementioned short stories. Beckett's text provides us there with an account or a myth of the weird society of seekers roaming inside the rubber cylinder. This geometric hall is by all means a peculiar structure as it possesses its own microclimate; the seekers experience the regular yet radical changes in light and temperature, which expose their bodies to unimaginable suffering and deterioration. Hermetic, the cylinder is a space where sounds do not resonate enough to be recognisable; sometimes, a distorted noise might be heard. Although the narrator presents us with the possibilities of exits, none of these can be found: there is no evidence of either "a secret passage branching from one of the tunnels" (Beckett, 1995c, p. 207) or "a trapdoor hidden in the hub of the ceiling" (Beckett, 1995c, p. 207). Yet, the seekers do not look for a way out. They are searching for their lost one, a primordial relationship, or a weird intimacy at the verge of the end of the world. Because of that, they move ladders, climb them, and then either occupy them or enter the niches carved in the walls of the rubber hall. Consequently, roaming and searching become the only activities they undertake, but at the same time the only principle around which their society might be organised. Importantly, everything we know about this group is provided by a stern and distant narrator, whose precise and scientific tone aims at guaranteeing his knowledge and authority; still, many of his judgements are concluded with a chant-like refrain "if this notion is maintained" (Beckett, 1995c, p. 205), regularly undermining the validity of his account.

Beckett's parabolic text becomes, therefore, the first take on the storied matter and nonhuman authorship. Although the narrator makes it possible to accommodate the external reality of the cylinder in a sufficient story, his account can hardly be accepted. Despite harmonic precision and regularity of events inside the hall, this structure resists viable narratives, just as its rubber walls absorb sounds and turn words into murmurs, if we were to recall the metaphor from *The Unnamable*. As Jonathan Boulter aptly notes, the abode is "a space, obviously limited, but continually and perhaps forever to be traversed; this is a space where nothing can be known" (Boulter, 2020, p. 113). Still, it demonstrates its own distinctive narrative mode, as carving niches in its walls changes not only their texture, but also their textuality. "The Lost Ones" might be read as an allegory for an author that detaches himself or herself from the matter discussed precisely because of his or her account. At the same time, this short story is an allegory for a storied matter as well; the rubber abode is entangled in incomprehensible transformations and changes that affect its materiality and contribute to its own story, beyond our linguistic reach, where the movements of the ladders and wandering the niches unravel new possibilities of meaning and matter production. There is no way out, because there has never been a way in, even though this fact should not discourage our accounts, as the material and nonhuman world is always filtrated by the human perspective which is a part of it. What we are left with instead is the reality, whose mathematical properties and cyclical functioning

along with the doubt repetitively planted by the narrator contribute to the agency of the abode. Precisely, the account ends, yet the cylindrical micro-world goes on and on, "bring[ing] the last man back to an endless beginning" (Boulter, 2020, p. 116).

Deleuze's theory of progressing exhaustion seems to reach its critical point in Beckett's "Ping" and "Lessness." As we might see, these works also cast new light on the positions of the author and the narrator. Let us immerse ourselves in the cuboid depicted in "Ping":

> All known all white bare white body fixed one yard legs joined like sewn. Light heat white floor one square yard never seen. White walls one yard by two white ceiling one square yard never seen. Bare white body fixed only the eyes only just. Traces blurs light grey almost white on white. Hands hanging palms front white feet heels together right angle. (Beckett, 1995b, p. 193)

Similar poetics is employed in "Lessness," even though the setting differs significantly from the "white world" portrayed above. We read:

> Ruins true refuge long last towards which so many false time out of mind. All sides endlessness earth sky as one no sound no stir. Grey face two pale blue little body heart beating only up right. Blacked out fallen open four walls over backwards true refuge issueless. (Beckett, 1995a, p. 197)

Both realms appear to be constructed with language that has limited its signifying capacities and to a great extent abandoned syntax, punctuation, and logic. Still, this materialisation functions in a manner different from that adopted by the concrete poetry. The concreteness of the visual representations is replaced with the exhausted distance; "Ping" and "Lessness" are remote entities at the verges of language, which rely on the extenuated space, the more of which we know, the more fleeting it happens to be, and on the accumulation of dissipating images, which simply take place and then are no more. Since both texts are written in the third language Deleuze enumerates, we can hardly pinpoint any superior narrator to it. Rather, the desolate spaces presented there are storytellers themselves. If we take a closer look into both works, we can assume that each of them depicts a post-apocalyptical realm. It seems that, instead of falling into a speculative bubble covering the lone yet highly improbable survivor of the absolute catastrophe who then provides us with an omniscient account, here Beckett privileges the worlds whose survivors are silent; these worlds become the narrative sites that depict their desolate territories following the premise that the actual end of the world has to entail the twilight of particular modes of perception and expression. Ruined or highly abstract, these realms remain active participants telling their own stories.

Just like "The Lost Ones," both short stories contribute to the criticism of a remote narrator or observer, undermining any transcendental instance of supervision, including the author himself. More radically, "Ping" and "Lessness" attempt to forge their own narrative modes founded on critical defamiliarisation and defragmentation of language. They function as well as the allegories for storied matter, yet in this case it is through their own attempt to name what remains of the world after the end of the world and – presumably – after the end of human beings. Therefore, they pertain to a fantasy of an exterior and radical realism which might still be available within literary terms. The recalled possible randomness of "Lessness" might emphasise this fact as well. Against his Joycean roots, Beckett widely adopted the poetics of

reduction, creating aporetic and empty spaces that resist clarification and deconstruct definitive readings, yet it is the very same strategy that makes his style unique and legitimises his distinctive authorial signature. Consequently, the very moment we might ascribe "the death of the author" to Beckett's universe, the author turns out to haunt "Lessness" again, unravelling a mental trap behind the aforementioned tension, and emphasising a weird performativity of a text, balancing between the return of the author and the exorcism of its idols. What Beckett achieves here is a strange and uncanny attempt to embrace the performativity of the text, comparable to Barad's reading of deconstruction, as if the text was about to "perform" or "write" itself without human intervention. Even though such a task still remains within the confinements of the necessity of the human author – that is, Beckett himself – it grants a revolutionary sense of agency to both short stories and their material landscapes that breaks through our understanding as the series of disparate images and intensities.

In the light of recent discussions regarding new materialist agencies – and Karen Barad in particular – we might perceive Beckett's spaces or the possibility of posthuman authorship which I theorise in this article as *matterphorical* (Gandorfer and Ayub, 2021). The bindings of matter and meaning visible in the discussed short stories both challenge the limits that the representational paradigm imposes on his fiction and urgently call for new ways of capturing "thought." As Daniela Gandorfer and Zulaikha Ayub point out: "*matterphorics* is committed less to a theoretical program than to a heightened attentiveness to the violence(s) already inherent in representational modes of thought and sense-making" (2021, p. 2). In a similar way, Beckett's catastrophic investigations of the desolate and abstract spaces, a loci *after* or *in the midst of* the end of the world, pose a formidable challenge to the representational paradigm by means of emphasising the material aspects *of* and *within* "Ping," "Lessness," or "The Lost Ones"; yet, Beckett does not provide a single alternative, answer, or even escape from the aesthetic deadlocks he constructs. Rather, he seems to be dedicated to revisioning a particular thought-experiment over and over again, changing its parameters and revising its settings. This act not only questions the position of the human author and narrator and their access to the represented story-world, but also scrutinises what might lie beyond (if there is indeed a "beyond") if matter and meaning are driven to their limits in a literary form and – seemingly – left on their own.

5. Conclusion

In this article I endeavoured to explore Beckett's relation to authorship as reflected in his progressing poetics of distrust or exhaustion. I reflected on how the inspirations drawn from Deleuze and new materialism might allow us to rethink the "materialist works" of Beckett, that is, "The Lost Ones," "Lessness," and "Ping." As I attempted to show, his exercising of a narrative situation often corresponds to both his own position of the author and doubts surrounding the asymmetry authorship instils. What remains problematic is the fact that the more Beckett re-negotiates the boundaries of his texts and the allegories of their storytellers – driving his prose to the limits of legibility – the more he imposes his own authorial signature. If we, however, accept his pact and against all odds treat these texts, especially the late prose, as independent narrative sites, new interpretative paths and inspiring transformations might emerge. A more considerable insight into such a reading of Beckett's peculiar *oeuvre* might

provide us with curious takes on living in the times of the Anthropocene, in which the practices of authorship and readership, inscribing and deciphering, become confused. Such a confusion stems, however, from the new modes of intimacy and exposure between linguistic textuality and materialist texture, and their unstable status after new materialism. At best, Beckett's short stories allow us to escape the conceptual bubble of the end of the world narratives; still, they also pose their intense affirmative model, whose enhanced material agencies blur human and nonhuman worlds, extract the narratives embedded in the material, and affirm the textual capacities of non-human actors. After all, posthuman authorship, according to which texts author themselves, might be a speculative fancy, yet it is also a provoking and creative thought experiment.

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