The Realm of Questions, Uncertainty and Paradoxes in Modernism

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THE REALM OF QUESTIONS, UNCERTAINTY AND PARADOXES IN MODERNISM

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To my sister Joan
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ABSTRACT

This project establishes how the struggles of modernist artists, such as James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka, and Witold Gombrowicz create culture as an artistic experience, which happens in the political space in-between the artist and the audience. I argue that “politics” and “action” are necessary for this creation of culture to happen. Following Hannah Arendt’s philosophy, “politics” depends on “action” and “action” is creation. At the same time, creation is evolution, in the Bergsonian sense. Following not only Arendt’s philosophy but also Henri Bergson’s philosophy of becoming, this dissertation explores how politics creates a culture through “action.” Even though Bergson does not name action as one of his main concepts, such as durée, “action” becomes part of his philosophy regarding the struggle of the creative mind. For Arendt, “action” detaches life from a life of habit, or a life that rejects creation. Creation by these two philosophers is understood as freedom to create and to perform, and as openness to other possibilities within language, including its deformation and evolution all of them able to create a political scenario that, according to Arendt, disseminate differences. Thus, the existence of culture is only possible through politics.
CHAPTER ONE

THE POLITICS OF MODERNISM

The action by which we utilize things is essentially a contact, and in that contact it is irrelevant whether one says that we act on the thing or that thing acts on us.

Bergson, “Letter to John Dewey”
3 January 1913

It isn’t ours: we accelerate slow things. An opening hand is already action. Let’s look at the life that flows in it.

Rilke, from French Poems

1.1 The Political Culture

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the political struggle that modernist artists like James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka and Witold Gombrowicz create, and includes a consideration of other artists’ work, such as Mark Rothko’s paintings and Richard Serra’s sculptures. I will argue that such struggle facilitates but also creates artwork, which occurs in a space in-between the artist and the audience. For that experience to happen, politics is necessary in order to create culture. Following Hannah Arendt’s philosophy, politics depends on “action” and “action” is creation. At the same time, creation is evolution, in the Bergsonian sense, and includes the totality of the artist’s past or memories regarding the creation of the artwork. Following not only Arendt’s philosophy but also Henri Bergson’s philosophy of becoming, this dissertation explores how politics creates a culture through action. Even though Bergson does not name action or motion as one of his main concepts, such as durée, action becomes part of his philosophy regarding the struggle of the creative mind. For example, in relation to dreams, action stands in between matter and mind; that is, action stands in a position in-between the waking life
and the life of dreams. The closer the individual is to dreams, the more he is detached from action. Bergson states:

   the normal self never stays in either of these extremes positions; it moves between them, adopts in turn the positions corresponding to the intermediate sections, or, in other words, gives to its representation just enough image and just enough idea for them to be able to lend useful aid to the present action. (Matter and Memory 163)

For Arendt, action detaches life from a life of habit, or a life that rejects creation, which is similar to Bergson’s understanding of habitual memories, such as the habitual movements of the body. Creation through these two philosophers has to be understood as freedom to create/perform art outside of the habitual and openness to the other possibilities within language, including its deformation and evolution. Thus, the artist is able to create political scenarios that, according to Arendt, disseminate differences. To facilitate the discussion, this introduction considers culture as a war/struggle through Arendt’s particular definition of politics in relation to action and the implications of that definition when comparing and distinguishing from the Bergsonian durée.

Karl Von Clausewitz defines “war as the continuation of politics by other means.” This definition reveals a continuity of the past as a linear force that moves into the present and interrogates the reasons for the Great War. War happens when negotiations fail to find a solution. On the other hand, Tom Stoppard’s Joyce reveals a different preoccupation or understanding of war when he states: “culture is the continuation of war by other means” (Travesties 32).

Following Arendt’s philosophy, the existence of culture as a continuation of war is only possible through politics; thus, politics is not the end of culture but its meaning. “Politics” is present in
the relationship between “culture” and “war.” How is “culture [...] the continuation of war [through politics] by other means”? What does “politics” mean to this definition of culture?

According to Arendt, politics is the plurality of men who emphasize the differences “between-men.” Arendt states that not all men are the same and their differences, intrinsic to their human condition, allow them to live together. For Arendt, “men are a human earthly product” (The Promise of Politics 93, emphasis added). Thus, “Politics deals with the coexistence and association of different men. Men organize themselves politically according to certain essential commodities found within or abstracted from an absolute chaos of differences” (ibid.). Assuming that the family should rule society contaminates differences because “the family acquires its deep-rooted importance from the fact that the world is organized in such a way that there is no place within it for the individual, and that means for everyone who is different.” As a consequence, that organization “leads to the fundamental perversion of politics, because it abolishes the basic quality of plurality, or rather forfeits it by introducing the concept of kinship” (94). Differences are necessary because they lead individuals to recognize what brings them together, what makes them human. Politics is men’s affairs concerned with differences; and these differences, and the recognition of differences, create equanimity in relationships. Through politics, man is able to think freely outside of totalitarian ideologies because politics recognizes differences, and thus, this space is the only one in which man can access freedom.1

According to Arendt, ideas produced by mankind through politics, through the plurality of men who emphasize differences, have the capacity to articulate judgment and prejudice. That is, prejudice can be experienced with a lesser degree. Even though prejudices are necessary for

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1 The totalitarian regime, in this sense, is beyond politics. The totalitarian regime does not necessarily use forces to impose ideological beliefs. Its intention is to create equalitarian ideas. Thus, everyone is in agreement, while, at the same time, denying a space to create thoughts.
ideologies, since ideologies depend on a priori ideas, a problem arises when these ideas become natural or habitual for the man who follows them without concern for action. For that reason, there is no room for ideologies in politics because politics’ intention is to exclude prejudice. This paradoxical characteristic of politics allows mankind to experience the space of freedom “between-men”, and positions freedom “in movement” with the freedom to speak in front of all men, understanding that the world is the totality of many differences (129). Politics also recognizes the multiplicities of each member of a certain group, recognizing this space of freedom constitutes the “public” space where art is possible.

The production of culture occurs through liberation from concepts like prejudice and judgments: liberation from a priori ideas. Traditionally, the definition of politics is related to physical forces. Clausewitz’s definition of war limits politics as an end, a last resource, after all negotiations to resolve a conflict lead to war. Under totalitarian regimes, artistic production, such as Milan Kundera’s reactionary novels against the 1968 Soviet occupation of Prague, does not necessarily represent the cause of the regimes but an opposition to the ideological regimes, which art struggles with in the political space. At the same time and paradoxically, artists like Kundera, who are against war, constrain their art production to fighting against those regimes. Either way, these artistic productions occur in the political space. When art is created through the differences “between-men” it becomes a cultural production. Culture thus creates a “public space,” and, what is “politics” is open to debate by the artist, who participates in the realm of questions, uncertainty, and paradox. This uncertainty does not embrace ideological concepts, but it is open to multiple possibilities. Nietzsche, in On the Genealogy of Morals, considers this scenario a “positive spirit,” “to replace the improbable with the more probable, possibly one error with another” (18). Kundera states that uncertainty is the only possible scenario wherein the
novel (art) can survive and exist. “Putting a novel,” Kundera states, “to the service of an authority, however noble, would be impossible,” and “a novel that fails to reveal some hitherto unknown bit of existence is immoral” (The Curtain 60,1). For Kundera, “knowledge is the novel’s only morality,” which he calls the “wisdom of uncertainty” (The Art of the Novel 6, 7). Thus, the political space allows culture to exist as part of mankind’s affair. Culture is also created when its flux is not fixed by an unquestionable definition but is apprehended through the flux of thoughts. Culture experiences freedom as it is questions and produces multiple possibilities.

Kundera’s definition of art excludes the possibility of finding and defining “truth.” In Geografía de la novela, Carlos Fuentes states that the novel, as the modern art par excellence, is threatened by the totalitarian state through its ideological imposition, “which is dedicated to imposing a unique truth” (103 translation is mine), which is, precisely, part of the experience of artistic expression, such as Joyce’s Ulysses, during the first half of the twentieth century. Art’s function is to discover the flux of the world in questions, in uncertainty. As a consequence, any a priori concept is questioned in the realm of art. Art is politics by other means but is not political in the traditional sense. The paradox of the political scenario in which the artist raises questions is the most important aspect of modern art. Art is not the end of politics because the politics of the twentieth century is mainly confined to ideological movements and considers wars as its end. Art does not function to resolve any problem but instead creates a space where the paradox of the world is presented. In this sense, art is the production of culture, but in order for this production to occur, art needs a political space in which differences are accepted and created. To accept differences does not imply diversity, or dialectics, but different possibilities in an open struggle. Still, the struggle does not mean a war of annihilation, but positioning art in politics.
Differences are forces that allow men (mankind) to experience politics. To further clarify, I need to distinguish the difference between men and man, since men are at once part of and the creator of politics. In order to avoid confusion between Arendt’s particular understanding of her concepts of “men” (the political individual) and “man” (the collective persona), I will use mankind in relationship to the political individual. According to Arendt, philosophy and religion are concerned with man, reducing man to a species. Philosophy assumes “that there is something political in man that” belongs to his biological capacities, a quality in everyone that categorizes man together, which is apolitical (The Promise of Politics 95). Religion assumes that God creates man, which defines him as an earthly product, “the product of human nature” (93). According to Arendt, assuming that God creates man implies no recognition among individuals’ differences; consequently, men (mankind) enter into the category of man since every individual is a repetition of others without the capacity for action. Arendt also interprets history as a discipline that structures men (mankind) as part of the human individual who responds to humanity.

Arendt’s philosophy implies multiplicities and differences within mankind, including the individual’s relation with others. Her philosophy of politics defines “men”, mankind, as singular and plural, in its multiplicity. On some level, this is a paradox, because even though no such thing as individuality exists, every person is made of singles and multiplicities, of pluralities, and of others members of society. Arendt stresses that individuals differentiate from each other in their capacity for action and artistic creation. For that reason, men, mankind, have to be recognized in order to make possible the space of politics.

1.2 The Possibilities of Politics

For a better understanding of politics, a discussion of Arendt’s definitions of “labor,” “work,” and “action” are needed. Arendt also defines politics as “the fact of human plurality”
“human plurality” not only implies differences but also the distinction that mankind is able to create thoughts beyond biological needs, through “labor.” In addition, humans are not equivalent to humanity. While “humanity” defines a category used by philosophers and theologians, “humans” distinguish mankind from animals because of his capacity for action. In order to create politics words such as “humanity” and “politics” need to be freed from prejudice, because they have been used to deny the space “between-men.” This understanding allows the individual to enact “action.”

“Aaction,” according to Arendt, is what allows men to experience freedom in the political space. An artist’s creation is not possible without action. The artist has to avoid a life reduced to “labor” and “work.” A life solely lived through “labor” reduces the individual to his biological needs. Through “labor” man produces what is necessary to sustain life, to continue with his life as a cycle of bodily needs (sleep, alimentation, defecation, etc.). Arendt notes that this kind of life does not have an end other than the prolongation of life and does not have consequences beyond the prolongation of consciousness in time. While labor solely allows man to produce the necessary wealth for his subsistence, “work” is a product that finds its end in the production of goods. The end of man’s production is what is added to the common things of the world: consumer goods. Through “labor” man experiences the cyclical movement of a biological process that has neither beginning nor end. While “labor” corresponds to man, action depends on mankind. “Work” adds things that are not directly related with biological life of individuals to the world, as “work” pursues the production of goods. Action occurs beyond the biological scenario, beyond “labor” and “work,” between the birth and death of mankind. Action occurs in the human world, in politics, through mankind’s speeches, and through his capacity to create beyond his biological and societal responsibilities. In addition, action does not have an end since
the death of the individual does not represent the end of mankind as a final consequence.

Action is also defined through the capacity to start and articulate something new, a *new beginning*. Arendt states, “Action, with all its uncertainty, is an ever present reminder that even though men [mankind] are going to die, they have not been born for that, but for a new beginning” (*De la historia a la acción* 107, translation is mine). A *new beginning* implies the embrace of life in the political space, the time between birth and death, through an experience beyond “labor” and “work.” As a consequence, the one who lacks action remains outside of the political space in the sphere of “labor” and “work.” At the intellectual level, “labor” limits man to surviving only as a biological entity without the capacity for thought, and “work” limits man to the production of things that do not correspond to “labor” or action, and limits the individual to the equanimity of ideas. On the other hand, action neither helps the individual survive as a biological body, nor adds to the production of goods, but instead exists beyond those conditions. A *new beginning* for individuals is the only mode for access to the political space and an experience of the openness to the world. Only mankind finds individuality in the space of the public life, from where the individual undoes every ideological (*a priori*) imposition that limits his freedom. To be free to articulate different opinions is to experience action. If this capacity is silenced, the political space is not possible. To summarize, public space and culture occur when individuals recognize that other individuals who are born and die in their lifetime, are individuals who leave some influence on other individuals after their death: culture occurs in the capacity to affect others through differences. In this sense there is no possibility for politics if an individual is isolated, willingly or by force, from society.

### 1.3 A New Beginning: Arendt and Bergson

Arendt’s affirmation that there is not strictly a beginning, a flux that constantly occurs
without end, differs but is not far from Bergson’s *durée*. While Bergson affirms continuity with the past, Arendt recognizes junctures, connections between the past and the future, which she refers to as new beginnings. As the trajectory of my progresses the argument would bring Arendt and Bergson into dialogue with each other. For Arendt, the new beginning takes place within becoming beyond a single individual:

> the birth of individual men, being new beginnings, re-affirms the *original* character of man in such a way that origin can never become entirely a thing of the past; the very fact of the memorable continuity of these beginnings in the sequence of generations guarantees a history which can never end because it is the history of beings whose essence is beginning. 

(*Essays in Understanding* 321)

Arendt’s “new beginning” occurs within every new individual in the political space as political action. Thus the individual has the capacity to begin again, from the past, and to affirm politics. For Bergson, “our duration is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would never be anything but present – no prolonging of the past in the actual, no evolution, no concrete duration” (*Creative Evolution* 4). Life is continuation, *durée*, and moves toward the possible without end. Bergson also states:

> It would be futile to try to assign to life an end, in the human sense of the world. To speak of an end of a pre-existing model which has only to be realized. It is to suppose, therefore, that all is given, and that the future can be read in the present. It is to believe that life, in its movement and in its entirety, goes to work like our intellect, which is only a motionless and fragmentary view of life, and which naturally takes its stand outside of
time. Life, on the contrary, progresses and endures in time. (51)

Arendt’s concept of new beginning is problematic in relation to Bergsonism. Contrary to Bergson, the concept of new beginning quantifies the understanding of the past, when considering junctures in the continuation of recurrent beginnings. Still, Arendt’s new beginning is fundamental for men’s freedom, for politics, since it focuses heavily in the capacity for action toward the future. “An event,” Arendt states, “belongs to the future, marks a beginning… which lies in the realm of human freedom” (Essays in Understanding 326 note 16). The past is not a static moment in time in which movement stops; whether it stops is a manner of interpretation. An end, the past, is constructed with the a priori idea that something begins right after. However, such an idea denies continuation, becoming, and does not recognize the future. Still, for Arendt, the future has no end, because even after one individual disappears, there are still others. The only possible end takes place when there is no longer any human being or consciousness, which will be the culmination of politics. Thus, individuals add to politics through their births and through perceptions and affections. Consciousness is necessary to recognize other individuals, but is only consciousness free from labor and work and which embraces the Bergsonian durée.

For Bergson, duration is not one moment taking place after another, but duration is continuous; it eludes the present and is the prolongation of the past into the present’s evolution. Bergson states, “[d]uration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances” (Creative Evolution 4). For this reason, time is a continuous and indivisible movement. Every individual forms part of this evolution, every “personality, which is being built up each instant with its accumulated experiences, changes without ceasing” (5-6). For that reason, time has to be apprehended qualitatively, as the continuous movement that every individual experiences during his life. Bergson’s evolution is part of the human experience, of
consciousness, the “continuity of change [becoming], preservation of the past in the present” (23). Bergson’s philosophy affirms that life is a continuous movement that cannot be divided into fragments and it has to be apprehended qualitatively. Duration, which we perceive, is succession and simultaneity.

To divide the continuous flux of time into before and after denies simultaneity and interrupts the perceived flux of time. According to Arendt, historians try to apprehend the world measuring every event in time, as a completed past. Arendt argues that historians focus on beginnings, and the end is understood retroactively, reducing the past to the event, when in reality, “the event illuminates its own past” (Essays in Understanding 319). Hence, historians understand time quantitatively, as Bergson would argue. Historians impose a beginning and an end onto every human experience in order to apprehend knowledge, but this knowledge does not necessarily allow the individual to understand political space. One can say that when man lives in “labor”, time is understood quantitatively. Thus, Arendt’s new beginning is not a quantitative way of understanding but a qualitative notion that is experience in the flux of time through openness to the world, which is close to Bergsonism. To experience a new beginning is only possible through action and understanding. Arendt defines understanding as a “form of cognition, distinct from many others, by which acting men… eventually can come to terms with what irrevocably happened and be reconciled with what unavoidable exists” (321-22). To reconcile means to “try to be at home in the world” without the production of final results. Thus, understanding assumes a life that “begin[s] with birth and ends with death” (308), but also a life that continues with the existence of others. The beginning and end of the life of the individual implies that every man comes into a pre-existing world that will remain even after there is no more human life. The new beginning implies an understanding of mankind as born into a world
that exists before him. According to Kundera, \textit{a priori} concepts are part of the world, a world that is “already made, masked, \textit{reinterpreted}” (\textit{The Curtain} 92). However, modern art has torn the curtain of interpretation since Cervantes, creating a \textit{continuation} with the old.

The artist has the capacity to experience political space when he does not deny the past but rejects the prejudice that comes with it, and understands the past as a constant flux. The artist’s position is not to fight against the war or any \textit{a priori} knowledge with other ideas, but to create a political space where differences are expressed and created. Paradoxically, when an artist tries to use words to fight back, “they become clichés” (\textit{Essays in Understanding} 308). Still, language is a medium used by artists to create a political space when positioning themselves outside of the clichés of language. Even though “each word of our speech is conventional,” as Bergson recognizes, “language is not therefore a convention, and it is as natural for man to speak as to walk” (\textit{The Creative Mind} 62). After all, language exists in an already made world we are born into. The function of language is “to establish a communication with a view of cooperation” (Ibid.). For Arendt, communication reconciles us with the past, although we have to recognize that the same words that artists use to create politics are the same as any \textit{a priori} conception. Conversely, artists produce thoughts, not ideas. Bergson’s intuition separates language from \textit{a priori} concepts. Intuition influences language in a way that “become[s] co-extensive with the mind” (64).

\textbf{1.4 Understanding Politics}

Arendt’s political philosophy reconciles the reality of the world after the two world wars. Her philosophy proposes a political space in which the past moves toward the future revealing a close understanding of Bergsonism. In this respect, and, despite their differences, both Arendt’s and Bergson’s philosophies move toward freedom, the freedom to move and to be free from \textit{a}
According to Arendt, the meaning of politics is within the political space as movement.

This freedom of movement, then – whether as the freedom to depart and begin something new and unheard-of or as the freedom to interact in speech with many others and experience the diversity that the world always is in its totality – most certainly was and is not the end purpose of politics, that is, something that can be achieved by political means. It is rather the substance and meaning of all politics of all things political. In this sense, politics and freedom are identical, and wherever this kind of freedom does exist, there is no political space in the true sense. (*The Promise of Politics* 129)

Thus, the word politics has to be understood differently from its common and historical uses of interpretation in order to understand the freedom that comes with it. Politics does not mean the force that the state exercises on its inhabitants, but rather the space created between-*men* wherein the only forces are the open struggle of thoughts. In this sense, politics is not related to ideology. An ideological definition of politics denies the differences between-*men*: ideologies group mankind into categories defining *man*. Art has the potential to create “politics” into the space in which the word itself acts. Thinking, without prejudices or judgment, paradoxically, is the end of politics, even though, for mankind it is impossible to think completely without prejudices.

Politics is about the experience of life. In this way as well, there are similarities between Arendt and Bergson’s philosophies.

Through politics, mankind experiences openness to the world, and recognizes that society is, in fact, a construction that was made before his existence, and, a social order that imposes an
obligation to each of its members. Bergson recognizes that a human community differs from animals because of mankind’s free will, although the will that holds a community together is regulated by the analogy that human community is a natural organization. Habits command mankind to obey by virtue of society, “like the cells of an organism” (The Two Sources of Morality and Religion 13). Religion, for example, serves as a mode of habit, introducing interdependence among different individuals: “everything, yet again, conspires to make social order an imitation of the order observed in nature” (14). From religion, a necessity is created, tying habit with the obligation to belong and to be active in the process of creating and supporting the social order. Organized society imposes on man a consciousness that works as a self, creating morality in the individual who responds to other individuals as obedience to duty. The social self is not conscious of this imposition because it automatically experiences it as habit in the daily routine of life. Thus, habit is apprehended as normative, as natural, as if nature precedes society, including every man’s creation. For that reason, individuals need action in order to create culture.

The chapters of this dissertation link Arendt’s politics and Bergson’s durée in relation to artistic creation. In chapter two, “Action and Intuition,” I expand the discussion of Arendt’s concept of action and the Bergsonian durée. I also discuss the similarities and differences between Bergson’s intuition and Joyce’s epiphany. For Joyce, epiphanies are a way of action through which the artist can perceive and craft his perceptions, through language, into art forms. At the same time, I consider Beckett’s response to Joyce’s epiphany on his last long novel How It Is. While Joyce adds words to create the epiphany in writing, Beckett reduces words to the minimum, deforming language.
The performance of art as a way to create and disseminate politics is discussed in chapter three, “Action in the Work of Art.” This chapter provides a discussion of the Bergsonian *durée* experienced by the artist and the audience. Literature is important for the creation of action but also other art forms, such as painting and sculpture. I argue that art materializes when it is experienced through the Bergsonian *durée*. Rothko’s paintings and Serra’s sculptures provide the discussion for a different understanding of Arendt’s action as performance. In Rothko’s paintings, the use of colors creates an experience through differences in degree considering the tone of the colors. For Serra, the aging of the art and the particular experiences of individuals create and perform action, creating the political space.

The political space is created even with communication that fails to be clear according to the conventionalism of language. In chapter four, “The Politics of the Idiotic Messenger,” I introduce and discuss the concept of the writer as an idiotic messenger, a corrupted messenger. Even though the message is corrupted, and the messenger is unaware of his capacity, the message still has the capacity to affect the audience. The discussion focuses on how in the works of Beckett, Kafka, and Gombrowicz language fails to carry a clear message and how that corrupted communication creates a political space. In order to clarify the concept of the idiotic messenger, I compare and contrast Beckett’s aesthetics on involuntary memory and time. In addition, Beckett’s *Proust* is compared and contrasted with Deleuze’s *Proust and Signs* and Bergson’s understanding of voluntary and involuntary memory. Even though Beckett discusses philosophical material, he does not follow any philosophy in particular, Bergson included. After all, Beckett is interested in creating his own aesthetics.

In the conclusion, “Politics, Action and the Tradition,” I recap the discussion on Arendt and Bergson regarding how their philosophy illuminates the modernist concept of the tradition. I
argue that the tradition is in deep uncertainty, not only in language, but regarding the movements of the works of art in relation to a non-chronological time. Beckett’s *Mercier and Camier* and Jorge Luis Borges’ stories and essays are examples of how some modernist artists learn from Eliot’s seminal idea of the tradition, not necessarily embracing it fully but questioning his Bergsonian concept of movement as part of the modernist emphasis on uncertainty.
CHAPTER TWO

ACTION AND INTUITION

Political action is essentially always the beginning of something new: as such, it is the very essence of human freedom.

Hannah Arendt, “Understanding and politics”

For them it’s the end, for me the beginning.

Samuel Beckett, The Unnamable

This chapter considers action, as necessary for art creation, beyond conventionalism and the life of habit. The discussion includes Joyce’s epiphany and Virginia Woolf’s “moments of being” as two forms of art creation. Even though these two are not the same, similarities can be found in relation to the Bergsonian concept of intuition as a way to understand internal duration, durée. Beckett’s experimental, and last novel, How It Is, is also discussed as a different kind of epiphany, which does not share, like Joyce and Woolf do, the same affinities with the Bergsonian durée. However, Beckett’s other epiphany, as I prefer to call it, takes part in the political space through action.

2.1 Action

Action, as the most important aspect of the political space, is related to the human world, to every aspect in which human relationships are present including war. Equanimity is not possible between-men who are not together because of differences. However, this un-equanimity creates culture. Culture is thus the continuation of war without the means to embrace any compromised “political agenda” (in the ideological sense). Culture is the prolongation of an artistic creation without the embrace of activism against “war” as its motto. Still, “culture” is related to “war”. When culture moves in a violent environment of events, such as the Great War
it creates politics. Thus, politics exposes differences when it describes war and recognizes the existence of the vanquisher as the defeated, just as Homer recognizes the Trojan and Greek.²

Such understanding is similar to Stoppard’s Joyce. Stoppard understands that in Ulysses, Joyce defines culture in relation to war affairs. Culture does not escape the present and does not accept a linear movement in which the present follows the past. To Joyce, the Great War does not limit his understanding of culture to the war. Culture is concerned with what happens in the space “between-men,” in the space of differences that existed before the time Joyce wrote his novels. Politics is then the space created by culture through art that is not committed to ideological causes. Politics is the only way in which culture can freely express without embracing a unquestionable definition and thus can allow an open space of differences. Culture creates politics through the struggles of differences. Joyce’s “culture” opens his artistic creation to the possible future without committing his art as a critique or reaction to a single event but a diversity of different war-related struggles and conflicts. For example, in Ulysses and Finnegans Wake the war of Troy is presented with the Irish War of Independence but also other conflicts that are not limited to Irish history, such as the battle of Waterloo among others.

What happens in “between-men” is duration, and creation within consciousness. Bergson states that the creative process happens in durée, which is precisely, creative evolution. A single instance is constantly modifying its content from the present. “Evolution” Bergson argues, “implies a real persistence of the past in the present, a duration which is, as it were, a hyphen, a connecting link. […] Continuity of change, preservation of the past in the present, real duration – the living being seems, then to share these attributes with consciousness” (The Creative Evolution 22, 23). The inner life that apprehends any event is like a melody, in which notes fold into each other. To understand the Great War as an isolated moment within consciousness is to

² See Arendt’s The Promise of Politics (123-5; 174-6).
deny the constant movement of time (If an event is isolated from the flux of time, it has the
danger of being interpreted through prejudices while the event is spatialized within the
individual.) Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* do not isolate a single event but describe
events within flux of other events in duration, rejecting *a priori* knowledge or analyses that
compromise the creation of differences. For Joyce’s characters, events happen in the present,
dragging the past into their immediate present. The immediate present already includes the past,
and this past is constantly modified by the present, as it is constantly created and recreated.
Although the present moment is important, it has not been rejected because of its apprehension
during flux of time. Joyce understands the past as a mode to understand the present; thus, he does
not isolate the present from the flux of time. Such is the experience of the artist. In *Travesties*,
Carr asks Joyce: “And what did you do in the Great War?” Joyce answers: “I wrote *Ulysses*”
(44). With his reply, he establishes himself in a political position that allows him openness to a
political space of freedom. The artistic intention is to produce without rejecting past artistic
productions but to take from them to “make it new” in the present. In the same sense, Joyce’s
*Ulysses* is not the culmination of the Classic tradition but an expression of an art that contains in
the present the tradition of which he is part. Joyce’s rewriting of Homer’s text implies an
experience of the past within the constant movement of the present.

In “Drama and Life,” Joyce considers drama, as part of the human society and “the
embodiment of changeless laws which the whimsicalities and circumstances of men and women
involve and overwrap” (*Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing* 23). Drama explores the
“accidental manners and humours” of the human society (23). Joyce’s “Drama and Life” was
presented as a paper in 1900, before he started working on *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* and
before his writing brought about radical changes to the modern tradition. Even though “Drama
and Life” is mainly concerned with Henri Ibsen’s theater and his innovative thematic on human society, Joyce also begins to introduce the unconventional form of his last two novels. However, at this time, Joyce states: “Drama will be for the future at war with convention, if it is to realize itself truly […] Drama or so wholehearted and admirable a nature cannot but draw all hearts from the spectacular and the theatrical, its note being truth and freedom in every aspect of it” (25). Still, Joyce does not create the drama of his novels without precursors. *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* continue with the same topics that had been present in the literary tradition. As a consequence, Joyce re-elaborates the old, creating a new, distinctly modernist aesthetics.

“Literature” reveals human relations through conventionality. In this regard, Joyce prefers “drama” in order to accentuate the war against conventions. The reason is that the theatrical aspect of drama affects spectators directly: drama creates a space where the characters imitate Nature. Conversely, drama (art) is not mimesis of nature but resembles Nature. To clarify, in “Aesthetics,” Joyce states that nature does not define drama (art), but art's aesthetics is taken from nature. For Joyce, the Aristotelian concept of “Art imitates nature,” has been misunderstood, it “means that the artistic process is like a natural process,” associated with real movement (104). Joyce, with a Bergsonian inflection, states, “[b]y drama I understand the interplay of passions to portray truth; drama is strife, evolution, movement in whatever way unfolded; it exists, before it takes form, independently; it is conditioned but not controlled by its scene” (24).

Stoppard’s Joyce uses war to destabilize conventions, to struggle, to find its realization as art that is part of one’s life’s experience as Stephen Daedalus proposes in Joyce’s *Stephen Hero*. Joyce makes “Drama and Life” Stephen’s work on aesthetics and art. However, when Stephen finishes presenting his opinion on drama “he [finds it] necessary to change the title from ‘Drama
and Life’ to “Art and Life’” (81). Stoppard considers the content of “Drama and Life” relevant to Joyce’s aesthetics and the product of a young writer or a juvenile character like Daedalus. The fact that Joyce incorporates his essay into Stephen’s character does not prove an intrinsic relation between Joyce and Stephen but rather that Joyce was developing different aesthetics without denying the influence of the early literary tradition. Joyce was indeed interested in art as a human aspect through epiphanies and drama as part of life as art.

2.2 Epiphany and Intuition

Epiphanies come from the outer world, from the reality of the world. Paradoxically the epiphanies are not artistic expressions, but become art when recalled by an artist. Conversely, Joyce recalls them in his literature because “the man of letters” should record epiphanies. Joyce’s epiphany consists of the apprehension of any trivial aspect of the world through a “sudden spiritual manifestation” of moments that “are the most delicate and evanescent” (Stephen Hero 211). Stephen’s epiphany is defined by the narrator as “a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself” (211). Through epiphanies, the mind recognizes an object and considers it “in whole and in part, in relation to itself and to other objects, examines the balance of its parts, contemplates the form of the object, traverses every cranny of the structure” (212). Stephen’s definition suggests a spiritual relation between mind and matter, with consciousness standing between mind and matter. This epiphany is influenced by religious mysticism and transformed by Stephen into a “philosophical” and “artistic” inquiry on his work.

Instead of being religious and mystical, Joyce’s epiphanies are experienced in-between the material world and the perceived consciousness. Epiphanies reveal the worldly, the world that has early been uncovered by Quijote. Epiphanies are about language without any theophany.
Even though the world is no longer ruled by God, it does not mean that a spiritual experience is not possible. The mind, standing as the spiritual qualities of mankind, is positions in-between without denying the surrounding matter and the body. Quijote’s world opens to the real, to what is worldly, and the mind, without theological implications, experiences the world through its only possible medium: language. This experience of language reveals everything as questions, and questions are more important than answers; the world is revealed through language, through writing, creating art. In this sense, Joyce follows Cervantes’ tradition but moves beyond it, using a different expression of language: the expression of consciousness in characters that understand their life through durée. Joyce’s epiphany allows Stephen to experience life between mind and matter, and matter is revealed in his mind as beyond inertia since matter also moves and changes. His characters apprehend matter as part of their spiritual life, meaning the life of the mind, and recall those experiences in art.

For the purpose of his creative process, Joyce recorded a series of epiphanies separately in a notebook before he incorporated them into his works. These epiphanic writings reveal something important when they are included as part of the whole text: even though epiphanies come at a certain moment and are about something specific, the moment cannot be isolated from the whole of reality. Through the context of the literary text, the reader and the author experience those moments as epiphanies. These experiences are part of the flux of thought and of an experience of the space in-between. Epiphanies are not single ideas but thoughts within the flux of thought. An understanding of Joyce’s epiphanies through Bergson implies that they are memory, consciousness. However, during an epiphany the individual recalls the necessary memories to apprehend the epiphanic moment, which goes beyond the discovery of something new in the present as recalled by the artist in his work. In this uncovering, something is already
within the individual, in the indivisible time of becoming experienced from his ongoing present moment.

Even though the epiphany is only recalled after its apprehension, it does not come from analysis. Bergson states, “from intuition one can pass to analysis, but not from analysis to intuition” (*An Introduction to Metaphysics* 48). The object is experienced in the flux of time through a concentrated operation of the mind without consequence for an activity necessary for life, such as habit, and without cutting out the present moment. The epiphany takes place in action, and is thus similar to Bergson’s intuition. For Bergson, the object is apprehended from the interior of the object and from the inner life of the mind: “And what I experience will depend neither on the point of view I may take up in regard to the object, since I am inside the object itself” (2). Bergson also adds, “I shall no longer grasp the movement from without, remaining where I am, but from where it is, from within, as it is in itself” (3). For Stephen, the epiphanic experience happens when the mind focuses on an object like “the clock of the Ballast Office” (*Stephen Hero* 211). Stephen compares the epiphany with a religious experience without any theological implication but as a manly and worldly experience. Harry Levin states that Joyce’s epiphany is a substitute “for the revelations of religion” (*James Joyce* 29). However, epiphanies are a sort of religious experiences without revelation, since the spirit (consciousness) experiences the rhythm of the object within the rest of the world. Objects are not revealed to mankind, but mankind perceives the objects, which do not call for a revelation, from within the flux of the inner life. Mankind experiences them within his own durée through intuition, through his own memories, consciousness.

In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Bergson explains the difference between intuition and analysis. Through analysis the world is known through symbols, concepts that represent the
world and the inner life: “A representation taken from a certain point of view, a translation made with certain symbols, will always remain imperfect in comparison with the object of which a view has been taken, or which the symbols seek to express” (5). When we position ourselves toward symbols, we remain outside the object, at the periphery. As a consequence, the object represents something a priori; through concepts we relate the object to other objects. Thus, concepts substitute for the object, for the symbols they made for it, lead us without effort to intuitively get inside the object. Intuition does not represent the reality of the world nor the inner self. Intuition is only a way for us to perceive, to experience and to understand the reality of the world and the inner self “in its own flowing through time – our self which endures” (9).

Real duration does not have extension in space nor is time spatialized, but time and space coexist. Durée is continuous unity and multiplicity. For that reason the present moment escapes us. Analysis cuts off time, stops the flux of our experience, and denies the duration of the inner life, which is consciousness. A present feeling cannot exist without the continuation of the memory of our past, thus the epiphanic experience. Bergson states,

Inner duration is the continuous life of memory which prolongs the past into the present, the present either containing within it in a distinct form the ceaselessly growing image of the past… Without this survival of the past into the present there would be no duration, but only instantaneity.

(44-5)

Real duration happens simultaneously in time and space. For the epiphany, the artist intuitively apprehends the reality of the world and transforms it into something different. The artist, positioning himself inside the object, apprehends its soul, and creates, as a consequence of his experience, the work of art. For Stephen, the artist is a “mediator between the world of his
experience and the world of his dream.” As a mediator, the artist has the faculty to select and reproduce, deform the apprehended object. To “re-embody” the object defines the artist as such (Stephen Hero 77, 78).

The artist who experiences epiphanies understands that he cannot step outside the object. In stepping outside the object and analyzing it, the artist cuts off durée through ideas or understands time quantitatively. Analyzing time quantitatively when using ideas cuts off the flux of time. As a consequence, every moment in time is apprehended independently from every other moment, like stages, and is analyzed without considering that time never stops, that new emotions, new characteristics are added, continuously, to the inner life. An isolated word stops the flux of the inner life and impairs our understanding that we live in durée. A word, or even a series of words, is in danger of becoming an idea when an interpretation negates its evolution. For example, Rimbaud proclaimed the imperative of being absolutely modern. If we interpret that command as ignoring the flux of thoughts, we get the idea that being modern means to follow his poetic. However, if we experience durée Rimbaud’s statement can be understood as a thought in flux. To be modern is something that evolves, that changes within time and space. Being modern today is not the same as being modern when Rimbaud proclaimed it. In the same sense, Stephen explains to Cranly that “the word ‘modern’ is only a word. But when I use it I use it with a certain meaning” (186). Like Bergson, Stephen recognizes that a word when used as an idea must be defined first to, paradoxically, avoid fitting a definition to the object. That is, to avoid what the object can suggest to us, to avoid the spatialization of time. In this sense, intuition places us in “mobility,” in durée (An Introduction to Metaphysics 47). Bergson states that, “our own duration can be presented to us directly in intuition, that it can be suggested to us indirectly
by images but that it can never – if we confine the word concept to its proper meaning – be enclosed in a conceptual representation” (22).

When Stephen explains epiphany he uses a clock machine, which is built to organize our daily life as an example of our inner life. More important, that clock quantitatively organizes the lives of the people who are surrounded by it. “Imagine my glimpses at that clock,” Stephen says, “as the propping of a spiritual eye which seeks to adjust its vision to an exact focus. The moment the focus is reached the object is epiphanized” (Stephen Hero 211). The clock suggests the epiphany to the inner life, but does so through consciousness, memory, and the constant inner flux. When Stephen decides not to analyze the object, but to use intuition, he apprehends the inner life. In order to explain that constant flux, an exercise in which that flux is explained, but not represented is necessary; thoughts are expressed by the artist and not words or ideas. For this reason concepts are necessary to explain the inner life, but concepts that are fluid, concepts that are understood, not analyzed, and are not contained in words or ideas. Stephen does this exercise when he apprehends the clock, through his inner life in both time and space.

Explaining the epiphany becomes a paradoxical exercise, because to explain we need to use words. Words have the capacity to quantify life and memories, but also words make thoughts possible. Stephen’s apprehension of the clock of the Ballast Office as an epiphany is expressed in words that evolve with memory. Ballast Office’s clock had been there before Stephen, meaning that the organized life the clock offers is part of the life of Dubliners, including Stephen. On the other hand, we have to understand that, since time cannot be quantified, every instance is formed by an ongoing movement from which Stephen and the clock are part of. This means that, from the moment that Stephen observes the clock and apprehends the clock, positioning himself inside the clock, to the moment when Stephen explains the epiphanic moment, time moves
simultaneously with them, including Cranly, the street, Dublin, and the whole of the world. Stephen experiences the epiphany *in-between* an unquantified moments and uses a thought to explain it to Cranly. At that moment, words lose their content and stop being ideas and the clock continues to be a clock without the content the word “clock” contains. As a result, a common and influential object changes its form. Virginia Woolf in “Sketch of the Past” has a similar experience with words: “I had a feeling of transparency in words when they cease to be words and become so intensified that one seems to experience them; to foretell them as if they developed what one is already feeling” (*Moments of Being* 93). Such is the experience of the clock, every movement of the clock hands is experienced without quantification or representation of time, and the epiphany is apprehended without the content that is added by words. Bergson states, “To try to fit a concept on an object is simply to ask what we can do with the object, and what it can do for us. To label an object with a certain concept is to mark in precise terms the kind of action or attitude the object should suggest to us” (*An Introduction to Metaphysics* 41).

Through the epiphany, experience, artists experience life beyond habit, in action, creating different movements that open to the possible future. Even what is habit can lead to epiphanies, like checking the time at the Ballast Office, or staring at an object that has been seen many times before. The inner life, which is organized with memories and dreams that do not correspond to a chronological order (Chronos or quantified time), is in relation to the outer world, including the societal strata. In order for the epiphany to happen, words are deformed, suspended from their logical order, and placed outside of the clichés of language into an experience beyond quantification. In this case, the language to quantify time does not describe the experience of the Ballast Office clock, but expresses and creates art. Time moves, but the awareness and the
quantification of time becomes different. Time is experienced beyond being an accessory and furniture, as if time needed to be advertised. “I will pass it time after time,” says Stephen to Cranly “It is only a catalogue of Dublin’s furniture. Then all at once I see it and I know at once what it is: epiphany” (Stephen Hero 211). Woolf’s experience adds something similar: “A great part of the day is not lived consciously. One walks, eats, sees things, deals with what has to be done; the broken vacuum cleaner; ordering dinner; writing orders to Mabel; washing; cooking dinner; bookbinding.” Then she adds, “When it is a bad day the proportion of non-being is much larger” (Moments of being 70).

Again, the paradox is clear, and as Bergson notes we still use the same language that stops us from experiencing durée. The saturation of accessories in our daily life, the habitual experiences stop us from experiencing the epiphanies, and even language relies on, like it does to Stephen, a priori meaning, since time is apprehended as a social commodity. Through the epiphany, intuition, the words that describe the clock become an empty place, a moment of “non-being” that still transverses our experience beyond language itself when it is experienced. In Stephen’s epiphany or Woolf’s “moments of being,” the same words mean something different, having less additions and effects. During the epiphanic moment, words translate into a different language. Language is not suspended but language becomes a flux of thought. For Bergson recalling such experience occurs in the immobile quantified time, while the experience “places

3 “Non-being” is for Woolf everything that we perceive without being conscious, like walking by the Ballast Office without being effected by the big clock. “Moments of being” are similar to Joyce’s epiphany and Bergson’s intuition. “Moments of Being” are those unique moments in which one is shocked and is opened to a reality different than a simple material reality. During moments of being, one experiences pure duration within matter. Time is not suspended, but intuitively apprehended without quantification. In this experience, the self coexists with the object becoming a whole: “It seems to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr Valpy’s suicide” (Moments of Being 71). Artists reveal and record these moments into art “where one thing follows another and all are swept into a whole” (75). A clock, a memory of a clock, connects the self in a stream in which the past is present “affected by the present moment” in a revelatory experience (75). Words add to this particular experience in a different way: “they cease to be words and become so intensified that one seems to experience them; to foretell them as if they developed what one is already feeling.” When the experience is recorded, “it matches what [one has] sometimes felts when [one] write[s]. The pen gets on the scent” (93).
itself in mobility, or, what comes to the same thing, in duration” (*An Introduction to Metaphysics* 47). Only the analysis of the epiphany is quantified using the clichés of language when the artist records his or her experience.

### 2.3 Beckett’s Other Epiphany

For Beckett, metaphors are no longer necessary. Nothing is left to represent, except the need to express through *a priori* language, and to express the event that repeats and disjoints reality (the illusion of order). Beckett radicalizes Joyce’s intention to epiphanize emptying the expressiveness of words. For Beckett, Joyce’s epiphany seems to depend more on the addition of words than the reduction of words. Beckett prefers to reduce words than to explore Joyce’s impulse to incorporate as much as he can. Beckett’s late texts become shorter, using words while avoiding cliché: to see without seeing and to say without saying too much. It occurs while the individual deterritorializes language: a witness without witnessing the language, he witnesses time without measuring it. The abandonment of language is not total but language expresses without being quantified. The voice of Beckett’s *How It Is* encourages the reader to “find more words and they all spent more brief moments of the lower face he would need good eyes the witness if there were a witness good eyes a good lamp he could have them witness the good eyes the good lamp.” It happens before announcing “midnight, no two in the morning three in the morning Ballast Office…” (44). Those words are words that are pronounced by an impaired witness, for whom “that kind of image not for the eyes made of words not for the ears” (45). The witness needs good eyes, but also, whoever the witness is, is in a position where “there is not much more left to endure” (43). In the mud are “things one knows already or will never know it’s the one or the other” (45). In addition, the seen image is seen with “no emotion” (46). As the
epiphany, the experience lacks the language to represent the “brief moment” without the excess of language, without emotion in the fading memory.

Although within the novel brief moment does not deny the past time entirely, the past time fades without a great impact for the present moment. As a consequence, language appears as an either/or struggle and at a place in-between, in relation to organizing thoughts and to remembering an image. The image, or the word that names the image, is of the “Ballast Office brief moments of the lower face no sound it’s my words cause them it’s they cause my words it’s one or the other I’ll fall asleep within humanity again just barely” (44-5). Later the voice says, “here things one knows already or will never know it’s or the other” (45 emphasis added). In the first either/or, the voice asks what causes the memory, the words or remembering the brief moments at the Ballast Office. In the second either/or, the voice seems to question if the memory is caused by involuntary memory or voluntary memory. Even though the voice’s considerations are posited, the voice does not show an interest in resolving this but in analyzing the soundless image from the present time. The silence of the Ballast Office’s image comes as if from a dream, so thus not an image for the eyes or words for the ears. However, the text records something that does not translate the experience but the impossibility of language to express and to recall a vast accumulation of past memories. What matters in the present moment is not the effect of the past in the present self, but the discursive discussion that does not create emotion or nostalgia. Only the Ballast Office, silently, is recorded by its name. The object itself, the building, does not matter. The brief moment at the Ballast Office as an experience, not to be seen or listened to, cripples the Joycean epiphany, but also Woolf’s “moments of being,” wherein the object matters. Paradoxically, something is being said, or better yet, something is being expressed after the apprehension of the object, language is happening.
The happening of language is still taking place in thoughts, or better yet, in ill thoughts. Like in the waking life, the happening of language falls into the category of involuntary memories, which cannot be controlled by the individual. For Joyce and Woolf, the individual can control his or her experience. For Beckett’s anti-epiphany, a certain lack of control, or involuntary memory, creates a different experience, that even thought, does not deny the will of Joyce writing *Ulysses* during the war, it does not escape the reality of the world. In *How It Is*, Beckett’s voice affirms politics and the enduring process of the artist’s becoming with the reduction of judgments and prejudices. At the same time, Beckett sets a new beginning with a different Ballast Office clock and within a fading past close to the past war experience, in which nothing is in need of healing. The future, thus, appears to prolong the experience of the dream, like memories.
CHAPTER THREE

ACTION IN THE WORK OF ART

Certainly, it would be a chimerical enterprise to try to free ourselves from the fundamental conditions of external perception.
Henri Bergson, Matter and Memory

Literature depends on what has been produced by previous literary texts in order to continue its existence. Every artist is an individual who creates within a constant movement of time, that is, past time, the present that escapes the artist, and the future that has not yet begun. The past allows the artist to create and explore the possible, the future. Movement is undeniably an important aspect of the literary tradition. But, what kind of movement: circular, linear, spiral, centrifugal, centripetal? This chapter argues that the characters’ commitment to action in modernist works defines and (re)defines the modernist aesthetic and that action is also important to later artists influenced by modernism, such as Mark Rothko and Richard Serra.

3.1 The Materialization of the Work of Art

Arendt’s “freedom” is defined as the capacity for action and politics. She categorically emphasizes that the work of art cannot be produced outside politics, but one must add that action and “politics” cannot be quantified. One cannot spatialize the work of art by taking away its freedom and its impossibility for action. “Spatialize” here means to deny freedom because following Bergson, freedom cannot occur outside the context of durée. Arendt states: “[o]nly in the freedom of our speaking with one another does the world, as that about which we speak emerge in its objectivity and visibility from all sides. Living in a real world and speaking with one another about it are basically one and the same” (The Promise of Politics 128-29). According to Arendt, the world created through freedom is not an idealist world, but a world that
materializes freedom. The world of action is, indeed, the world that emerges through communicating differences. The artist willingly creates freedom when differences appear through an active life.

Literature, art, has the capacity to create the experience of action, to bring freedom. According to Arendt, to experience life in the field of action is the same as to state that politics is freedom (Between Past and Future 145). There must be a place in the world for action through which the individual experiences freedom with other individuals and not in isolation. “We first become aware of freedom,” Arendt argues, “or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves” (147). An interrelation with others is what makes action a “human affair.” Thus, action connects the individual not just with others but also with the world (The Promise of Politics 154). But for freedom to be experienced, action must occur simultaneously in space and time. A worldly space is created when the individual recognizes creativity, when the artist knows that a world that does not deny durée is continuously becoming. The worldly space that includes the material world but also the life of the mind, consciousness, memory (in the Bergsonian sense) is created as a place that does not correspond to labor. In other words, the world is evolution (when mankind evolve from labor into an active life) and the men of action understand that they are “beginners.” But, this also implies that the world that has not yet come into being is the possible only if it is created through action. In this sense, the world does not become a place for action (worldly) until mankind experiences freedom. Without the creation of a place for action, the individual does not experience evolution, which is to move from labor to action in order to make the worldly a reality in which freedom takes place.

Works of art are created as expressions of an artist’s individuality, which is not a condition within himself but comes through his experience of the political space. Mankind’s
evolution does not necessarily mean progress. Neither is there an ascendant movement, there is no scientific evolution in the Darwinian sense. Evolution means creation within the world between-men. Freedom does not take place in isolation because freedom has to be materialized through the interactions of differences. Arendt’s politics materializes an individual’s freedom when the individual acts as “creative artist.” The main concern “is not whether the creative artist is free in the process of creation” but if the work of art appears in the world (Between Past and Future 152).

Even though freedom is present when the artist is creating, the creative process is often hidden from the public. The end product of a creative process is what is presented to the world. Here we can argue two different kinds of freedom: freedom to create and freedom to perform and to expose the work of art. To experience freedom, to create, assumes that the artist’s creation occurs not in isolation but through a relation of differences. Usually, individual artists do their work in their own space without communication with others, but what leads the artist to do that is the human connection he experiences prior to the creative process. Gombrowicz argues that the one who creates affects the creation and, at the same time, he is affected by his work. In addition, the artist is “subject to the ‘interhuman’ as a superior, creative force, our only accessible divinity” (Diary 2 6). The artist cannot produce ex nihilo but through openness to the world (to every possibility, to every movement in the world), nor through understanding his ‘will’ as something given by any divine power.

Considering that the artist does not create in isolation makes us question, again, if the work of art exists in the world if it is not exposed to the world. An idealist’s point of view would conclude that if the work of art is not perceived, the art does not exist. On the other hand, the artist who creates perceives the work of art. But, is the work of art constituted as such if the
creation process occurs in isolation? Again, a work created in isolation does not exist because the artist above all must live in the world. The work of art needs to be present in the world after the artist finishes. If the work of art occurs, then it becomes subject to a “human” relation. For the artist to constitute the creation as a work of art, he needs to expose the art in the worldly space, meaning the political space. *Taking place,* in the etymological sense, means from the *Latin:* to receive, to accept, to hear, to translate, to explain, to understand, to intend, to carry across, to transport, and to remove. When the work of art *takes place* in the world, it does so in flux between the artist, the work of art, and another individual who perceives the final product of the artist. In this way, the work of art is positioned between the artist and the individual who interprets (removing and carrying across understanding) and shares the work (and his interpretation of the work) with others. Paradoxically, the work of art matters and becomes matter when it is performed, or exposed.

To perform and to expose implies that the work of art becomes part of the world through the evolution of mankind. It also means that the work of art creates the political space at the same time through its performance and exposition. For that reason, Arendt privileges “performing art” because of its “strong affinity with politics” (*Between Past and Future* 152). A performance artist can only act if there is an audience because an individual needs an other individual to act. A writer needs a reader after the work is complete and is at hand as the audience perceives the performance at the moment of its presentation. As a consequence, the world is created in the sense that there is freedom, that the active individual is capable to surpass or remove the animal state (labor) in which the artists create from nature, in order to free themselves from the biological state of life. Worldly reality becomes “tangible in words which can be heard, in deeds which can be seen, and in events which are talked about, remembered, and
turned into stories before they are finally incorporated into the great storybook of human history” (153). Politics is necessary to maintain the permanence of mankind’s activity. For that reason, not everything that occurs in politics is called directly into being, but individuals, as Bergson proves, have the capacity to incorporate everything from the past to turn it into action.

To act is to perform something that endures and to support the continuation of other past acts. Arendt’s concept of action, in Latin, means to act, “to set something in motion” (agere) and to endure (gerere), “which is hard to translate and somehow means the enduring and supporting continuation of past acts” (164). Agere also means to perform, which implies to carry out and to carry through, but also to make and to be acted on. The artist communicates with others through his creation. To perform is to produce, to bring out, following Kundera, what is hidden. The performance as production prolongs the work of art through the audience and takes place and part in durée, in memory, in the inner life of the audience; the same could be said of other arts, such as the novel.

At this point, we have to question if every work of art is a performance or has to be performed. To produce and to perform imply to make something visible, which is something that the arts do through different manifestations. The novel occurs in a world that is mediated by production. Any novel moves from the creating process that allows the artist to create, but in order to be exposed or to be performed, the novel is subject to a process of production, which, sometimes, antagonizes the artist’s creation. Any form of materialized societal power affects the artist’s process of production. Walter Benjamin’s understanding of the author is someone who struggles against the dominant class. Expanding the context of Benjamin’s conception helps us to understand that the artist always struggles from the beginning of the creation process, to the publication or exposition of the work, but also with the audience at the time the work of art is
accessible to them. The case of *Ulysses* shows that there was a struggle before the book was exposed and performed to the American audience. The case of *Ulysses* is a particular one because the state’s involvement in matter of aesthetics. Of course, before *Ulysses* there were books that were banned because of ideological reasons. But, in this particular case, judge John M. Woosley’s decision to admit *Ulysses* to the American audience recognizes the political space as one of differences. Joyce’s novel’s introduction to the political space in United States begins with the rights for distributing the novel and ends in the hands of the audience (reader), who, even though he experiences a different struggle with the understanding of the novel, decides whether or not to read it.

Thus, a work of art cannot take place if is not “transported” to the audience. The audience of *Ulysses* makes the novel exist as a work of art (even though we can question who actually read Joyce’s novel). *Ulysses* takes place in the world because of its reception, acceptance, and/or rejection. These differences belong to the experience of the reader or receiver of the print work who is capable of experiencing politics when he is in contact with the text. As a consequence, the reader experiences freedom when the work of art takes place. The audience is affected during the reading process. The mind is moving and creates thoughts within the reading. Whether or not there is communication between the artist and the audience, will be discussed in the next chapter. For now, lets just assume that something happens when the individual reads or pays attention to the artist’s performance.

Politics is necessary to expose, develop, and materialize the work of art. Greek politics recognizes the existence of the defeated in war. To eradicate the defeater’s existence is against politics. During the attacks of the World Trade Center, valuable works of art were destroyed, such as Joan Miró’s tapestry *Carpet*. If we consider the original as “the work of art,” Miró’s
Carpet does not exist anymore. Supposing that there is no picture of that work of art, we may be able to argue that Miró’s Carpet still exists because there are individuals alive who perceived it. On the other hand, they are not capable of representing the tapestry to other individuals. Even if they can explain Miró’s Carpet, after those individuals die, no one will be able to reproduce it. Since we know that memory is not photographic, such supposition is not possible. Still, Miró’s Carpet can be perceived in books, postcards, etc. Even though a reproduction is not the original, reproductions are the most convenient medium in which individuals who never visited the World Trade Center can perceive Miró’s Carpet.

Art critics and literary critics, among others, also make a wider exposition of the work of art possible. If Max Brod has accepted his friend’s will, we would never have been able to perceive Kafka’s seminal novels and short stories. Probably, without Benjamin, Kafka’s work would not be read as widely as it is today. Critics, with their differences in opinions and knowledge, add something new to the work of art. Their influences, from being in the world, open a political space where the artist and the audience interact. The more that is written about a work of art, the more presence that work of art has. Ulysses had and still has many readers (judging by the numbers of publications and conferences about Joyce’s work). Critics, either accept or reject the work of art, and in so doing, open a space of discussion that reveals differences. During this process the work of art materializes freedom, just as Judge John M. Woosley’s decision does in the Ulysses’s trial.

The materialization of the work of art cannot be confused with the danger of spatializing the work of art. Any work of art is materialized when perceived in durée. The process of materializing the work of art does not fix the work of art in time, but inserts and places the work of art in both time and space. The materialization of the work of art recognizes that the work of
art has a past, a present, and a future, when an audience perceives it, which means that the audience is interested in the artist’s creation. In a way, there has to be an interest by an audience to incorporate the work of art into the world, as part of the political experience. We can argue that, according to Bergson, everything we have perceived, conscious or unconscious, can be called into the present. On the other hand, what interests us forms part of our conscious relation with the world. What is hidden, what we failed to recognize, may or not may be called into the present, but this should not be the case with the work of art. The conscious mind performs mainly what the conscious life recognizes including the past that affects the performing act. To perform for an audience is the purpose of the work of art to make it present and to affect the audience.

The materialization of the work of art, which is performance, happens in an open space in which the work of art moves (not necessarily without difficulty or struggle, in cases when the art is repressed) and is perceived by an audience who thinks and creates thoughts during its movement. Although, we have to recognize that, between the work of art and the audience, exists a relationship beyond the material object. The mind or the spirit perceives the work of art, but not without the body. In addition, perception does not occur *ex nihilo*. The individual perceives the work of art based on his own knowledge and personality through bodily sensations and through his inner life. Previous experiences and perceptions are present when an individual is interested in any work of art. Even when the artist has something in mind during the creative process of which the audience may be or not be aware, the individual, as part of the audience, experiences the work of art, as it appeals to him. Both the artist and the audience are part of the world.
3.2 The Materialization of Form

Modernist artists, like Kandinsky, are aware of something else occurring beyond the materiality of the work of art. They understand the material world through a different level than representation. The material used in the production or reproduction of the work of art corresponds to the materialization of an object. As a response, Kandinsky, in Concerning the Spiritual in Art, argues that a new art is necessary, an art that does not resemble the material world but its spirituality. Kandinsky proposes that the artist does not simply use material objects in order to create art. Material objects, as are recognized by the artist, need a transformation, a deformation, from the common reference in order to express another aspect of the individual’s reality. Kandinsky’s aspiration is to include the spiritual part of the individuals the part that is affected by emotions.

Every artistic expression cannot be performed without the use of the form in which their medium performance takes place. For example, a painter can approach his art through the use of color and form. Even though the use of form is not necessarily mimetic, without form, creation is impossible. Form does not necessarily organize and does not limit the medium, but defines and deforms its limits from other artistic expressions. Kandinsky recognizes the difference between the modern painting and a representational one. In a world that experiences new forms of expressions, the painter needs to express the spirituality of art in a way that is not possible in other artistic forms. Kundera uses a similar argument when he foresees the future of the art of the novel. According to Kundera, the novel needs to be written against mimetic representation. With new artistic expressions such as film, the novel has to express the paradox of the world, eluding translation into film. Philip Kaufman’s adaptation of The Unbearable Lightness of Being proves Kundera’s argument, reducing the novel to a simple love triangle. Joyce’s Ulysses and
*Finnegans Wake* are novels that a cinematographer cannot capture without doing considerable changes to the author’s work. Still, we can find passages in *Finnegans Wake* in which the action seems directed by the lens of the camera, or different cameras through the evolution of its artistic medium: “revealed by Oscur Camerad. The last of Duth Schulds, perhumps. Pipe in Dream Cluse. Uncovers Pub History. The Outrage, at Length. […] Moviefigure on in scenic section” (602.23-5, 7).

According to Kandinsky, form is expressed in painting through colors. But, the artist cannot create colors: he uses what already exists. Following Bergson, at some level, the artist can create differences in degree in order to affect the audience, although the audience’s emotions are, also, created through differences in kind. Rothko, who is influenced by modernist aesthetics, is an example of how an artist can affect the audience through color. Rothko paints colors in square or vertical canvas, organizing different degrees of color. In Rothko’s *White Over Red* (see fig. 1), the only recognizable form in the canvas is the rectangle. Conversely, the degrees in color create the art. Rothko’s *White Over Red* performs the white as a non-totalitarian white: the white does not impose over the red, nor does it make the color pink: it creates not synthesis but harmony while emphasizing differences with other colors and within the color itself. As a consequence, the audience feels something that does not resemble any material object. Every individual experiences different emotions. That is to say, the colors in Rothko’s art have differences in degree. However, the individual experiences differences in kind. For example, the audience, as is in the case with Rothko’s *White Over Red*, can experience the feeling of love, which is a difference of kind. For Bergson, there is *a priori* knowledge we experience before we stare into art. Emotions are a “consequence of an idea, or a mental picture; the ‘feeling’ is indeed the result of an intellectual state” (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* 43). The representation of the
material world comes through the intellect and affects the audience’s emotions. The emotions are brought into the present from the individual’s past experience(s). Simon Schama's series *Power of Art* for the BBC suggests that the audience, while standing before a Rothko painting, experiences in their minds a variety of images capable of creating a variety of emotions such as love and/or hate through recognizable mental pictures.

![Figure # 1 Mark Rothko, *White Over Red*, 1957](image)

One can argue that Rothko’s art manipulates emotions in the audience. Emotions come and go during the performance process in which the audience attends to the art. Once the audience willingly experiences Rothko’s art, something happens. At first sight, the audience recognizes nothing mimetic in Rothko’s *White Over Red*. But, Rothko’s colors and form, beyond the abstraction, allow the audience to think and to create thoughts, even if the thoughts are concerned with why *White Over Red* is considered art. The mere question of what art is or is not reveals differences between the audience and the museum, gallery, or a particular collection that exhibits his work. In addition, Rothko’s paintings do not quantify their expression. That proves
that Rothko’s art does not spatialize time and it does not fix an idea through a precise moment in time. Instead, the audience experiences movement. Bergson states in *Matter and Memory*: “There is no perception which is not prolonged into movements” (94). This means that even if the individual stands still in front of the work of art, the mind is moving, creating thoughts, perceiving. There is no inertia in the art or in the audience. The audience apprehends the movement and art’s materialization. Thus, the active mind is the only one that can be conscious of movement, and, through action, the active mind creates the political space, affirming the non-spatialization of time. As a consequence, the performance allows the audience to experience freedom to create thoughts.

The perception of art happens outside of habit since there is no freedom in habit. Habitual movements are automatic and resemble biological life or a life that revolves around *labor*. In addition, habit is related to the intellect, but not to intuition. Bergson states that habit is “an activity which, starting as intelligence, progresses toward an imitation of instinct” (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* 26). Habit does not allow the audience be part of the performance. An individual who approaches art through habit is only capable of apprehending its materiality. Thus, Rothko’s *White Over Red* is apprehended simply as colors on a canvas, though the audience may be concerned with the fact that *White Over Red* is not mimetic in order to simply state that is abstract. As a consequence, abstraction may become an excuse for the individual who does not put effort into apprehending the work of art. Action is denied through this reaction and leaves the individual outside the political space. Without action, the audience cannot experience the work of art or apprehend it intuitively. For that reason, the audience needs to be liberated from habit or labor and work in order to experience the work of art. In this sense, an audience who only depends on their intellect cannot experience freedom.
We have to consider if Rothko’s art is abstract or if it becomes abstract in the mind that does not experience action (and *durée*). Some other questions come from this idea. Is abstract art considered ‘abstract’ because it lacks material forms or material references without considering the audience’s experience? Can we define the concept ‘abstract’ as a lack of intuition? If that is so, does ‘abstraction’ happen as such in a mind that does not experience freedom, action, intuition? In this respect, Rothko does not consider his art to be abstract. Instead he captures the entirety of human experience without representation, as Rothko, in “The Portrait and the Modern Artist,” states,

The modern artist has, in varying degrees, detached himself from appearance in nature. [...] Today the artist is no longer constrained by the limitation that all of man’s experience is expressed by his outward experience. Freed from the need of describing a particular person, the possibilities are endless. The whole of man’s experience becomes his model, and in that sense it can be said that all of art is a portrait of an idea *(The Rothko Book 181, 182)*.

According to Rothko, his art is not abstract because “it is not the intention either to create or to emphasize a formal color – space arrangement. They depart from natural representation only to intensify the expression of the subject implied in the title – not to dilute or efface it” (182).

Within his art and his art’s philosophy, Rothko negates pure idealism and pure materialism. There is a space *in-between* both of them in which art expresses the “whole of man’s experience” (182). Rothko’s art departs from nature and affirms its movement in the space between idealism and materialism. His philosophy of art is further clarified in various articles and interviews. In one of his “Personal Statement” (1945) Rothko states: art “adhere[s] to the
material reality of the world and the substance of things,” but he embraces the dream and the spiritual aspect of life (182). At the same time, Rothko knows that art without an audience does not exist, and there is always a danger for art to end in the eyes of an uninterested audience. In another “Personal Statement” (1947), Rothko recognizes that “[i]t is therefore a risky and unfeeling act to send it [the art] out into the world” (184). Despite the idealistic preoccupation, for Rothko the surrealists go too far by denying the material world and embracing the unconscious as the real expression of men. According to Rothko, art “is an anecdote of the spirit, and the only means of making concrete the purpose of its varied quickness and stillness” (183).

Rothko’s rejection, of the idea of art as pure idealism, affirms that art is not an escape from action but a way for action and a way for intuition. Rothko argues that action is usually defined as the fulfillment of the biological and social needs, as through the procurement of material goods. Rothko adds that action happens in the whole of the experience of the individual, including the spiritual and materialistic part of the individual’s experience. He states,

Art is such an action. It is a kindred form of action to idealism. They are both expressions of the same drive, and the man who fails to fulfill this urge in one form or another is as guilty of escapism as the one who fails to occupy himself with the satisfaction of bodily needs.

Art is not escapism either; it affects the individual who lives in society, as Rothko explains,

Art is not only a form of action, it is a form of social action. For the artist is a type of communication, and when it enters the environment it produces its effects just as any other form of action does. [...] It might be said that its use as a means of social action is dependent upon the numbers which it affects.” (The Artist Reality. Philosophies of Art 10)
Even though these statements were written before Rothko’s color form paintings such as *White Over Red*, his philosophy of art has to be understood *in-between* idealism and materialism. In this sense, Rothko’s art is materialized on a canvas and evolves after its completion through its performance in the audience’s consciousness.

After the work of art is materialized, the physical materiality, and the audience change through time. That action is also present in other artistic mediums such as sculpture. Another artist that has been influenced by modernist aesthetic is Richard Serra. Serra’s *Vortex 2002* (see fig. 2) is performed without spatialized time. Within changes in the physical materiality, the performance of Serra’s sculpture changes as well. Both changes happen in front of a new or the same audience. Serra’s *Vortex 2002* is a stand sculpture made of 67’ tall steel. The steels are curved and twisted, which allows the audience to walk through the interior of the 230-ton sculpture. Since steel is a material that oxidizes with time, this work of art is visibly perceived in *durée*. The physical materiality of *Vortex 2002* changes the perception of the individual who previous to visiting the museum, perceived only a photograph *Vortex 2002*. In addition, the perception of the audience, who comes back after some time to perceive the art again, is different; it changes. Even though the form is the same, the colors change because of the oxidation. (Even though the oxidation process stops its faster course after eight or ten years, this process is the more visible indication of oxidation.) Not only does the audience perceive art that changes, but the audience is always changing as well because the experience of *durée* is a reciprocal and continuous action. Once the individual is inside of Serra’s sculpture, every sound (steps, screams, speech, inhalations, and exhalations, etc.) is a condition of *durée*. There are external aspects in the art and in the audience that create at every particular moment a different performance. A *Vortex 2002* picture for the Museum of Modern Art of Fort Worth (where the
sculpture is located) compared to one taken in 2010 reveals a difference in degree (see fig. 3). The picture taken during my third visit exposes more oxidation. The difference of degrees caused by the oxidation affects not only how the art is seen but also how it affects sounds. Aspects such as the weather, the wind, and the position of the audience, including the differences of the height, weight, age of every individual, create a different performance. The sunlight comes into the inside of the art, but the experience depends on the time of the day, if it is cloudy, sunny, dark, or raining. In addition, the audience decides their own position inside. These two external aspects of the performance create an art that does not repeat in the same way because it also creates differences in kind.

Figure # 2 Richard Serra, *Vortex*, 2002, 67’ 10” x 21’ 9” x 20’ 10”
Cor-ten steel. Photograph by David Woo

The audience’s physical position, whether on the inside or the outside of *Vortex 2002*, creates differences of degree when the audience is not active or when the audience is affected by the art. Although this relation (no matter where the audience is positioned physically) is located within the work of art in order to experience art through intuition. For the performance to happen, both differences in degree and differences in kind have to exist. In order for the performance to take place, the audience needs to experience differences in kind. Differences of degree only reveal the material aspect of art. Serra’s art is performed when there is an outside performer. Again, being an outsider does not mean literally outside but physically external to the art. The audience becomes an insider through the experience of the work of art. A picture of *Vortex 2002* within a book does not permit the audience to be active since Serra’s sculpture

Figure # 3 Richard Serra, *Vortex*, 2002, 67’ 10” x 21’ 9” x 20’ 10”
Cor-ten steel. Photograph by Antonio Delgado
requires a physically present audience. Different pictures, taken during an interval of time, reveal differences of degree in relation to the material composition of the sculpture. Even though those juxtaposed pictures reveal time, this duration does not reveal the differences in kind that are required by performance art. The pictures reveal quantitative time. The pictures spatialize time. Thus, during the performance the audience creates differences in kind and without spatializing time. There may be differences in kind between different pictures, but, concerning Serra’s *Vortex 2002*, it has limits. Through performance Serra’s sculpture is inserted into an openness. The standstill steels are more than construction materials; they become a whole within consciousness in the world. Without an audience, they are basically misplaced steels. The fact that these steel slabs are located at the left of the museum designed by Tadao Ando, next to the Kimbell Art Museum, designed by Louis Kahn, and no further than a hundred yards from Miró’s sculpture’s *Woman Addressing the Public*, proves that its location is not accidental and provides an *a priori* idea regarding art. At the same time, the location affects an audience who questions if what that audience experiences is art or not. Standing next to *Vortex 2002*, I experienced how some individuals do not understand the standing steels as an artistic expression until they perform it: experiencing their steps’ sounds, the echoes of their voices, and, depending on time of day, the light that illuminates the inside (see fig. 4). The experience allows the audience to apprehend Serra’s sculpture as worldly.

The writer also stands in a space between idealism and materialism. Without a reader, a book is only words organized at the writer’s discretion. A book is not, necessarily, by itself a work of art. A book is experienced in *durée*, which is only possible through a reader. Conversely, the writer needs to affect the reader in different ways. According to Kandinsky, when an artist
affects the audience, he creates freedom. A writer finds harmony when he discovers the spirituality in words: “even a familiar word like ‘hair,’ if used in a certain way can intensify an atmosphere of sorrow or despair” (Concerning the Spirituality in Art 31). To intensify the atmosphere of a word implies for the artist to create associations in the audience beyond the word’s common references or clichés. How the audience members are affected beyond their own reference is a paradox. The audience’s references and prejudices are consciously present.
However, there are other references that the audience does not have present, or that do not interest them until that moment. These references are similar to dream material: what does not interest us during our waking perception of the world.

When the work of art becomes matter, without denying *durée*, it can be apprehended by the *men* of action, such as Joyce’s epiphany. Bergson proves that our mind apprehends *durée* but not without the body; the mind takes part of space through its inseparable brain functions. For that reason the mind needs the body, and that is also why the brain’s injury does not allow the mind to apprehend and to understand the world. How, then, can a novel or a poem happen between idealism and materialism? How can reading be an act that happens between idealism and materialism, since words seem to represent ideas and material objects, and they lack materiality? It happens through perceptions. The writer perceives the world, discovers something that was hidden from man by habit, and transforms it into literature. Then, the reader is affected by the text. The reader must follow the flux of the text: thoughts and not ideas. It has to be said, that for no reason this experience is linear or it happens as a chain of events. The artist does not have control over which specific experience the audience has. Since the audience is made of individuals who express differences according to their personal becoming, the artist’s performance becomes multiple.

### 3.3 The Artist as Creator of Action and Possibilities

We cannot deny the influence of dreams in the creative process, but dreams by themselves cannot create. On the other hand, *some act of disorganization* takes place in dreams. At the same time, dreams cannot materialize creation but bring a language to the work of art. We dream for ourselves, being the only witness of our personal recollections. In dreams nothing becomes active unless something is dragged to the waking life. Bergson emphasizes that action
does not occur in the oneiric life; action is part of the waking life, leading consciousness to act, to create, to live a life that is opposed to the vegetative or animal life. If action takes place between the present and future, it is because the memories that interest us work in the present and move toward the future. The body, which is “situated between the matter which influences it and that on which it has influence,” is the center of action (Matter and Memory 138) and does not function actively in the oneiric life. Dreams are mainly composed of “the past we sometimes fail to recognize” in our waking lives (Mind-Energy 114). In order to act, to live, consciousness needs to be situated in the present, which is what interests us at some particular moment. Then, we use memories (the virtual past that becomes actualized in the present) in order to move toward the future. For that reason, thoughts are created in the waking life, not in dreams. In dreams, we experience a state of relaxation: “in a few seconds a dream can present to us a series of events which would occupy, in the waking state, entire days” (128). When we wake from our dreams, we cannot remember the entire dream, and, thus, we begin to fill the gaps and organize our memory of the dream in a “meaningful” way, forming and deforming the dream’s content. The moment when we recraft our dreams is also action.

We have the control to make decisions and, willingly, create art within the creation of the self, which is not possible in the oneiric life since our body is resting. However, the self during the oneiric life is in contact with memories from the waking life, adding content material for the possible active life. Bergson uses the example of “Devil's Trill Sonata,” in which Tartini dreamed that the devil teaches him this violin solo. According to Bergson, Tartini learned how to play the solo after he woke because he already knew the notes from his previous memories. Tartini added to the dream to create the violin solo during the waking life. For this reason, action implies consciousness and becoming, in a material world; action also implies self, the mind,
within the spiritual world. In other words, action prolongs our consciousness: from our past, enlarging our present and contracting the past, to our present that is enlarged by memory toward the future.

Following Bergson, one can argue that if the past is continuously pressing into the present, an artist’s creation is a product of his own past, which includes every voluntary or involuntary perception of the world and denies a creation *ex nihilo*, while also including the present conditions the artist has at any given moment. The artist’s individuality is what makes the work of art. But also, every influence from the past moves the artist to create in a present that escapes him. Even if the artist “foresees” his work before it is finished, the final product will not be exactly what the artist expected from any present moment before the work is completed; “at every moment [consciousness] is creating something” (*Creative Evilution* 29). Bergson states of the possible:

> As reality is created as something unforeseen and new, its image is reflected behind it into the indefinite past; thus it finds that it has from all time been possible, but it is at this precise moment that it begins to have been possible, and that is why I said that its possibility, which does not precede its reality, will have preceded it once the reality has appeared.

 (*The Creative Mind* 82)

According to Bergson, the possible “would therefore have become reality by the addition of something” (82). When “the artist in executing his work is creating the possible as well as the real” (84). For an artist is not possible to create without considering his own becoming, his own duration. Thus, we can state that the creative process takes part in *durée* without foreseeing the future as prophetic.
In that regard, Kundera, in a Bergsonian understanding of the literary tradition, rejects the idea that Kafka is a prophet.

Kafka made no prophecies. All he did was see what was “behind.” He did not know that his seeing was also fore-seeing. He did not intend to unmask a social system. He shed light on the mechanism he knew from private and microsocial human practice, not suspecting that later developments would put those mechanisms into action on the great stage of History. (The Art of the Novel 116)

Bergson states, “We must resign ourselves to the inevitable: it is the real which makes itself possible, and not the possible which becomes real” (The Creative Mind 85). Max Brod’s analysis of his friend adjudicates the title of prophet. Kafka does not prophesize the totalitarian regime but explores the possibilities of it according to his experiences. In other words, the awareness of the past allows Kafka to reveal a future, that may or may not happen, and that is productive of a creative mind. The future that takes place is the work of art. Even though Kundera does not mention Bergson’s philosophy in his essay, his argument is a response to adjudicate the artist’s capacity to understand the world that is not yet present. Kafka’s works reveal an understanding of previous artists, as well as his personal thoughts.

It can be argued that Kafka’s work is original in some senses, but the topics of his works are not new to anyone. A work of art occurs as part of the durée of the artist and of his contemporary. Because there is no such thing as an isolated artist, the artist adds his particular understanding and includes other’s influences according to his particular aesthetic. Flaubert, Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, Cervantes and Homer, among others, influenced Kafka’s work. However, Kafka does not write like any of them; he creates his own form. A careful analysis of
the letter he never sent to his father reveals a critique of the German enlightenment, proving, at the same time, the past pushing forward. Kafka’s accusation to his father is nothing but a complaint concerning the idea of how parents should educate their children in order to make society work as an organized structure. Still, the argument of his work as original cannot fall into the argument that he created *ex nihilo*. Kafka, as Kundera repeats, reveals what is hidden behind the curtain, which is similar to the Bergsonian possible. The artist discovers, in Bergson’s terminology what “already exists actually or virtually” (*The Creative Mind* 37). The artist has the capacity for uncovering and discovering what is in the present, but the artist cannot do it without the virtual, without the past. Minding the hidden problem, discovering the questions that are present in the world, and materializing them through art is the artist’s *raison d’être*. According to Kundera, the novel expresses its position in the world as the art that reveals what philosophy cannot do in the same way because the novel, or art, is not concerned with solutions but with discovering the questions that make the world a worldly place, a political place in which mankind experiences freedom. The artist uses what happens in time and space, in duration, in order to reveal the possible; when the virtual is apprehended and is understood, the artist uses it in order to act. The man of action, the artist, reveals the possible through creation of a work that takes place in the world. In doing this, the artist also creates a world that is real.

How, then, do some artists seem to foresee “the future”? John Bishop mentions in his introduction to the Penguin edition of Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* that someone found a mention of the formula hydrogen bomb in the novel (xii). Does that mean that we can adjudicate to Joyce the rank of prophet? Did Joyce know about the bomb when it is in process? Or, did Joyce’s novel foresee the possibility of that catastrophe? To start answering these questions, I will agree with Freud that sometimes, in a dream, a cigar is just a cigar. Sometimes, a mere chance brings out
arguments without deserving further discussion. Still, those chances do not imply that an artist’s creation happens ex nihilo. The artist’s past includes every aspect of the worldly experience: literature, newspaper, etc. To call the world is to call the mind in matter. Every individual’s experience is materialized beyond his relation with other individuals. If the mind retains every memory, if nothing is forgotten but is, instead, called into being in the artist’s personality, then the virtual should replace the idea of ex nihilo. More precisely, the individual materializes thoughts through action. The future is foreseen as the possible not as a prophecy, and exposed by an artist becoming in the present; even though it will never become literally actual does not mean that the artist is a prophet, but that the artist is living in action and durée. Still, and with these considerations, we cannot tell if Joyce is a prophet of the catastrophe of the twentieth century.

On the other hand, and beside the influences that lead to the work of art, every work of art contains and engenders its own path: “for the human mind is so constructed that it cannot begin to understand the new until it has done everything in its power related to the old” (The Creative Mind 88). Joyce’s Finnegans Wake is an example of the influence of other works. The constant research and reworking that is constituted in the final text of Finnegans Wake still occupies many academics today, who are still trying to decipher Joyce’s text through genetic studies. One cannot understand Finnegans Wake without Joyce’s being Irish, Catholic, a poet, and everything from his past that pushes into his future. Finnegans Wake is a result of years of reading, perceptions, and an active life crafted by the artist into art. In the same way, Quijote wanders around the world acting as a knight, knowing every rule that will help him to find his path, as the novel does, because he read every chivalrous text at hand. Since the first pages of the novel, Cervantes names some of the books read by Quijote, the books that make his self. By the
end, the work of art is able to produce its own effect whether or not the other works that influenced it are understandable or not.

Joyce’s and Cervantes’ novels are not the culmination but the continuation of previous productions or creations and the start for possible creations. Their works produce and influence other artists as well. Deleuze states that Proust’s novel: *is the work of art that produces within itself and upon itself its own effects, and is filled with them and nourished by them: the work of art is nourished by the truths it engenders*” (*Proust and Signs* 154). These understandings are products of the effects that the work of art has on other artists and on the individual. Freedom and understanding come into being together when the conditions for politics are favorable. For this reason, the artist needs to work without prejudice, without imposing any ideological agenda that commits his work with any *a priori* knowledge. Still, it could be argued that the tradition stands as *a priori* knowledge. However, this is the world where the artist has to act as a new beginner. The artist has a will to decide what to add to his creation, taking from everywhere, from the whole of the world, and opens to every possibility that can provide through his work in order to move into a future that does not yet exist.

As Deleuze states in *Proust and Signs* and later emphasizes with Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the work of art is a machine capable of producing and reproducing itself. But, the art’s machine produces multiplicities, which also perpetuate the production of multiplicities. What the work of art multiplies is its meaning into an “apparent chaos.” Deleuze, in reference to Joyce, states,

It is only when the significant contents and the ideal significations have collapsed and given way to multiplicity of fragments, to chaos – but in addition, the subjective forms of chaotic and multiple impersonal reality –
that the work of art assumes its full meaning, that is, exactly all the meanings one wants it to have according to its functioning; the essential point being that it function, that the machine works. *(Proust and Signs* 155-56)

Even though there is chaos, the work of art is whole, a part of another whole “by virtues of these new linguistic conventions” in which, one can argue, consciousness becomes its own coding machine (156). Understanding is difficult because of the chaos the art machine produces. These codes do not correspond to the traditional structure but to movement through *durée*, which engenders a new understanding.

Shiv Kumar recognizes a Bergsonism in the modernist aesthetics Joyce reflects in his novels. According to Kumar, Bergson proposes a different aesthetic for a new, emergent novelist when he states, the novelist “ceases to have any *point de vue* in the traditional sense, as his object is to reproduce, as faithfully as possible, his character’s internal rhythms of thought and experience” (“Bergson’s Theory of the Novel” 174). In other words, modernist artists do not intend to reproduce life in a traditional way but through action, through the real flux of movement. There has to be an abandonment of the old habit that limits characters to material description that avoids the constant change that occurs in their inner life.

The work of art itself offers a new code, a deformed code, regarding its own truth, a new understanding of reading and thinking a work of art that is conscious with the artist experiencing time as indivisible. Following Bergson, if consciousness is in a constant state of change preserving the past in the present when the artist is creating, then Joyce’s technique decodes language in a constant flux of decoding every codified language. Neither *Ulysses* nor *Finnegans Wake* are examples of a different code of language. From this, we can say that modernist art
takes place in politics, that modernist art only takes place in action since action is the capacity to
create differences. There is no origin; in the Nietzschean sense of origin, the origin cannot be
placed in the specificity of time, but only in duration, in constant movement. Politics is not an
anarchist idea. Politics take place within an organized structure in which individuals
communicate thoughts and define the work of art as part of the whole, as differences that are
constantly born between-men.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE POLITICS OF THE IDIOTIC MESSENGER

Everything that happened happened inside it, and at the same time everything that happened outside it.
Samuel Beckett, *Watt*

... we should reestablish continuity in our knowledge as a whole,— a continuity which would no longer be hypothetical and constructed but experienced and lived.
Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*

Knowing is always a way to dilate the farewell.
José Liboy Erba, *Cada vez te despides mejor*

Beckett’s modernism is peculiar in his distance from his predecessors, while still recognizing them. Characters from *Watt, Nohow On, The Unnamable, How It Is* and his later short fiction show traces of Proust’s conception of memory, but also Bergsonism. At the same time, other modernist artists, like Kafka and Gombrowicz, illuminate Beckett’s aesthetics of communication, which stands in-between going on and not being able to go on but ultimately going on. I called this an aesthetics of the “idiotic messenger.” The idiotic messenger creates a space of politics but also deforms the message he carries while questioning the codes in which such a message has been written. Watt is arguably one of Beckett’s most compelling characters. In the novel name after his name, Beckett shows us how this enigmatic character is always being perceived by others. Even though the reader notices that Sam records Watt’s own recollections, Sam organizes Watt’s recollections in a coherent form, leaving the confusing beginning (with the narrator difficulty since Watt cannot witness himself from a significant distance) for the reader to ponder, as it is unclear how Sam knows about such events. The narrative makes it difficult to verify a reliable messenger or communicator, which is symptomatic of what I define as the idiotic messenger.

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4“Conocer es siempre una forma dilatada de la despedida” (José Liboy Erba, *Cada vez te despides mejor* 12).
4.1 Non-Communication=Idiotism

Beckett’s modernism deals with different forms of art production that communicate politics, differences even through non-communication. In Watt, Watt does not recognize a pot as a pot. The object does not correspond in Watt’s mind to what it is in itself. The pot remains present in front of him. In other ways, the pot remains an object; the pot does not disappear because a word does not name it. The pot does not stop being a pot but stops being recognized as a pot and does not change simply because Watt is not able to recognize it. Watt is unable to recognize the word, the concept that names the pot. The word “pot” cannot encompass the object; the word “pot” does not represent the thing itself. As Bergson states, language prevents us from knowing the thing itself. However, Watt’s experience does not leave the world empty, as in a vacuum; it communicates non-communication. Still, Watt’s inability to understand language affects everyone around him. Thus, Watt’s non-communication communicates something that both Watt as a messenger and the message receiver try to apprehend.

Beckett’s work does not yield a simple understanding. Interpreting Beckett’s work is a task that cannot be fully accomplished through any particular theory since his texts elude particular interpretations. His work consists of an awareness of the hermeneutic process; as soon as an interpretation attempts to ground them, his work turns against such intention. Beckett’s awareness of literary and philosophical problems tears down the possibility to confirm any possible hermeneutics when are questioned by his characters. In his book on Murphy, C. J. Ackerly demonstrates how the Cartesian model fails to generate a life without the body. All understanding of Beckett’s work needs to assume the impossibility of finding a satisfactory knowledge through any specific hermeneutics. A variety of philosophical and literary references in his work, without being validated, are constantly struggling against each other. For example,
in *Murphy* we have the Cartesian *cogito* being denied. The incorporation of philosophical references posits the capacity of Beckett’s work to carry any codified message, or to carry differences. The reader waits for the codified message, like Vladimir and Estragon do for Godot, and, as Mercier and Camier, the reader finally may “drop the subject,” the text. At the same time, Beckett’s works can be compared to Molloy’s trying to meet with Moran in order to realize the impossibility of recognizing the embracement of the Jungian archetypal model (no universality is in Beckett’s work but, rather an exploration of individualities). The impossibility to reconcile his texts with a particular hermeneutics leads us to question what kind of “message,” if there is one, the messenger carries and the validity and purpose of that “message.”

Juan Duchesne-Winter, in “Idiota escritor,” defines Beckett’s characters as “idiotic subjects.” Idiotic here refers to one “who only is able to express in a language that no one knows”; at the same time, he is, “indifferent to any sense or meaning”\(^5\) (*Fugas incomunistas* 105). Duchesne-Winter states, “The modern writer is a most authentic messenger when he convinces us that he does not bring any message from anyone”\(^6\) (106). This definition of the modern writer has two negations. First, the modern writer is idiotic; he is only a catalyst who every time he expresses something, expresses what no one can understand. He thus expresses nothing. His nothingness does not exist in a vacuum, for his nothingness creates “sense” something happens. Second, the modern writer (as messenger) has not been sent by anyone. No one knows from where he comes. He only proceeds with the message as if it were meaningful. At the same time, he has no interest in the message, but rather in the function of messenger. Does the idiotic messenger’s definition fail to ground a definition? Does this argument define literature as an empty place? Does literature need to say something? If the function of literature is to say

\(^5\) Translations from Duchesne’s *Fugas Incommunistas* are mine.

\(^6\) “El escritor moderno es un mensajero tanto más auténtico cuanto más nos convence de que no trae mensaje alguno de parte de nadie.” (Duchesne-Winter, *Fugas Incommunistas* 106)
something, does this something have to be understood, meaningful, clear, true? According to Duchesne-Winter, the world is not clear and distinguishable and language is idiotic, not a nomenclature; the world lacks any inherent meaning, and it is man who produces sense from that illusion. Consequently, literature should not assume to be clear and distinguished.

This definition of the modern writer resonates with Beckett’s characters: Watt and Mr. Knott in *Watt*, Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*, Molloy and Moran in *Molloy*, etc. All these characters experience collapsing subjectivity, one that is created through the social structure. None of these characters takes a position in which they remain productive to society. Following Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*, Beckett’s characters experience a disjuncture of their productive role in society and stop the “flows” and “codes” of their communities (275-76). This disjunction determines a subject, which does not transmit a “codified message.”

Duchesne-Winter’s definition of the modern writer assumes a particular definition of the subject. According to him, the subject is not singular but shares singularities with other subjects. The subject perceives other singularities, which become intrinsic to his idiotic self. Duchesne-Winter’s modern writer can be understood better through what Gombrowicz states in his *Diary*:

> [M]y man is created from the outside, that is, he is inauthentic in essence – he is always not-himself, because he is determined by form, which is born between people. His “I”, therefore, is marked for him in the “inter-humanity”. An eternal actor, but a natural one, because his artificiality is inborn, it makes up a feature of his humanity – to be a man means to

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7 Although, this definition does not completely succeeds to understand Beckett’s characters. On the other hand, it cannot be entirely reject.
pretend to be a man- to be a man is to “act like” a man while not being one deep inside- to be a man is to recite humanity. (Diary 2 4)

For Gombrowicz, there is no essence in the subject. Every human is an empty space. Every relation with others becomes an act in which one pretends, or acts, to be what one is not: a vacuum.

A vacuum does not designate an empty space in any strict sense. However, the idea of a vacuum is what Bergson defines as “disorder” and “nothingness.” There is no such thing as an “empty space” if this is considered qualitatively. The empty space, a vacuum, nothingness, designates a presence: “the presence of a thing or an order which does not interest us” (The Creative Mind 49). Bergson elaborates on this through the idea of order and disorder: “to speak of the absence of all order and all things, that is, to speak of absolute disorder and absolute nothingness, is to pronounce words void of meanings” (49). Language expresses absence in a vacuum as lack or reality. Absence has more presence than the idea of presence: the idea of what is present and what is absent, the idea of nothingness. Thus, absence is more real than presence.

The idiotic messenger, as I propose, pretends to carry the vacuum. In Latin to pretend is related to postulatum, simulatio, simulare, fingere, and affectare. Postulatum implies a demand, or a claim. The messenger is the one who postulates, who demands something, an answer, a response. Even when his message is not clear, he expects something (idiotism?). At the same time, his idiotism carries a deceiving message (simulare). In addition, the messenger and the message are corrupted. The idiotic messenger pretends to be what he is not, and carries a message that does not communicate. He is corrupted because he is an actor and because he imitates and impersonates. The idiotic messenger intellectually supposes (fingere) a message. Even though his message is corrupted, not codified and difficult to analyze, the messenger
himself, the corrupter of the message, is not corrupted in the same way. The messenger’s ambition is to make a presence of himself and to affect others with his message. The problem is that he is not like everyone else thus he is misunderstood.

Duchesne-Winter does not deal with the messenger’s pretention as I propose. Instead, he names him “the idiotic writer.” He does not delineate the consequences of using the verb to pretend. However, some of the meanings are implied with the notion of the idiotism. Duchesne-Winter uses Dostoevsky’s Myshkin and Beckett’s Watt as examples of idiotic writers. In *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin is able to affect everyone without noticing or causing anyone else to notice. He does not carry a message but catalyzes the life of every character that runs into him.⁸ In relation to Watt, Duchesne-Winter states that, “his oddities are not part of his incapacities, but from his capacity to denature the functions that may define him as a natural human being” (112).⁹ Then, he adds, “when Watt perceives and thinks, he shows total uninterest in knowing what things really mean. He only tries to know what significance is pretended… from the nothing that happens” (113).¹⁰ A casual reader, since the beginning of *Watt*, notices the unconventional narrative and Watt’s behavior. However, we cannot understand Watt, as a character, as someone who is not part of the whole of the world. Watt’s idiotism expresses what a common fictional character is unable to express.

Following Duchesne-Winter’s argument, the idiotic messenger experiences not-belonging to language in order to assume a message that does not become an experience that can be represented through *écriture* but that rescues its meaning as an event and the event as meaning.

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⁸ Dostoevsky’s novel describes the daily life of the characters after the arrival of Mischkin, and how his presence affects everyone around him.

⁹ “Sus rarezas no parecen derivar de sus incapacidades, sino de su capacidad para desnaturalizar aquellas funciones que lo definirían como ser humano natural.” (Duchesne-Winter 112)

¹⁰ “Al percibir y pensar, Watt muestra total desinterés en saber lo que las cosas realmente significan, solo intenta saber aquello que pretende que signifiquen… a partir de esa nada que ocurre.” (113)
According to his argument, Watt does not recognize essence in speech since his message refers to things as something that is not, and that keeps being as such. The problem with this argument is that Watt is described solely as one who does not recognize the relation between words. In *Watt*, the narrator states:

> For the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something, just as the only way one can speak of God is to speak of him as though he were a man, which to be sure he was, in a sense, for a time, and the only way one can speak of man, even our anthropologists have realized that, is to speak of him as though he were a termite. (77)

Duchesne-Winter does not reject intrinsic meaning entirely. However, he argues that Watt is unable to recognize a sequence of words, such as the ones quoted, but Watt is unable to recognize the sense of this sequence. Duchesne-Winter insists that Watt, in his indifference, does not decode words in order to uncover what is signified, but to discover what one “pretends” to make them signify (114). Watt is not able to recognize the relation between language and the “thing” because a relation does not exist. Watt does not recognize *a priori* concepts. The analysis proposed by Duchesne-Winter assumes the existence of discourse and concepts as already given not as part of new possible creations. At this time, Watt experiences his life, or fails to, through Bergsonism, although thoughts escape Watt. Watt is one step closer to the deformation of language as Beckett proposes in *Proust* and in the “German Letter.” For a better understanding of Beckett’s deformation of language it is necessary to discuss his monograph on Proust, the “German Letter,” and Gombrowicz’s aesthetics as *inter mezzo*. The discussion overlaps and expands the understanding of the idiotic messenger in relation to the message’s receiver, the message itself, and the world in where idiotism takes place.
4.2 Deformation: *Durée*

The object evolves, and by the time the conclusion - if any – is reached, it is already out of date. Samuel Beckett

Beckett’s monograph on Marcel Proust’s *À La Recherche du Temps Perdu* states that habit is the enemy of involuntary memory, and involuntary memory is the only way artists discover the world, which evolves and changes through the subject’s experience. Even though there is no mention of Bergson’s philosophy, Beckett intended to add “5 or 6 pages to the last 9” in which he “would like to develop the parallel with Dostoyevsky and separate Proust’s intuitivism from Bergson’s” (*The Letters of Samuel Beckett* 52). Without those pages Beckett elaborates solely on Proust’s movement, without mentioning Bergson’s *durée*. After Beckett some other authors have discussed Proust, like Deleuze, who, like Beckett, adds an important understanding for modernism. Deleuze’s book on Proust distinguishes between Proust’s and Bergson’s work. Beckett does not intend to clarify that distinction or to privilege one over the other. Beckett and Deleuze focus on involuntary memory as the most important part of “the attainment” (for Beckett) and “apprenticeship” (for Deleuze). Bergson also considers the artist an important agent to whom the creative process happens in *durée*. For Beckett, movement is related, and in some instances equals involuntary memory in opposition to voluntary memory, which is the “cancer of time” (*Proust* 18), time being “damnation and salvation” (11). In order to understand time as cancer, we need to examine primarily the relation of involuntary memory and the artist, and how Bergson’s philosophy influences Beckett’s understanding of Proust’s definition of the artist while Beckett creates for his own art’s aesthetics. This discussion delineates characteristics of the idiotic messenger, as well as analyzes Beckett’s deformation of language in relation to Arendt’s politics.
As one knows, Bergson’s philosophy, among other philosophies, influenced modernist artists. To trace Bergson’s philosophy through other philosophers, such as Deleuze, who has interest in art, is easy. Schopenhauer influences Proust. However, since the comparisons to Bergson are inevitable, Proust needs to clarify that his novels have nothing to do with the Bergsonian durée: “They are not Bergsonian novels, for my work is dominated by a distinction which not only does not figure in Bergson’s philosophy but which is even contradicted by it” ([*Letters of Marcel Proust*](https://example.com) 272). The same cannot be said about Beckett’s works. Beckett’s *Proust* mentions Schopenhauer as Proust’s influence.\(^{11}\) Even though both Deleuze and Beckett are interested in Proust’s work, Beckett is interested in his own understanding of time just as he deals with Proust’s aesthetics. According to Deleuze, “Proust does not in the least conceive change as a Bergsonian duration, but as a defection, a race to the grave” (*Proust and Signs* 18). Beckett calls time a cancer in agreement with Deleuze and Proust, but defines involuntary memory as part of the internal duration of the individual’s consciousness resembling Bergsonism.

An understanding of Bergson’s pure memory as the memories that we do not need for present action or habit, leads us to argue that the artist depends on memories that are not suitable for mechanic actions. Bergson states that habit “acts our past experience but does not call up its image.” In opposition to pure memory, habit is not “coextensive with consciousness” (*Matter and Memory* 151). Body memory functions by habit, which is the instantaneous memory that helps us to organize the body’s actions in the present. However, the mind, consciousness, depends on memory. Consciousness exists because of all the past that endures. The artist depends on both pure memory and on involuntary memory, through which comes the necessary

\(^{11}\) Beckett sent a letter to Charles Prentice asking about the possibility to add some pages by the end of Proust in order to distinguish “intuitivism” between Bergson and Proust ([*The Letters of Samuel Beckett 1929-1940*](https://example.com) 52).
memories, or the material, for creating art. Involuntary memory is recalled through present action, and not in its entirety because it experiences the self through durée. We can say that consciousness experiences the duration of the inner life through involuntary memory. The artist transforms and creates thoughts out of the memory material that comes from involuntary memory. However, habit is still important for our present action. Habit does not call images from the past to help us to repeat actions, but they can call forward involuntarily memories. Involuntary memories do not help the artist to create, to connect ideas, since these connections come from pure memories, from our own duration, but they organize life and thereby make creating possible.

According to Bergson, the artist sees what we cannot perceive naturally. Material for the artist’s creations does not come from nowhere (creation ex nihilo is not possible) or from habit, but from all that has been perceived by the artist. “What is the aim of art,” Bergson states, “if not to show us, in nature and in the mind, outside of us and within us, things which did not explicitly strike our senses and our consciousness?” (The Creative Mind 112). The artist recalls from his past perceptions. Even though his memories do not take place again, as memories took place before, since we change constantly, the artist transforms memories from the present state of consciousness. The artist brings about this transformation to reveal reality without imitation, to reveal the continuous change of the self. A specific feeling is recalled, and in naming it becomes a word, an idea, but this idea does not resemble the experience because the feeling has differences in degree. The artist transforms his idea into a thought. For example, a past time in which the artist recalls anger, this feeling is called into his present consciousness, which endures. The same degree of the past’s experience is not recalled. The feeling changes in degree and not
in kind. If that feeling is related to an individual, then both the individual and the feeling have changed within the artist who recalls, and keeps changing through the work of art.

Following Bergson’s philosophy, and as I discussed in the previous chapter, we can infer that, after the artist’s death, the work of art is still part of durée. It remains in the audience. In this sense, Proust’s art is part of Beckett’s literature and Deleuze’s philosophy. However, if the artist is condemned to die, to stop moving in time, can we expect the same from his work? For Proust the object of desire disappears with the death of the subject. According to Beckett, Proust’s involuntary memory saves us from habit; involuntary memory resurrects the past but the resurrected past is deformed. Time is not recoverable, nor is the desired object, which is precisely the problem: the desired object is deformed when it is brought forward by involuntary memory (Proust 53). Habit cannot influence this creative action. Habit preludes the author from experiencing involuntary memories. It also adapts the individual to the present action and it enslaves the artist to voluntary actions. This definition of habit is different from Bergson’s.

Beckett, following Proust, has Schopenhauer’s philosophy in mind. According to this understanding, habit limits the knowledge of the world. However, and according to James Acheson, since the object of desire changes we change as well. Habit controls us, forcing us to adapt to the experience of boredom. Involuntary memory is the only way out of habit (Samuel Beckett’s Artistic Theory and Practice 9-10).

Acheson argues that Beckett’s Proust fails to be clear about Schopenhauer’s influence in Proust (8). Conversely, Beckett does not elaborate on Schopenhauer’s philosophy, not even to explain terms such as “ideas.” As we know, and as Acheson recognizes, Beckett’s works do not follow any philosophy in particular but uncover the world as a paradox. In a letter to Tom McGreevy, Beckett says that he was reading Schopenhauer not “caring whether he is right or
wrong or a good or worthless metaphysician” (The Letters of Samuel Beckett 1929-1949 33).

Beckett’s lack of interest in confirming or denying Schopenhauer’s philosophy and its influence in Proust’s monumental novel proves that Beckett is looking for his own aesthetics. We can also guess what would have been made of Proust if Beckett ended up adding the pages he wanted to add on Bergson and Dostoevsky. However, that is too much speculation. We know through Beckett’s letter that he was reading Bergson during that time. On the other hand, in the omission of Schopenhauer, there is a need not to agree entirely with Proust’s aesthetics.

Even though Beckett does not mention Bergson in Proust, clearly a Bergsonian influence remains, especially when Beckett argues against habit and when he defines involuntary memory. The fact that Beckett mentions Schopenhauer may mislead the reader away from a Bergsonian influence on Beckett’s conception of the artist. Obviously, Beckett leaves philosophical gaps in his essay (after all Beckett’s essay is not on philosophy). The discussion is not to trying to reconcile Bergson’s philosophy with Proust’s novel or Schopenhauer’s philosophy, or even with Beckett’s own work. Beckett’s Proust is not solely on Proust’s literature, but on his own forthcoming works, as Beckett seems to admit. In addition, he argues that the title, Le Temp Retrouvé, is inappropriate to its content, since time is not regained, as Crime and Punishment is an inappropriate title because the work “contains no allusion to either crime or punishment” (Proust 75). This statement should be considered one of non-communication that words express when we codify language. The mention, and subsequent non-elaboration on Dostoevsky, connects Proust’s, and Beckett’s own, aesthetics with this modern tradition. In this sense, Dostoevsky’s Myshkin has been influenced by Cervantes’ Quijote such as Beckett’s Watt is influenced by both of them.
Clearly an awareness of change, of deformation, exists. Early in *Proust*, Beckett states, “the world of our own latent consciousness, and its cosmography has suffered a dislocation” (13). Consciousness changes from one hour to the next, from yesterday to today: “The mood is not important. Deformation has taken place.” Also, “there is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us” (13). That deformation is related to Proust aesthetics in which we deform our object of desire until it is lost with our death (44, 53, 78). That is why Beckett quotes Segismundo statement from de la Barca: “Pues el delito mayor/ Del hombre es haber nacido” (67). However, the notion of how consciousness perceives the external and its constant changes is Bergsonian. According to Beckett, “the observer infects the observed with his own mobility” (*Proust* 17). The ideal subject is qualified by the consciousness that desires the subject, but the desired subject also changes; the desired object is infected and deformed. Here we have again two notions: the Proustian inescapable movement to death, which infects the observed subject, and the Bergsonian mobility that occurs in the mind of the observer as the observer experiences intuition. For Proust, in order to apprehend the object, a moment occurs in which the subject, escaping from habit, understands the essence of the object of desire in a timeless moment. These contradictions cannot be reconciled with each other. Proustian time infects the object with the incapacity to satisfy the observer’s desire. In this sense, habit is the enemy of the artist and his involuntary memory since it stops this deformation. In this regard deformation is necessary for the artistic creation.

Beckett recognizes Proust’s pessimism in his conception of time as a “cancer” (18). The past can only be apprehended in retrospect. But time is not recovered, nor is the object of desire, if we consider that the past endures. When we recall the feelings of the present, consciousness has changed. Such action depends on the “unceasing modification of [the] personality, whose
permanent reality, if any, can only be apprehended as a retrospective hypothesis” (15).

According to Bergson, consciousness can explain reality in concepts but not from concepts to reality: “from intuition one can pass to analysis, but not from analysis to intuition” (An Introduction to Metaphysics 48). According to Bergson, analysis quantified the inner movement of consciousness, while through intuition, which is a “kind of intellectual sympathy, one places oneself within an object,” this is “our own personality in its flowing through time – our self which endures” (7, 9).

Life is a constant movement that includes not just individuals but everything that is in the world. Individuals have the capacity to affect and be affected. Life happens in the totality of the world that includes nature and everything that is made by men, including a pot. A pot, and any other object, has the capacity to affect individuals, to create movements that intersect the interval of life of every individual. To understand the individual through stages is to deny the constant becoming. One concept isolates a single point in the flux of thought and connects it with other single points in order to create a narrative based on “ideas,” to use, again, Bergson’s metaphor of the writer. In this sense, focusing on “ideas” instead of “thoughts” denies the inner movement of the mind, which apprehends the outer world; it denies intuition. As a consequence, analysis understands time mathematically, or quantitatively in Bergson’s terms. For Bergson, thoughts and ideas are different but connected: ideas are words included in the movement of thoughts creating harmony similar to the work of the writer. Once an idea is taken apart the flux of thought is interrupted. According to Bergson, the rhythm of consciousness is uninterrupted. Thus, a word cannot express the comings and goings of the mind. A word stops the thinking with one idea and stops the “flow of meaning.” Proust’s involuntary memory pretends to isolate the mind from time, denying its continuous movement. Focusing on ideas, as Proust seems to do,
stops the flux of time and the reality of becoming. It isolates one idea from *durée*; it sets the ideas apart in order for them to be understood. This process negates movement, and it privileges not just one idea over another, but negates even thought: “The idea is the halt of thought; it arises when thinking, instead of continuing its own train, makes a pause or its reflected back on itself” (*Mind-Energy* 55).

Assuming every word as an idea and the experience of the world as referential to *a priori* knowledge is dangerous. By force of habit every word is and has to be codified. On the other hand, Beckett’s “German Letter of 1937” proposes a rebellion against words, against interpretation and representation. Recognizing that he aspires to something more radical than Joyce’s work, Beckett states:

> At first it can only be a matter of somehow finding a method by which we can represent this mocking attitude toward the word, through words. In this dissonance between the means and their use it will perhaps become possible to feel a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlines All. (*Disjecta* 172)

Beckett advocates for “an assault against words in the name of beauty” (173). Beckett’s *Watt* escapes from concepts in several instances, as Watt fails to escape from habit. However, Watt remains as trying to understand concepts. The most memorable is Watt’s apprehension of the pot. Watt realizes that calling something by its name implies more than using a single word; it implies an idea, a concept.

> Looking at a pot… or thinking of a pot, at one of Mr. Knott’s pots, at one of Mr. Knott’s pot, of one of Mr. Knott’s pots, it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot… For it was not a pot, the more he looked, the more he
reflects, 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)

The pot loses its name, or the idea that it represents. Watt still focuses on one idea however interrupting the flux of thought (at least in this instance). The pot does not lose its meaning because Watt is incapable of escaping from habit.

Even though Beckett’s *Watt* plays with words, Watt himself lacks involuntary memory. Again, Beckett does not pretend to embrace either Bergson or Proust. Watt fails to experience intuition, and so cannot experience a life outside of habit (in the Proustian sense). Sam, the narrator, captures Watt’s impossibility to experience involuntary memory. However, Watt’s impossibility to call memories involuntarily does not result in boredom. Beckett introduces in *Watt* an aesthetics that was not foreseen by Proust: the assault on words. However, the assault on words on *Watt* happens through the disintegration of habit, without calling forward voluntary memory. Sam says about Watt: “the notorious difficulty of recapturing, at will, modes of feeling peculiar to a certain time, and to a certain place, and perhaps also to a certain state of health, when the time is past, and the place left, and the body struggling with quite a new situation” (75).

Right after Watt’s relation to the pot is told, Sam completes and finishes Watt’s story with his story about Watt’s incapacity to communicate through the conventionalism of language. Sam describes Watt’s communication as “the rapidity of his utterance and the eccentricities of his syntax, as elsewhere recorded” (75). The habitual words, the habitual understanding and communication, are assaulted by words. Although, Beckett does not assault concepts in order to create thoughts there is no fluidity in Sam’s witnessing Watt’s speech.
Beckett’s *Watt* does not embrace Proustian aesthetics nor does it follow Bergsonism. References to both of them exist. However, Watt does not have a past, and the objects, such as the pot, do not seem to recall involuntary memory either. Everything that Sam knows about him derives from the time Watt spent at Mr. Knott’s house. According to the narrator, “Watt learned towards the end of this stay in Mr. Knott’s house to accept that nothing had happened, than a nothing had happened, leaved to bear it and even, in a shy way, to like it” (80). The only movements in the novel are caused by habits, by mechanical circumstances that add nothing to his personality. How Watt was before his time at Mr. Knott’s house is not important for the novel. What is important for Sam is that he is still able to organize Watt’s narrative. Watt’s assault on words is still comprehensible after Sam organizes his words in thoughts. Even though Watt’s communication does not communicate anything relevant to his inner life, non-communication happens, even if we consider the incident with the piano and the painting on the wall. These incidents only reveal Watt’s incapacity to move, to experience *durée*. Still, we do not know for sure how the narrator organizes his story about Watt. However, we can tell the story is organized some time *a posteriori*.

4.3 The Absence of Nostalgia

What happens to Watt seems to mean nothing to Watt, and creates little effect on Watt’s mind in order for him to move toward the future. Time past is going to be lost without the capacity to experience even nostalgia. The Greek *nostos* means the “return.” More specifically nostalgia is the pain, or the suffering, in returning home. But, the expectation for home lacks experiencing time, and home is also the spatial place separated from *durée*. *Nostos* is the return to the old inhabited space as experienced before the present moment when the nostalgic feeling arises. Such place excludes the state of the mind or consciousness as an evolving process in
durée. Odysseus is the great hero returning home, but as it turns out, he is a failed hero. Odysseus spends time far from his country, but his country remains to him as a fixed idea instead of an enduring thought. His country becomes, after all, Penelope’s idea of the oikos, of the family order in which everyone has their own place. Odysseus fails because his returning means a going back to the same space within the unchanged feelings of the past, without the changes produced by durée. Such nostalgia produces spatialization of time, cutting the time out of his consciousness in relation to his former social position while he wanders. For Odysseus, nostalgia means to return as if those twenty years away from home, seven of which he spent with Calypso, have not produced any change in him towards Penelope. Memories are not capable of producing any new thought in Odysseus, but configure a timeless idea for his return home.

Nostalgia, as an idea, denies that in reality we see our past as ill seen, and that when we talk about we ill said it. For S.E. Gontarski, in his introduction to the Grove edition of Nohow On, “Not only are these ghostly imagined images ill seen, but they are ill said because the right word is always the ‘wrong word’” (xxiii). Nostalgia, as we know it, is not the right word for Beckett’s work or any other modernist work. In addition, “nostalgia” is not even the right word to describe our relationships with the past. Nothing can be regained from the past that has not evolved into our duration. The English word for “nostalgia,” homesickness, denies our relation with our internal duration. As Kundera states in his last novel, the nostalgic feeling remains its spatial characteristic related to the Greek nostos. According to Kundera,

In Spanish añoranza comes from the verb añorar (to feel nostalgia), which comes from the Catalan enyorar, itself from the Latin word ignorare (to be unaware of, not known, not experience; to lack or miss). In
that etymological light nostalgia seems something like the pain of ignorance, of not knowing. (*Ignorance* 6)

We do not know the past as it happens because our on duration, and, as a consequence, we ignore the past. In Beckett’s *Company*, his character remains ignorant in relation to the details: “Only a small part of what is said can be verified… But by far the greater part of what is said cannot be verified” (*Nohow On 3*). Gontarski also states, “The company of *Company*, then, is not the nostalgia of memory regained, the past recaptured, but the solace of “conjuring something out of nothing’” (xxii). We agree with Watt’s narrator, “Not that space is wanting, for space is not wanting. Not that time is lacking, for time is not lacking” (*Watt* 62).

Nostalgia is problematic for Bergsonism because it positions the past as unchanged, and also sets the present without any possible movement toward the future. Thus, nostalgia has the capacity to stop and/or create a new beginning from happening. In such a situation, the individual is incapable of understanding his own durée, falling into habit, or into the wrong “company.” In Latin, “company” (*consuetudo* and *consuescere*) means familiarity, habit. For Beckett, such familiarity and habit are ill ones, failing ones, which are, at the same time, the reason of continuing creating thoughts in order to “fail again” and to “fail better” (89). Instead of embracing nostalgia, Beckett’s work de-familiarizes, or deforms, company, excluding the *effect of the habitual*. Even though Beckett deforms the habitual, the habitual still exists through the same words and in memories, without producing the necessity to experience the same common places as nostalgia entails through an unchanging past.

**4.4 Communicating Non-Communication**

Everything is completely lost and nothing is completely lost. Transformation, a search for a different communication, exists, although this communication deforms referents. This non-
communication happens in *durée*, even if the idiotic messenger cannot experience his becoming, which does not mean it does not happen. The idiotic messenger can do this because he does not feel nostalgia. Thus, new “lines of communication” are necessary. An urgent need to be aware of the existing possibility for nostalgia exists in order to have a “breakdown of the object,” as Beckett discusses in relation to Irish poetry (*Disjecta* 70), in order to express nothing and everything through non-communication, which communicates the word without losing the object. The Greek *nostos* implies that the subject misses what is lost, but, by the end, the lost subject is recovered or reached. Neither Proust nor Beckett agrees that such recovery is possible. What is possible is a form of communication that does not communicate what the object used to signify, because the subject experiencing *durée* (either the idiotic messenger or the receiver of the message) is constantly changing. The object changes within the subject, every instance, every day. Beckett states:

> There is no escape from the hours and the days. Neither from tomorrow, nor from yesterday. There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or has been deformed by us […] Deformation has taken place. […] The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday’s ego, not for today’s. (*Proust* 13)

In addition, language expresses deformation. Deleuze and Guattari state: “One language can fill a certain function for one material and another function for another material” (*Kafka* 24).

Non-communication exists because communication has no end. Everything flows through the idiotic message, even if the messenger cannot allow the flux of codifying thoughts. The one who receives the message experiences fatigue but his consciousness does not stop moving. On the other hand, the problem comes when the receiver of the idiotic message tries to codify
language and restore it, without understanding that behind every communication, deformation takes place. When this happens the deformed words take on a different form, come into an order that does not belong to the message. In other words, and following Deleuze, the receiver of the message does not understand the “outside of language”; what happened happens in the outside of language when the idiotic messenger “pushes language to its limit” (Essays Critical and Clinical 19). When the message’s receiver fails to recognize this, then the message dies with him: this is the end of the message. Kafka’s K never reaches the castle. His race is constant and vain since he misapprehends and misunderstands the deformation of language that occurs in his call for the job position and that is repeated during the phone call from the castle. No wonder that, trying to pursue meaning, K dies of fatigue in his intention to reach the castle (according to the end revealed by Kafka to Max Brod). However, Kafka does not use any particular deformation of language to explain this situation. Instead, he uses simple language within a dense narrative. On the other hand, Beckett shows more interest in words inside the text. Even though deforming words is necessary, his narratives get shorter, reducing the story to the minimum without disappearing. Bram van Velde describes the situation of the artist in what seems to be intermezzo between Kafka and Beckett: “Life is exhausting, isn’t it? Often you just can’t do it, you can’t go on” (Juliet 72). Beckett cannot make words completely disappear. If that were the case, then there would be a need for a different artistic medium to express his thoughts. Nor does Rothko avoid colors but uses them in an unconventional way, creating a new beginning for them. Beckett does the same with words, tearing apart not only their meaning, but also their grammatical use. He not only writes in French and then translates into English or vice versa, but also includes words that do not belong either to English or French.
In *How It Is*, Beckett includes words that are not English cognates and that have not been accepted as part of the vernacular but that are mythical. If a mythic language, such as Hebrew, invites one to reterritorialize (as Deleuze and Guattari state in *Kafka*), then, Beckett’s reterritorialization communicates through non-communicative language without representing ideas. This occurs because the referent is lost, although the reference is still present without calling forth the same meaning, as in a dream that cannot be codified. On the other hand, words are inserted into the flux of thought without the intention to call any mythological reference, losing the capacity to become ideas. The narrator, in *How It Is* says, "question if always good old question if always like that since the world world for me from murmurs of my mother shat into the incredible tohu-bohu" (42). Nothingness, emptiness, worthlessness are present and absent. The “old” is no longer an authority because it has never been. The “old” is not present but the continuation of emptiness. “Tohu,” when it is used in the Hebrew Old Testament, means waste. However, “bohu” is only used accompanying “tohu” in Genesis 1:2 (and subsequently two other moments in allusion to that passage). Even though the meaning is not clear, it does not signify a concept but chaos or disorder. Beckett shows no interest to elucidate this theological debate. Beckett incorporates “tohu-bohu” in a different context, outside the “divine” authority, since it is the Jewish God and the one adopted by Christians who pronounce those words. Beckett, instead, adds more emptiness, more nothingness, emphasizing the worthless defecation, nonsense or the mother of the worthless sense of the mother of shit, or the shitty mother. The artist does not communicate anything related to salvation, or, in theological terms, redemption. The artist communicates the paradox of the world; the uncertainty is called into thoughts and that is taking place in emptiness, in nothingness, without *a priori* order that has been corrupted. “Tohu-bohu” implies a destruction of the first act of god’s creation. However, there is no redemption after
chaos is established. Likewise no mention is made of creation ex-nihilo, or the first verse of Genesis. Every attempt to understand or re-establish order has to be dropped, as Mercier and Camier drop their subject.

4.5 The Message of Idiotism

Besides Duchesne-Winter’s final assumption of the idiotic and the fact that he applies his theory only to writing, Watt’s pretentions, involuntarily maybe, reveal him in the openness to the world that exists outside of writing. Duchesne-Winter assumes the openness of the world according to Heidegger’s definition of art, but, in his interpretation of Watt, écriture closes the world in the text making the “thingly” as an object that cannot be apprehended. This analysis denies that Watt, and subsequently Beckett’s novel, is part of a “whole,” part of the “openness” to the world as Bergson defines it. Strictly speaking, it does not allow being part of the world outside of the work of art. According to Heidegger, the work of art has something beyond the instant it is perceived. The work of art does not have an inherent aesthetic value and is not an object that can have another function in itself beyond being an object. Heidegger states that “the art work is something else over and above the “thingly” element. This something else constitutes its artistic nature…. In the work of art, something other is brought together with the thing that is made” (Poetry, Language, Thought 19). For Heidegger this is a different “aesthetic” that has nothing to do with beauty and that does not correspond with the image that adheres to something else beyond the present state of the art work. “This something else” comes from outside the object. The work of art adheres to the being of man in his experience as “being in the world,” but not as object, as a thing. Heidegger states that the world is never an object between us but the place we live. The “aesthetic” adheres through perception that is outside the materiality of the world. Carlos Fuentes, following Bergson’s durée, defines the aesthetics of the novel, which is
the aesthetics of the modern art. According to Fuentes, “the work of art adheres something to the reality of the world (what previously was not there) and doing this, creates reality, but a reality that is not perceived immediately” (Geografía de la novela 17). For that reason, we have to understand the work of art as part of the reality of the world.

The work of art cannot be isolated from the whole of the world because it is part of the whole and, also, leads the audience to experience the openness to the “whole.” Deleuze explains the Bergsonian “whole” through “Relation.” Relation does not belong to the objects but is experienced between them. This “whole” is not separate from the universe “because it is open upon a world, [and] the universe is itself the Open” (Cinema 1 10). The novel is not a closed system when perceived among others, within a tradition, when the text folds with others and overlaps them creating different movements to different directions in time. Isolating a novel, or a single work of art, is taking it outside its movement. The tradition creates an order out of different works of art that is not fixed and that constantly changes, which is similar to what happens after the recollection of a dream. In dreams, everything that is disconnected connects during the movement in oneiric time. Then, during the waking life, those disconnections are connected into a logical order, excluding everything that does not interest us at the particular moment of the recollection. However, revision can always occur when something that was left out interests us at other particular moments. The novel happens in the whole, and this whole is the Open to other possibilities and differences within the literary tradition, including the creation of new possibilities to create and to add to it. For Deleuze, “the whole is therefore like thread which traverses sets and gives each other the possibility, which is necessarily realized, of communicating with another, to infinity. Thus the whole is the Open” (18).

12 “[L]a obra de arte añade algo a la realidad que antes no estaba allí, y al hacerlo, forma la realidad, pero una realidad que no es, muchas veces, inmediatamente perceptible material” (Geografía de la novela 17).
Bergsonian “openness” has resonances in Heidegger’s definition of the work of art. However, Heidegger is interested in language as a “thingly” in the world, while Bergson considers language an impediment to knowing the “thing in itself” (The Creative Mind 55-58). In the Heideggerian sense, this “thingly,” that is language, has to be codified. The “thingly” has nothing to do with the thing as an object. Heidegger states that the “thingly” is not an object’s known qualities but the qualities are based upon what “adheres” to it. A pair of shoes means something if someone thinks of them, but they still remain a pair of shoes, a thing. Even though different shoes are also used for different purposes and occasions, shoes are still the same objects. What adheres to them is what makes them “thingly.” Heidegger’s example of the “thingly” is the many shoes painted by Van Gogh, because they do not have the same meaning or purpose; they are no longer functional. In this sense, the “thingly” expresses a different presence beyond materiality and language. We can tell that in Van Gogh’s shoes, the practical use is absent. However, this absence makes them more present in relation to the openness to the whole, because they are also related to individuals as part of the whole. We find something of this in Watt, but Beckett is not interested in creating presence through language as Heidegger’s metaphysics implies. Watt only foresees what Beckett later accomplished in How It Is and “Texts for Nothing.”

Watt’s problem is to try to recognize that the “thing itself” is not limited to the pot, the picture, or the piano, as he does not pretend to connect with the Heideggerian concept of “thingly.” Various incidents describe how Watt is creating “distance” from the world. These are described by the narrator, who narrates the novel according to Watt’s testimony of what he experiences, mainly in relation to Mr. Knott’s house. As a result, the reader is given a point of view other than Watt’s. The “organized world” described by the narrator contrasts with Watt’s
“distance” from that world. We call the world in *Watt* “organized” to distinguish it from Watt’s mind, organized as the novel is organized. Watt arrives to work at Mr. Knott’s house, but the house does not represent the family structure: there is no Ms. Knott; the leftovers are for a dog that Watt does not see; and, besides Watt, no others take care of Mr. Knott’s house. The house, big as described, does not represent the place in which the representation of society lives; the societal structure is non-existent. There is no *polis* but a social disintegration, or deformation. The public space is described at the beginning of *Watt* when Watt is seen from a distance (a confusing incident since the narrator probably was not near to record this incident, and also because Watt’s past is unknown).

For the literary modern tradition, things do not correspond to their names, but they are also open to the whole of the world without assumptive interpretations that enforce binary oppositions or representations. Kundera describes the modern novel as a place where metaphors are not even possible. According to the heritage of Cervantes, the world no longer needs a redeemer since nothing is left to redeem or codify. Kundera, in *The Art of the Novel*, states, “In the absence of the Supreme Judge, the world suddenly appeared in its fearsome ambiguity; the single divine Truth decomposed into myriad relative truths parceled out by men. Thus was born the world of the Modern Era, the image and model of that world” (6). This “fearsome ambiguity” is how the nothingness is perceived if interpreted quantitatively, not believing in the necessity of redemption. The opposite is the case of Cervantes’, Beckett’s, and Kafka’s novels, but also in Joyce by the end of *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* when Stephen decides to fly away, denying the precepts of Catholicism. The individual experiences an escape without relation to the Supreme Judge. He creates a “body without organs,” as described by Deleuze and Guattari and
he is not subject to an organized organism that creates subjectivity. The individual relates to the whole of the world in openness to every possibility.

4.6 “No-podernimiento”

Duchesne-Winter also states that being idiotic is being part of a collection of subjects, but, at the same time, the idiotic is a single subject within “singulars” (“singularidad”) and “singularities” (“singularidades”). Following this, we can ask: how is it possible for the idiotic subject to speak a language that no one comprehends if he is made up of a variety of “singularities”? Is the idiotic a subject made by other subjects’ “singularities”? The problem is that Duchesne-Winter follows Gombrowicz’s definition of man without giving up the metaphysical implication in naming this man as a single subject. The concept of subject has to be open to constant becoming and differences. Gombrowicz states that “If I can never be entirely myself, the only thing that allows me to save my personality from annihilation is my will to authenticity, that stubborn-in-spite-of-everything ‘I want to be myself’ which is nothing more than a tragic and hopeless revolt against deformation” (Diary 2 4). Deformation has to take place in order to turn down the “interhuman” relationship, which subjects the individual to the social structure and places the individual at the outside of the societal structure. Gombrowicz’s definition of man is not about annihilation: the entire subjectivity does not disappear, and according to Deleuze and Guattari it is not a “death drive” since “You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn” (A Thousand Plateaus 160). This man finds his line of flight and constantly reterritorializes himself. According to Gombrowicz, a man made of “singularities” cannot find anything essential to the self beyond the intention to find (or create) a self. Gombrowicz’s aesthetics states the degradation of form (the subject) as the only possible definition for man. Through the degradation of form, Gombrowicz’s man experiences his inner
life in *durée*. However, for the degradation of form to happen, the “interhuman” relationship has to be broken. It has to be noted that Gombrowicz’s man names the singular, but makes reference to a singular that includes other singulars. For that reason, he makes reference to “individuals” when he names a singular person instead of individual.

Gombrowicz’s aesthetics is about immaturity, but also about deformation. An understanding of Gombrowicz’s “deformation” helps to understand Beckett’s deformation of words. Even though Gombrowicz and Beckett never meet and they do not seem to know each other’s work, they both share and are part of the same tradition. While Gombrowicz’s literary work explains how deformation takes place, he does not go as far in his literary form as Beckett does in his work. The opposite occurs in Beckett’s oeuvre: the deformation of words is present in his literary work but is not discussed in detail in his critical work. Gombrowicz’s narrative in *Ferdydurke* and *Ponografia*, following Cervantes’ tradition, is interrupted by prologues to subsequent chapters. In these prologues, the narrators theorize about the novel and about its form. In both novels, Gombrowicz attacks “interhuman” relations, because they are created by society to maintain the societal structure, to codify, to create, and to maintain order among subjects. His critique of “interhuman” relationships is based on the need to build a self, or the “I” (as Gombrowicz prefers to call it), to destroy the form that this relationship imposes on the individual.

One slight difference between Arendt’s *politics* and “interhumanity” is that even though “interhumanity” also happens between people, such as politics, this happening takes place within forms and among different forms, stopping the individual’s becoming and imposing equanimity without differences. Gombrowicz defines “interhumanity” as “forms that become established between people” (*Diary 2* 10). Gombrowicz’s man “form” is created from society and not within
and *in-between* other individuals. Individuality is denied in this equation, but so is movement, becoming. “Interhumanity” implies a man’s connection with others, but this connection is an established form that imposes ideas, creating an individual who is forced to like and to contemplate certain artistic expressions because he has been told to do so. Gombrowicz’s aesthetics deforms the established form that has been and is constantly imposed on individuals. For that reason, Gombrowicz aims his critique of maturity, against being complete and against perfection. Thus, politics is possible when the “interhuman” form is torn apart, when deformation occurs on the social conventionalisms that push the individual to be equal, without differences. However, that does not mean that the artist has to live in isolation, that he does not need the world, but rather that the artist has to learn how to live within the world *in-between* other individuals, to live from the *outside of society*. Van Velde describes this in relation to the artist and his artistic creation: “When you go a long way, you necessarily distance yourself from other people. But in the intervals between work, you do to some extent rejoin the human world” (*Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde* 86). “Interhumanity” is nothing else but a false sense of “freedom” that allows society to think as one instead of allowing the becoming of individuals. This implies the acceptance that man is created from the outside and that man’s thoughts are the *outside of himself*.

In Gombrowicz’s novels, other characters, and maybe the reader, cannot comprehend this man, because this man does not move or act inside and/or within “interhuman” relations, which is only possible between equals: the children in *Ferdydurke* who constantly experience the destruction of form, for instance, and Frederyk in *Pornografía*, who is only understood by Witold. Even so, Gombrowicz’s aesthetics cannot be understood as a critique of society.\(^\text{13}\) In

\(^{13}\) Gombrowicz states about his work: “the history of my becoming is the history of my constant adjustment to my literary work – which always surprised me by being born in an unpredictable way, as if not of me.” He also adds: “a
*Ferdydurke*, Gombrowicz reveals society as a convention, but his intention is to deal with man in isolation from society, as an organized structure, man outside “interhumanity.” In *Pornografía*, Frederyk exhibits the degradation of man from “interhumanity,” through the degradation of God incarnated in Christ and the rejection of the need for redemption. Regardless of Frederyk as “body without organs,” he must become part of the mass through the role of “actor” (Gombrowicz’s term) but distances himself from the interhuman community that the Catholic mass creates. He *pretends* to be one with the rest, to be part of the social structure but remains outside of it. He *acts* like a man only and thus lacks essence. Frederyk assumes this space-between at the same time that he refuses to have communion with the congregation. He acts in the space-between that keeps one physically present but absent in mind, in memories, inside society. To degrade man means to exhibit the nothingness between men, and this nothingness may be presented as differences between individuals. While Frederyk participates in the mass, his friend Witold is horrified by the participation because this exposes the nothingness of the Catholic sacrament. The mass also exposes Frederyk’s nothingness, isolating man as a conventional subject who cannot mature according to society’s convention. In order to be a man, one needs to embrace deformation through immaturity. In order to be a man one must recognize one’s own “nothingness,” as in Beckett’s “Texts for Nothing,” in which one’s thoughts are made of other’s thoughts, outside thoughts, memories from the world such as van Velde proposes for the artist.

Frederyk’s “nothingness,” his performance in the mass, expresses, at least for the audience, more quantitative presence than absence. However, he is more present than absent during the ritual because he qualifies his inner life instead of experiencing the mass. His friend

writer and a work are something changing and elusive – only the reader preserves them in some sort of definite and commanding sense” (*Diary* 2 11,13).
Witold is horrified with Frederyk’s physical presence, or performance, knowing Frederyk’s “nothingness” as chaos, as disorder, placing himself outside of the mass. According to Bergson, “nothingness” has been confused with the absence (or the lack) of something. Such things as a vacuum do not exist; “nothingness” calls into the present more presence than a perceived reality. Nothingness contains both the perceived reality plus the idea of absence, disorder plus the idea of order. For Bergson, the idea of chaos is usually confused with order and disorder. Bergson does not recognize this dualism between order/disorder. Conceiving disorder implies the idea of order plus the negative idea of disorder, which forms part of what is absent. In this sense, Frederyk’s non-believing in the mass means he participates more than the ones who believe in it. His lack of faith in the ritual makes his participation more present than that of the believers. Frederyk’s participation in the mass performs his “nothingness” in relation to a community of believers through his interaction with Witold. His absence in communion denotes a presence that is revealed through his negativity to assume a “pose” in front of the believers, who do not perceive his presence though he renounces his being part of them. Yet through this action, Frederyk is part of that religious and social ritual. Frederyk’s “interhuman performance” to the others in the mass through Witold is the only way to connect himself with the whole, opening himself to the rest of the world, avoiding isolation from the social convention while recognizing this advance as such.

In addition, Gombrowicz uses negative terms and creates new ones in order to show that deformation comes into language as well, implying the existence of more presence than absence. In *Ferdydurke*, Gombrowicz develops certain terms in which the characters lose their will or capacity to be part of the societal structure, as their way to openness into the whole of the world. They experience an openness through their bodies in relation to others bodies outside the considerations of conventional behaviors. Gombrowicz’s *Ferdydurke* describes how, at schools,
students are not able to act according to their will: “[E]l nopodernimiento [es] general y ecuménico.” *Nopodernimiento* cannot be translated to English.\(^{14}\) *Nopodernimiento* is made up by Gombrowicz for the Spanish translation, and is a term fundamental to his novel.

*Nopodernimiento* expresses a deep Nietzschean influence on Gombrowicz affirming life: “And the students repeat no neither we can, and a general *nopodernimiento* began to raise everywhere… the absolute *nopodernimiento*; at every moment the wild noise of *nopodernimiento* was on all parts of the school. The *nopodernimiento* is general and ecumenical” (65-66). Language does not allow them to experience a present moment that happens in nothingness, although this presence needs to be translated through language. This moment contrasts with Frederyk’s participation in the mass in *Pornografía*. Frederyk is the only participant of the mass who allows openness to the whole while destroying the closed performance of the mass, and, as a consequence, opens the mass. On the other hand, the students in *Ferdydurke* experience openness to the whole through nothingness.

**4.7 A New Beginning Without Nostalgia for Words**

Gombrowicz’s “*Nopoderniento*” is similar to Melville’s Bartleby’s “I prefer not to.” “Not to” has the capacity to affect others, to carry a message and to create thoughts, such as thinking about “to prefer” as happens to the other characters in Melville’s “Bartleby, The Scrivener.” But it can also be related to Beckett’s movement in *The Unnamable* and “Texts for Nothing.” The Unnamable states by the end: “you must go on, I can’t go on, you must go on. I’ll go on” (*Three Novels* 414). But from where and to where go on? In order to go on one needs a place of departure and a destination. Both of them seem impossible because there is not a strict beginning and the end must be silence. But what kind of silence, even though “it’s being prohibited?” (396). Gombrowicz proposes an end, which is immaturity, in order to destroy form.

\(^{14}\) I prefer to used the Spanish version and translate myself.
Thus, man can find his way out of the societal structure as form, creating a political space in which the “I” experiences becoming within society, meaning that one should go back to a previous state. We can say that, in a sense, “nopodernimiento” is another beginning, a new beginning, or a return without nostalgia since the “I,” consciousness, will remember everything that had taken place. “How it is” and what is remembered is explored throughout Beckett’s work, such as *Nohow On* and in *The Unnamable*. However, Beckett’s work offers a different beginning. Beckett disrupts the “beginning” in *How It Is* by using the term *tohu-bahu*. According to Beckett, the beginning is not a vacuum, the creation of the world or the recreation of the world from “Genesis 1:2” (the organized world as we know it), but maybe the self within the self, and simultaneously outside of the self. The beginning of the world is not disorder, but the order that had been imposed to the Unnamable by, maybe, his family. His beginning is a personal beginning related to the self, to the “I” that thinks and tries not, but has the duty to think. In addition to the organized societal structure that the Unnamable (or someone else) recollects about his family, another beginning comes from memories: this beginning comes from words, from the necessity and the duty to express, and words are real as Malone passing, rounding close to the Unnamable. The beginning is a non-quantified beginning, although a beginning, a beginning that can be placed and constantly substituted by other beginnings, not as repetition but through the flux of thought. However, the Unnamable wants to get rid of that beginning in order to go on. Going on is a moving backward to an unnamable beginning which paradoxically is the end. The end of “going on” exists in both senses, the end as a goal and the end as the search, or medium, for silence. In a sense, the Unnamable struggles with an unreachable end because the end would be an empty page, annihilation, no memories, the end of consciousness, with no witness to testify to that conclusion. It is no surprise that the Unnamable recalls others such as
Malone, Murphy and Mercier. Their existence is recognized in order to find a political space. In this case, to preserve the memories of others, or the defeated, as Arendt discusses, to relate to others like himself: individuals who struggle escape from the conventions of the societal structure. Doing this, the Unnamable avoids positioning himself in isolation, accomplishing what Watt fails to do but Sam accomplishes.

Beckett goes further than Gombrowicz. Not only does he use a language that is more than incisive and a narrative structure that eludes the exhausted writer in Watt and The Unnamable, but he uses words without the intention to communicate a clear and distinguishable message. While Gombrowicz creates his own language to expose the impossibility of movement through conventions, Beckett’s language stops a movement that paradoxically moves with the flux of the text. Beckett does not narrate a story in texts such as The Unnamable, Nohow on, and in the “Texts for Nothing.” No story is told or, at least, one that contains a clear message. But, not telling a story is the story. Stories are constantly saying and unsaying. Words still exist but outside the common uses. Words become their own outside, creating different movements with different directions. The creation of the idiotic message in which words are incomprehensible is a power of truth, and cannot be restored to the audience through repetition after the language in the message has been deformed. The voices in those texts are the voices of the idiotic messenger who needs and has the duty to talk and move without moving further (in a closed space). However, Beckett as a writer is the one who moves further than Gombrowicz, but, also, further than Joyce.

In Finnegans Wake the language may elude the reader, but there always exists a story to tell through the narrative. In Joyce, we find the same story with variations. Joyce disrupts both social structure and language. Even though Joyce’s language is not codified, every word offers
meanings (and often multiple meanings), but a meaning that constantly escapes the reader. The reader of *Finnegans Wake* is required to open languages to different directions within the plane of the novel, an opening that resembles Deleuze and Guatarri’s rhizome. Beckett’s intention is similar but also corrupts the language that holds together possibilities to re-establish order so denies the beginning of any single world. His texts explore the impossibility for the dualities of words to stand in binary opposition, denying any dialectical implication to language. For that reason Beckett’s texts seem chaotic and different from Joyce’s. Order is not re-established because nothing needs to be re-established. Such things as no end and beginning again or a beginning and an end again do not exist, as in Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*.

4.8 “Under Duress”

Language, in Beckett’s work, is corrupt but necessary: *on* is “going on” but “not going on.” The word is exhausted to its limits without giving up the idiotic message, the text, and language itself. “Not to know what they say. Not to know what it is the words it says say” (*Nohow On* 104). However, something has to be told, even though that something tells nothing, and becomes an image (a dead image) that passes without forming any truth, dislocating and corrupting memories not only of events but also of the words’ meanings. Instead of codifying words, the image exposes an empty space (nothingness), a place without fixed concepts, in which thoughts are in flux without being interrupted by interpretation. Nothingness is, again using the Bergsonian notion, the absence of something telling “the text” through language. Escaping from words is as impossible as escaping from the days and hours. Even when Beckett eradicates the word “word” in *Worstward Ho*, he substitutes it for another word: “blank.” “Blanks for nohow on…Blanks for when words gone. When nohow on” (105, 112). “Going on”
is “going on” but also “not going on”; it is the impossibility to “go on” in addition to the duty to “go on.”

Even though “going on” and “not going on” are contraries, Beckett’s intention is not dialectical but to bring about understanding. Following Schopenhauer, in “On Thinking for Oneself,” the one who thinks more than he reads versus the one who reads and does not think his own opinions, has the capacity for thought. The individual who only reads accumulates information but loses the capacity to think critically when other’s voices shut down one’s own voice. The Unnamable takes the position of the one who reads, analyses and recognizes that others’ thoughts are a starting point for one’s own: references to other texts such as the Bible and to life experienced are found throughout the text. According to Schopenhauer, to create one’s own thoughts one must analyze every side of any thought, combining them. Understanding is produced when thoughts are turned over. At some point, the Unnamable stops reading and starts considering his thoughts. For Schopenhauer, “when a man thinks for himself, he follows the impulse of his own mind, which is determined for him at the time, either by his environment or some particular recollection” (523). The Unnamable constantly recalls from the totality of his memories and perceptions. Through his memories and his thoughts, his consciousness is creating a constant becoming, but becoming is created when the form that is imposed by society is broken down from the limits, from the outside of language. Form is destroyed when the Unnamable confronts not only others’ thoughts but also his own. This is the case with the Unnamable’s combinations or the possibilities that moves through the flux of his thoughts.

“Going on” leaves a message without any clear content, but with the deformation of its form. Even the referents have been taken out. Every word uttered is uttered for the first time.

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15 It is not my intention, as was not for Beckett, to sustain Schopenhauer’s philosophy. I substitute “understanding,” as a define before through Arendt’s philosophy, for “knowledge” (used by Schopenhauer), as a Beckettian exercise in order to analyze and offer some understanding on Beckett’s work.
When the reader goes back through the text, he or she is capable of finding the repetition of words and recognizes that words are foreign. For that reason, every uttered word is uttered for the first but also last time. Beckett thus explores the silence within utterance, depicting every silence as different. This last statement does not contradict the notion that the audience, through familiarity with words’ common usage recognizes every uttered word. The Unnamable recognizes through “noes and yesses” (Three Novels 291) the previous existent (non) sense of words. Again, even though language is corrupted, words are still present in literature. Words do not disappear. Beckett does not get rid of them, but deforms them into nothingness. The Unnamable cannot find silence outside of his skull, his body, his mind, because memories are always present and coming out of him in words. Beckett describes this in one of his poems:
“écoute-les/ s'ajouter/ les mots/ aux mots/ sans mot/ les pas/ un à/ un” (Collected Poems 71).

When Kafka transforms a bureaucratic employee into something else everything seems to turn upside down. Conversely, Gregor Samsa’s existence is not denied; his past is still present, creating a continuation of the past into something that endures differently. Gregor experiences alienation, but in regards to society. Living in a closed space that is his room, Gregor’s family contributes to his alienation. But the memories from his life’s experiences and perceptions sustain his existence until he dies, although he does not disappear. Both, his previous state, the normal state for the outside world, and his last one, becoming animal, are part of the story. By the end, Gregor becomes animal: his voice, the last, external, human characteristic disappears, but not his consciousness. For a common understanding, his metamorphosis is not functional but is almost nothing, to the annihilation of the self, and he no longer will be able to be part of the societal structure, because he cannot produce and contribute to the maintenance of his family. This nothing becomes a quality of his state of being outside conventions. At this point, Gregor is
no longer capable of supporting his family; he becomes nothing, devoid of content, a deformed form. On the other hand, he has been free of his duty and the will to go to work remains in him until he decides that between his internal struggle and the world, the better option is to hold the world.

Kafka’s and Beckett’s characters have a duty to perform and to utter a message. Elias Canetti, in Kafka’s Other Trial, describes how Kafka’s struggle with social conventions leads him to find a line of flight through his work. In this sense, Canetti’s work is the precursor of Deleuze and Guatarri’s Kafka. As Canetti states throughout his analysis on Kafka’s letter and his text, Kafka’s work expresses the struggle with the duty of getting married and the intention to start a family. The result is that Kafka experiences his life, which is considered by him a life dedicated to the literary, as an imprisonment. Beckett’s the Unnamable understands the same duty through the memories of his father, in addition to the Unnamable’s possible experiences as husband and father. The Unnamable states:

I can’t even bring myself to name them, nor any of the others whose names I forget, who told me I was they, who I must have tried to be, under duress, or through fear, or to avoid acknowledging me, not the slightest connexion. […] There’s no getting rid of them without naming them and their contraptions, that’s the thing to keep in mind. […] This will leave me free to consider how I may best proceed with my own affair, beginning again at the point where I had to interrupt it, under duress, or through fear, or through ignorance. (Three Novels 326, emphasis added)

In opposition to Watt, the Unnamable’s memories have a strong effect on his consciousness. To “go on” and “not to go on” is Beckett’s best description of the conflictive
mind that stands in the political space, in-between two different constraints, which always tries to get out of the body. Since that task is impossible, the individual has no other option but to live on the outside of the clichés of society, experiencing at every different instant his becoming. His becoming happens through his own memories, as through the experiences from his moving present; that is, every repetition of memories is experienced differently in time and space, including every mention of his duty to communicate. For that reason, every communication becomes a non-communication, even thought seems to be the same, and every communication is different from the past one and from the future one, which is expressed every moment in the novel. However, the moment described in the previous quote reveals this “going on” and “not going on” in time and space are inseparable from each other when the Unnamable tries, and is interrupted, “under duress.” But this interruption is movement, non-static; it implies memories and thoughts: the creation of other thoughts and the experience of the self in becoming open to future experiences of time from which there is no escape.

“Duress” implies a threat, a violent action brought to someone against one’s will. It also means imprisonment. On the other hand, “duress” comes from the Latin duritio and durus, and has the same etymology of durée. The French durée implies both time and space as Bergson posits in his philosophy. This seems to be in Beckett’s mind when he describes becoming in an untitled poem: “je suis ce cours de sable/ entre le galet et la dune… et vivrai le tempts d’une porte/ qui s’ouvre et se referme.” Beckell’s own translation exposes the implications of the French durée when both the French version and its translation are put together: “my way is in the sand flowing/ between the shingle and the dune… and live the space of the door/ that opens and shuts” (Collected Poems 58,9 emphasis added). The becoming of the narrator takes place in durée, with every encounter that the open and shut door advent, but also in-between a space: in
and out “the space of the door” traces every time it opens and shuts. As a consequence, in Watt we cannot easily distinguish “what was inside it and what was outside it.” Thus, “everything that happened happened inside it, and at the same time everything that happened happened outside it” (Watt 43), and, for the Unnamable, “let us try and determine, before we seek, what it can be, before we seek over there, over where, talking unceasingly, seeking incessantly, in yourself, outside yourself” (Three Novels 385). In addition, “I’ll have said it inside me, then in the breath outside me, perhaps that’s what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle… I am neither one side nor the other, I’m in the middle” (383). For Beckett, this is an imprisonment since there is no escape from time, as he states in Proust, but neither from space. Thus, deformation through and by time and space is inevitable. But deformation is something positive: it creates politics and action. Every memory, or lack of memory, creates the becoming of the individual experiencing the goes and not goes, the yesses and noes of his duty of duration. Precisely, the Unnamable experiences his duty under duress, under the cancer of time, living the time and space that opens and closes, that constantly moves, even if it is not clear and distinguishable.

For the Unnamable, to talk and to experience his becoming happens by force, “par force” (L’Innommable 79-80), or involuntarily. Beckett’s translation of “par force” as “under duress” is similar to his translation of “le tempts” for “the space.” Instead of a literal translation, his translation positions languages in-between respective meanings, opening it to the whole of the world of experiences, folding the message, and revealing the outside of language within language itself, without rejecting language. Beckett’s translation of “par force” as “under duress” recognizes the French text but also adds the spatial and temporal condition of the Unnamable, who cannot escape from the hours and days, from being born. As a consequence, he cannot
escape from his duty or *pensum* of saying something and having thoughts. The Unnamable states,

I spoke, I must have spoken, of a lesson, it was *pensum* I should have said,

I confused *pensum* with lesson. Yes, I have a *pensum* to discharge, before
I can be free, free to dribble, free to speak no more, listen no more… I was
given a *pensum*, at birth perhaps, as a punishment for having been born
perhaps, or for no particular reason. (*Three Novels* 310; emphasis added)

*Pensum* is a Latin noun that means a task or a duty, but also has a value of importance. *Penso* (the ablative and the dative) also means to consider and to judge. In addition, the verb to think in Spanish is derived from the same root. *Pensum*, also, from the old French means punishment (for being born?). All these mentioned meanings are present in Beckett’s text. Beckett does not translate this word in his English translation, leaving it there with the Latin and French possibilities as part of the Unnamable’s message.

The word *pensum* is experienced, intuited, through his becoming, and is the result of his repetitive saying of stop talking. At the same time, *pensum* implies a non-original experience: his personal experience, without any original sin (even though this notion is, also, questioned), and within a world that already exists. In addition, any reference that traces it to a first beginning are proper to thoughts, questions that imply place and time with the individual in the middle: “Where now? Who now? When now?” (291). Thus, the Unnamable does not want to look for an original for the word *pensum* but to posit the possibilities of it. The possibility of his *pensum* is the task of moving outside the cultural engagement of language with meaning “under duress,” which takes place in a lifetime during the individuals constant duration. To be born, or not to be born, questions the idea of being, a defined form escaping from the fixity of language, and the social
construction as its consequence. The idea of being born has a meaningful purpose, whether we consider it a religious belief or not. For the Unnamable, the idea of being born is not a transcendental idea, but the consequence of existing in the world is the duty to talk; that may be the only sin of being born, such as Calderon de la Barca states in *La vida es sueño*. Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, expresses in a more radical way than de la Barca, “What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second for you is – to die soon” (42).

In Beckett’s novel, *pen sum* is continuous and posits the Unnamable’s existence in, as I propose, a constant *born ing*, a form that is not grammatically correct in English, but a form that escapes language as a nomenclature. According to the hermeneutical form set by language, once born, the act stops its movement to a definitive past, to a complete action. However, the *pen sum* the Unnamable carries allows him to experience *born ing*: first, to have been born and the possibility of being lucky enough to have never been born as he states, “some people are lucky, born of a wet dream and dead before morning” (*Three Novels* 379, 80). Second, he also experiences the capacity to keep *born ing*. In this sense the Unnamable positions his experience outside of the clichés of language. Even though this grammatical form is not mentioned by the Unnamable, considering it in this way helps us to understand what he experiences as his *pen sum* under *durée*. Form, or that deformation of language (to be born), to carry a *pen sum*, calls the attention to Beckett’s other characters. Mrs. Rooney, in *All that Fall*, tells Mr. Rooney a story that haunted her for years. Such is the case of a girl whom she heard about in a neurologist conference: “The trouble with her was she had never been really born!” (31). For the Unnamable, “never been really born” does not imply a completed action, but a haunting becoming that becomes the possible outside of psychoanalytical interpretation. The Unnamable
states, “I can’t get born, perhaps that’s their big idea, to keep on saying the same old thing, generation after generation, till I go mad and begin to scream… no point in waiting for that” (Three Novels 383). The act of being born is placed, within language as his pensum, in becoming: to be constantly borning.

Pensum needs to take place, but it takes place elsewhere, as it has taken place before in other voices. As being born and being part of the world, the Unnamable’s pensum moves as a constant borning in-between other voices that come before him, the political space, and struggle against the psychoanalyst’s statement. In that sense, the Unnamable’s voices are voices that come from elsewhere: de la Barca’s Segismundo, the Christian idea of original sin, all the sperm after every male ejaculation, etc. All these voices traverse each other, creating a message that has no beginning, nor end; the message is the end in itself. The message comes from nowhere and moves elsewhere. Conversely, these voices are not unified or reconciled with other voices. For the voices do not exist other compromise that is not the message and messenger’s pensum (which is contained in the message), and pensum is not the relation to other individual’s voices but to his own voices. These voices also go elsewhere, outside the Unnamable’s voice, who utters to the social collective of individuals in a language that is reterritorialized outside theological implications. Voices are people, bodily utterances, who are affected and have the capacity to affect others even without knowing it (idiotism). The effects move beyond the realm of language to affect the reader, and the listener, through the idiotic message. Every utterance, even every repeated utterance, carries a new message, an idiotic message that inserts more pensums under duress. Every utterance also opens the messenger to possibilities beyond his own understanding and existence.
Even after his own death, the idiotic messenger carries his message as a *pensum*. After the idiotic messenger’s *decease*, the memories of his message are preserved in the individuals who have received the message through their politics. After all, the message does not disappear but becomes a deformation of it. As with memories, the message is deformed by time, by *durée*, by other consciousness’s. In this sense, the messenger, such as Beckett states, cannot escape from “the cancer of time,” even after he is *done* with his *pensum*, and after the message is delivered. The messenger is dead and the accomplishments of his *pensum* are revealed in the last word of Beckett’s *Proust*: “defuntus.” Beckett finishes *Proust* stating, “the ‘invisible reality’ that damns the life of the body on earth as a pensum and reveals the meaning of the word: ‘defuntus’” (*Proust* 93).

Deformation takes place within differences creating new messages, and possibilities, creating art, revealing the paradoxical experience of the individual who experiences change, without recognizing it as such. For example, in dreams, words appear chaotic, and we organize them after we wake. The world appears to us as an organized whole because we consider dreams as a secondary part of our life. Moving in the organized world becomes a duty that, wrongly, forces the individual’s existence to reconcile the world with a clear and distinguishable message. Obeying culture instead of becoming a *question*, and becoming something else, anything but the pre-fixed possibilities, deny the possibility to understand the idiotic world. Here *question* implies the Latin meaning of *quaestio*: the action to ask but also information and a subject matter. *Question* comprehends the uncertainty for what is necessary to investigate, a subject matter that cannot be solved. But, it also means a certain condition that materializes an action. Such is a *question* of moving outside of the clichés of society, which lets other voices move without a center in a transverse form, deforming us. Deleuze and Guattari are right when they argue that
one needs to become other outside representation. However, in order to succeed, one has to communicate, to move, and to evolve, as the Unnamable does, with every utterance in a world that shares a language that is culturally given.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: POLITICS, ACTION
AND THE TRADITION

We shall never know, said Camier,
at what hour we arranged to meet today,
so let us drop the subject.
Samuel Beckett, Mercier and Camier

One of the consequences of Arendt’s concept of new beginning is the capacity for an artist to create and to perform his art at any particular moment in time and space, even ignoring chronological order on the tradition. Every work can create a particular beginning in the reading/writing process. Joyce’s Ulysses can be read without a previous knowledge of Homer’s Odyssey. The literary tradition depends on politics in order to constantly rewrite itself with the addition of new artistic encounters, which cross time and geographical space. To order literature chronologically is dangerous, since inquires about texts may be limited to historic analysis. For further clarification, a consideration of the precursors of some modernist writers such as Joyce, Beckett, Kafka, and, Jorge Luis Borges in the making of the literary tradition is necessary. However, such analysis needs to be understood through Bergsonism. First of all, one should accept that not all modernist writers can claim the same precursors and that being a modernist writer does not mean that the same techniques are shared.

5.1 The Politics of the Reading/Writing Process

For modernists, the literary tradition does not depend on chronological time to organize its different movements. Nor does it share an ascendant culmination of a different kind of art that can be apprehended quantitatively. We should attend to Jung’s reaction to Ulysses and consider that some of the reasons why he detests Joyce’s text, and as consequence excludes it from the tradition, are the ones that make Joyce part of a different modernist awareness. Jung states,
“Nothing comes to meet the reader, everything turns away from him, leaving him gaping after it” (The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature 111). Even though Jung’s monologue on Ulysses also acknowledges Joyce’s use of mythology, he despises the novel for the lack of structure that corresponds to consciousness instead of a revelation of the collective unconsciousness. Thus, Jung misses Joyce’s intention with the text. Conversely, Ulysses’s intention, as Jung rightly states, is not “hopeless emptiness” that begins and ends with nothingness (110). Joyce tells, among other stories, the Homeric story within a stream that includes other stories. Basically, Ulysses fails to offer Jung an example that proves how archetypes reveal when they are necessary. At the beginning of his monologue, Jung states that Ulysses is about Joyce and not about “the figure of Homer’s world” (109). With this statement, Jung accuses Joyce’s individuality of deforming the archetypal figure when he follows his desire to write a book “about nothing” and turns away from the reader. For Jung, Ulysses is about nothing, because the language and the form of the novel move simultaneously in different directions.

In his critique of Ulysses, Jung reduces the suppression of language and the incomplete meaning in sentences to one of his most furious critiques of Ulysses. However, contrary to Jung’s understanding the reader does not turn away from the text, just as the text does not turn away from the tradition. In this sense, Jung’s complaints about Joyce’s Ulysses are similar to what Kafka’s K experiences in The Castle. K wanders during the entire novel as he tries to reach the castle. The reader notices during the novel’s progression how the castle is not a true castle but more like a group of buildings. More importantly, the reader becomes exhausted as K attempts to move toward (?) the castle and the castle seems to move farther away whenever K gets “closer.” Kafka did not finish this novel, as he also did not complete some of his other work. But, according to Brod, Kafka intended to end the novel with K dying of exhaustion without
completing his wandering. Still, the castle cannot be reached; the castle is and will remain far from K. Certainly, this does not invalidate Kafka’s incomplete novel. The reader is able to read *The Castle* and to experience the journey.

Jung interprets Joyce’s use of language as a clinical case. According to Jung, “even the layman would have no difficulty in tracing the analogies between *Ulysses* and the schizophrenic mentality” (*The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature* 116). Nonetheless, this use of language is what defines the value of modernist literature in opposition to a literature that mimics society. Literature uses a distinctive language in order to express reality, a language that evolves and changes, that forms and deforms meaning, and that eludes the reader, even though the language looks familiar. The reader of Kafka’s novels can tell at first sight his language is clear and simple. Yet, a closer reading reveals a hidden intention to make language foreign to itself, and that makes the reader uncomfortable (dogs and apes talk, mice sing, a vermin cannot go to work, etc.) In particular, these extraordinary examples intersect with K in the *The Castle*. Klamm, the man K is asking for, has no definitive description either. Everyone who sees him describes him differently, and even K never sees the man, as he thought he expects to. Every time he gets

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* Critics of modernism, such as Lukács, understand it in favor of a mimetic realism to explain the world through the societal structure. Realism should reveal the contradiction of the social existence that is determined by external and material causes to the conscious of the individual. The individual exists because there are eternal causes inherent to his existence. Lukács’ definition of realism deals with literature, however the way literature is conceived makes of literature part of the social structure and not an independent art, isolate from the social struggle. Literature is not independent from historical changes. His definition of realism is concerned with how literature can express realism in a world that tends to collapse into different movements of modernism that attempt to disestablish the relation of the individual from the social structure. Lukács does not recognize literary freedom to modernist writers who want to express the world (the external and internal world) in a fragmented way (“Art and the Objective Truth” 26-27); if they want to express it, they should do it through realism (“Realism in the Balance” 1036). This definition of realism is related to Marxist premises of social struggles and excludes any other possibilities that denied how the social existence determined the individual. Lukács’ realism does not express the world fragmented as some artist did; it excludes the exploration of consciousness independent from material causes. Writers such as Kafka, Joyce and Beckett are excluded for not writing realism (otherwise, there are Marxist interpretations on Kafka’s texts), but other writers such as Honoré de Balzac and Thomas Mann are considered. Lukács implies how writers such as Kafka, Joyce, and Beckett are concern with experimental writing and with the individual, isolated from the social structure.
closer and considers something to be “clear,” everything appears different without representation to words.

Without a doubt, the influence of Kafka’s work creates and inserts a common adjective to the intellectual tradition through which Kafka’s work exposes the paradox of modernist art such as Joyce’s *Ulysses*. The Kafkaesque elucidates a complex and ambiguous world beyond Kafka’s emblematic texts. T.S. Eliot’s seminar essay on the literary tradition justifies the Kafkaesque but also affirms that Joyce’s *Ulysses* is a modernist novel. These two affirmations position Kafka and Joyce as part of the same tradition in which no artist stands by himself. The Kafkaesque meaning comes from Kafka’s literary referents and his historical background, which, instead of moving linearly it moves backward and forward in time. Eliot’s tradition defines a work of art as being influenced by previous art, but also as being influenced by the reader of the previous texts. “Tradition and the Individual Talent” is published as early as 1917, which indicates Eliot’s awareness of what other artists were doing.¹⁷ Eliot’s statement is the work of an individual artist who incorporates a variety of different artists. In addition, Eliot’s essay is a product of different literary and philosophical influences.

Jung’s theory illuminates and raises questions concerning the definition of “literary text” for modernist writers. Psychoanalysis stands in opposition to some modernist aesthetics while at the same time it influences modernism, thereby creating tension and struggle between different groups of modernist artists. “*Ulysses*: a monologue” exemplifies Jung’s rejection of other aesthetics as “unmodern” (*The Spirit Man, Art, and Literature* 119), and posits the necessity to define and form the tradition. However, for Jung, modern artists are called on to be part of the healing of human calamities. On the other hand, modernists such as Joyce, Beckett and Kafka,

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¹⁷ In “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*,” Eliot encourages modernist artist to follow Joyce’s novel (130). Eliot’s essay implies what he did in “The Wasteland”.
are not compromised by anything other than the pleasure of their literary production and the literary tradition from which they are consciously (and actively) involved, as Kafka’s work exemplifies. Jung understands that *Ulysses* turns away from him, yet does not consider this quality as one of Joyce’s aesthetic intentions. Simply, *Ulysses* does not match Jung’s interpretation because the novel is not written to reveal anything except the contradictions and paradoxes of the world. Affirming, as Jung wants, a literature that does not struggle with the world denies the existence of an important characteristic of modernist aesthetics and conception of the world as paradoxical. If the world, according to Jung, needs some help from the artist to reveal his collective unconscious, then neither Joyce, Beckett, nor even Kafka are able to bring such help.

Kafka’s work is included in my analysis not only because of his emblematic influence but also because, following Jung’s theory and following Marxist analysis, his texts are a perfect example of how modernist artists perceive the world and its politics. In this sense, Kafka helps to explain Joyce’s paradoxical literature. Also, Kafka’s work is in dialogue with world literature (Homer, Flaubert, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, among others) and also with the “real” world (he was aware more so than his contemporaries of his historical epoch). Arguably, no one feels the same intrinsic relation between literature and life as Kafka does. Throughout his entire diary and letters, he repeats that literature is the only thing that pleases him. For that reason, his letters, documented conversations and diary (which is basically a workbook and not a diary) are important to explore like his novels and stories. Kafka said to Gustav Janouch about Edgar Allan Poe: “He wrote tales of mystery to make himself at home in the world” (Janouch 42). Here Kafka comments on Poe can be a reflection to his own texts. He wants “to make himself at home” by looking for an exit from reality. “In reality,” Kafka says, “I mount into a prison
specially constructed for myself…, except for myself… no one would recognize it as a prison. For that reason, every attempt at escape is useless” (53). The real world, according to Kafka, is a world codified through language and social roles that impose social responsibilities. Kafka’s feeling towards that world is described as if he lived in a cage with bars that he carries with him all the time.\(^\text{18}\) This statement should be understood beyond the relation to the German occupation of Prague and be extended to the relationship with his own family. He complains in different parts of his literary production that he was forced to have a family. In a diary entry dated October 24, 1911, he questions the meaning of the word “mother.” Through the simple word used to name the mother, he questions how relevant the significance is for him as content. The word mother, muter, was a German concept without correspondence to his Jewish sense of what a mother was. Even though this word stops the flux of thought, for Kafka that is an opportunity to create other thoughts. The German mother has a closer and personal relationship with her sons than the traditional Jewish mothers. Conversely, in reality, Kafka experiences a cold relationship with his mother and also with his father, who exemplifies the *Old Testament* authoritative figure.

In another entry, ten years later (October 25, 1921), he was unable to play cards with his parents. He feels like the relation with his parents is socially imposed, just as his obligations are in the rest of his social life, including his work in the insurance company. Four days later, he tried in vain to please himself and his mother by playing cards. After trying, Kafka ended up envying the solitude that Robinson Crusoe had on his island. Two days later (November 1), he also wrote in his diary about how the law, as he calls this obligation with the outside world, imposes on him. The only way to transgress the law is to despise it. Even this cannot end with a reality in which the law and the imposition of it will remain. All truth is imposing to him, as Nietzsche proposes

\(^{18}\) “I, who am in the cage,” tells Kafka. After Janouch commented “That’s understandable. The office,” Kafka interrupts him: “Not only in the office, but everywhere… I carry the bars within me all the time” (Janouch 20).
in “On Truth and Falsity in the Extra-Moral Sense,” in the form of the self “that society imposes in order to exist” (The Critical Tradition 455). Nietzsche also affirms, “All living is an obeying” (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 88). Such is the reality from which Kafka, as an artist living in a world structure around family bonding (based of enlightenment ideas), is trying to escape, as K, the character of The Castle, who tried to reach the castle, and as Frieda who prefers the confusing structure of the castle town a commitment to K. Kafka’s only exit is writing while searching for the unreachable.

Kafka finds a pleasure in literature that avoids but also questions commitment to the social structure, a literature that overlaps politics in language. Deleuze and Guattari would add that Kafka shows how the social Oedipal-capital structure does not work. This happens while the capital-culture tries to add more desire to the machine-production (in order to be in society and feel like a part of it), which is the Oedipal social discourse as a production of the capitalist society as we know it. In this way, Kafka is as an example of the one who questions the norm and thus becomes the schizo. Deleuze and Guattari’s statement that “the schizophrenic loses his patience and demands to be left alone” describes the world Kafka created for himself in order to escape from the real world (Anti-Oedipus 14). For that reason, Kafka’s exploration of the condition of the social structure in his literature does not distinguish it from the real world because, for Kafka, there is a relation between this world and the language that brings it into being. Kafka, thus, sees language as the only possible way to sustain existence while creating it in between an already existing world and his new beginning. However, language sustains an unbearable reality. Such reality overlaps with past time and the inescapable present: the Old

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19 K does not need to stay in the castle town. The reason why K is in the town is because he was told to come to work in apposition that does not even exist. K insists in staying and confronts Klamm; there is an inexplicable will to pursue his search for the castle. He can get out as he pleases, he is told by Frieda to do it; however, he is unable to run out of there.
Testament father relationship and the contemporary implications, the already existing world of Kafka and his new beginning and continuation. In this sense, the societal structure is still present through the tradition, but its paradoxical reality is uncovered. Thus, reality, for Kafka, is a series of movements that comes from any direction: the past, the present and even the future have a capacity to affect Kafka as an artist trying to find a language to express the world as a paradox.

5.2 Une question

Kafka is not the only important artist who defines what is literary as a paradox; he serves as a model to different critics, such as Deleuze and Guattari, Blanchot, Kundera and Borges, among others. Blanchot gives one of the most intriguing, and appropriating, definitions of modern literature in *De Kafka à Kafka*: « Admettons que la littérature commence au moment où la littérature devient une question » (11). By “question” Blanchot does not mean the writer’s intention during the process of writing. According to Blanchot, the “question” is what remains in the text after the writer has finished writing. The reader finds the question in the text when this is addressed as an interrogation to the language that becomes literature. Blanchot, following Kafka, does not consider language a nomenclature. He states of the writer: « Pour écrire, il lui faut détruire le langage tel qu’il est et le réaliser sous une autre forme, nier les livres en faisant un livre avec ce qu’ils ne sont pas » (26). Literature, by function, does not close the sense or the meaning of the text. On the other hand:

La littérature est le langage qui se fait ambiguïté. La langue courante n’est pas nécessairement claire, elle ne dit pas toujours ce qu’elle dit, le malentendu est aussi une de ses voies… Dans la littérature, l’ambiguïté est

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20 “Let’s admit that literature begins at the time in which literature is a question.” Blanchot’s translations from *De Kafka à Kafka* are mine.
21 “To write, he must destroy the language as it is and write it in another way; he writes a book while at the same time negating the book.”
comme livrée à ses excès par les facilités qu’elle trouve et épuisée par l’étendue des abus qu’elle peut commettre. (57)

Blanchot considers literature and the text as “le lieu des contradictions et des désaccords” (91).

The writer is the one who, through the use of language, provokes these contradictions and disagreements in order to create literature, the text with contradictions and disagreements. In other words, a text contradicts and disagrees with itself and with other texts.

Such definition defines modernist literature as part of the tradition of Cervantes and Rabelais: the world as ambiguity, but also politics and action. According to Kundera, novelists such as Kafka and Joyce discover what only the novel can reveal: “terminal paradoxes.” This happens in a world in which “existential categories” lose their sense (The Art of the Novel 12). As a consequence of this, the novel’s philosophical questions are not posed in order to be resolved but to be explored through contradictions and disagreements. Kundera exhibits his philosophical concern with modern art not to write philosophy but to uncover the world as the place of “contradictions et désaccords,” as an enormous and continuous question mark; the same can be said of Borges’s texts and Beckett’s works.

Understanding and the insertion of an artist in the literary tradition are political with the capacity for action, and recognize new possibilities. Through the exploration of the world as a “question,” Borges introduces himself in the modern tradition among modernist artist such as Joyce, Kafka, and Beckett. Interestingly no mention can be found of Beckett in Borges’ work, and according to biographical information, the only time they coincided was in 1961 when they shared an award. On the other hand, Borges wrote essays on Joyce and poems about him in

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22 “Literature is the language that becomes ambiguity. The common language is not necessarily clear, not always says what it says; the misunderstanding is also one of its roads. In literature, the ambiguity is free to its excess and it is exhausted by the degree of the abuse that is able to do.”

23 “the place of disagreement and contradictions”
Elogio de la sombra. Kafka’s stories are relevant to Borges’ own aesthetic as they express Borges affinities with the development of argument, which, according to Borges is the most important part of the story. In his prologue to Kafka, Borges recalls the first time he read a Kafka story in 1917 (the same year Eliot published “Tradition and the Individual Talent”). In this later reflection, he recalls his indifference to Kafka. Later on, he finds two obsessions in Kafka, one of which is the idea of the infinite, which according to him, occurs often in his works. He also states in Biblioteca personal, that Kafka “transmuted circumstances and agonies in fables,” “writing squalid nightmares.” The nightmare, the only possible dream experience for Kafka, does not invalidate dreams; dreams are not solely for interpretation because they are real. Borges considers both dreams and nightmares as part of the experience of reality. Both aspects of dreams are not dissociated from the waking life as Bergson discusses in Matter and Memory and Mind-Energy. Dreams are experienced and are understood from the images perceived during the waking life. Knowing this, Kafka’s nightmares provide Borges with a particular understanding of literature. Kafka’s nightmares are products of his waking life and his literary and “philosophical” background.

In this sense, Borges, as Eliot, explores the possibilities of the literary tradition. For both of them, the literary tradition is movement, evolution. In his essay “Kafka y sus precursores,” in which Borges establishes his argument in relation to the literary tradition, Kafka becomes an exemplar of movement in which literature is explored non-linearly. The essay positions Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent” within Borges argument (even though Borges only

24 The poems are “James Joyce” and “Invocación a Joyce” (“Invocation to Joyce”). (Obra poética 320, 341-342)
25 “El argumento y el ambiente son lo esencial; no las evoluciones de la fábula ni la penetración psicológica” (Prólogos de la biblioteca de Babel 56).
26 “El destino de Kafka fue transmutar las circunstancias y las agonías en fábulas. Redactó sórdidas pesadillas en un estilo limpio” (Biblioteca personal 16).
27 “Kafka, sinceramente, solo podía sonar pesadillas y no ignoraba que la realidad se encarga sin cesar de suministrarlas” (Prólogos de la biblioteca de Babel 16).
mentions Eliot in a footnote at the end of the essay). However, Eliot’s essay questions what the concept of tradition means to modernist writers. Because he is influenced by Bergson’s philosophy, Eliot defines the literary tradition in the following manner:

[What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them… the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. (Point of View 25-6)]

Eliot’s idea of the artist as an individual consciousness in which the past is influenced by the present echoes Bergson’s philosophy. For Bergson, “our personality, which is being built up each instant with its accumulated experience, changes without ceasing. By changing it prevents any state, although superficially identical with another, from ever repeating in its very depth. That is why our duration is irreversible.” In addition, our “present state is explained by what was in me and by what was acting on me a moment ago.” For the artist, “such as the talent of the painter is formed or deformed – in any case is modified – under the very influence of the works he produces, so each of our states, at the moment of its issue, modifies our personality, being indeed the new form that we just assuming” (Creative Evolution 5,6). The nature of consciousness is to exist and “to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly” (Ibid. 7). Bergson states that the present contains the past; the past is dragged to consciousness but never through the same state twice, akin to Borges’ interpretation of Heraclitus’ statement that no one steps twice in the same river. In addition, Bergson adds that “[t]he poet is [a] revealing agent,” who expresses instead of creates out of nothing (The Creative
Mind 112). Bergson also states that the artist concerns himself less with “the material side of life” than the philosopher does. The artist’s role is to materialize thoughts and bring them “in nature and in the mind, outside of us and within us” into a life of action (113). The materialization of thoughts is an important distinction between the philosopher and the artist incorporated by Eliot in his discussion on the metaphysical poet. Borges also assumes this distinction in his concept of precursors. The Heracletean notion is relevant not only to Bergson’s argument on movement but also to Borges idealism, which includes his Kafkaesque notion proposed in “Kafka y sus precursores.”

Idealism, for Borges, implies that a book only exist when a reader exists. This means that in order to create precursors, the writer must first be a reader. The reader must have knowledge of the books that precede him. The writer, who cannot stand alone, cannot produce without reading. The reader/writer produces from his consciousness because the writing process depends on personal memory. In order to recall other texts, the writer must be familiar with them; hence, the writer must be, above all else a reader. Borges, influenced by George Berkeley, states that knowing is to recognize what is seen, and that is precisely been known, or perceived, in order to be recognize.28 The reader changes the meaning of other texts every time he reads them. The reading process implies writing and vice versa. Thus, for the reader to exist he must write, or create thoughts. (It is no wonder then, that Borges published a few books of prologues as part of his personal library). At the same time, for a writer to exist, others must read him.

Interesting enough, Borges embraces Berkeley’s idealism over Bergson’s understanding that positions consciousness between mind and matter, idealism and materialism. According to Berkeley, what exists is whatever is perceived by the mind; nothing can exist outside the mind.

28 “[C]onocer es reconocer, per es preciso haber conocido, para reconocer, pero conocer es reconocer” (Discusión 170).
Our senses perceive the external world but, without the mind, the external world cannot be apprehended and does not exist. For that reason, a multiplicity of readers makes the existence of books. The library of Babel exists because of its readers; it is no wonder why Borges claims to be first of all a reader. But, the reading process is a constant movement that ends in writing to move back to a reader. As discussed in the previous chapter, for Beckett, this process is an ill one. In *Nohow On* the characters (voices) see, hear, and reason ill. However, mental activity is necessary: “In order to be company he must display a certain mental activity” even if “he reasons and reasons ill” (7).

### 5.3 Becoming Precursors

The tradition is created, modified and endured from the new beginnings of the reading/writing process. The reading/writing process does not correspond exclusively to cultures, languages, and epochs but takes place in *durée*. Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are examples of how modernist artists borrow from texts that are part of different cultures and epochs to change the way those texts were previously read, and this political characteristic is one of modernism’s most important features. In this same way, Beckett’s works influence Joyce’s texts, Borges texts illuminate Joyce’s texts, and Kafka’s texts bring an understanding of Beckett and Borges as well. Everything converges in apparent chaos with different movements of reading/writing adjacent to each other. Borges’ examples of the precursors of the Kafkaesque are presented chronologically in his essay in order to make it easier for the reader, as his examples are from Greek, Chinese, Danish, British, French, and German texts. However, Beckett can be read before Kafka just as Kafka is read, by Borges, before Zeno of Elea.

To link Joyce, Kafka, Beckett and Borges together still results in difficulty because they share more than their philosophical and literary tradition: they are contemporaries. As Borges
constantly argues, quoting Samuel Johnson, no one likes to owe anything to his contemporaries. In addition, because they are close to each other it becomes difficult to state which of them is a precursor to another. Thus, they share, more or less, the same precursors. Borges intentionally excludes Joyce as his contemporary; Beckett writes within Joyce’s shadow. Joyce and Kafka stand alone, without any direct relation between them. Still Kundera’s analysis positions Joyce and Kafka in the same modernist tradition. Conversely, Kundera, in The Curtain, agrees that Joyce’s Ulysses is the modern Odyssey throughout one day in Leopold Bloom’s life. Kundera also assigns to Kafka the other Homeric epic, “[The] Castle is the modern Iliad,” which no longer represents the epic world (106). Alternately, Kafka’s and Beckett’s writings have affinities. Beckett’s Endgame seems to be in Kafka’s mind before Beckett wrote it. Kafka’s aphorism: “The Messiah will come only when he is no longer necessary” (The Blue Octavo Notebook 28), as Hamm impossibility to have a painkiller, is similar to Beckett’s Godot who never arrives. Among these four writers, Borges is the only one who openly insists on being part of the same tradition beyond his geographical location, although he does not need to claim Beckett to be considered within the tradition. 29 Beckett’s novels claim the same tradition by utilizing the similar motifs and the same philosophical tradition. For example, the paradox of “Achilles and Tortoise” is reworked by Beckett in Mercier and Camier in which the question of who arrives first remains unsolved.

Both Beckett and Borges use Zeno’s so-called “paradox” but with different results. In opposition to Borges, Beckett does not embrace Zeno’s theory of movement but uses it as part of the drama of Mercier and Camier, in which the characters move constantly from one place to

29 In a conversation with María Kodama, Borges’ widow, and after I rephrase the question several times, she confess Borges’ disliking with Beckett’s work. According to Kodama, Borges rejects Beckett’s language and form. “Borges’ Colloquium with María Kodama.” invited by the Argentinean Consulate. University of Miami, Florida. (May 2009)
another. Borges, in “Kafka y sus precursores,” without success, uses Zeno’s “paradox” to illustrate his definition of the literary tradition. Yet, Beckett is not interested in developing a theory of the literary tradition. Instead, he uses Zeno’s “paradox” to confirm his interest in working within a tradition, and, in forming and deforming the new and the old, as his work is part of modernist aesthetics of creating more questions. This is merely one of many examples from Beckett’s work in which he uses a text from a previous tradition, such as Dante’s Divine Comedy. Conversely, considering Borges’ emphasis on how the literary tradition is represented and how Beckett attempts to move out of Joyce’s shadow, their common “literary” reference deserves attention. Zeno’s “paradox” states that the tortoise advances to a certain point before Achilles begins to move toward the tortoise. Achilles will never meet the tortoise because he must move first half the distance between himself and the tortoise, and before that, Achilles must move half of the distance between himself and the tortoise. To Zeno, every instance Achilles moves forward, he stops at every half distance he moves.

On the other hand, Beckett’s novel proves Borges wrong. Mercier and Camier illustrates the idea of Borges’ precursors through Zeno’s “paradox” of “Achilles and the Tortoise,” alluding to the paradoxical characteristic of the novel and a quantification of time. Beckett’s characters do not want to resolve a philosophical problem because they do not recognize any problem to solve. Rather, they experience and expose the world as a paradox. Mercier and Camier argue about who arrived first for a while before deciding to drop the subject. What is relevant is that both need to meet and agree to meet at some place. The narrator describes their arrival: “Camier was first to arrive at the appointed place. That is to say that on his arrival Mercier was not there. In reality Mercier had forestalled him by a good ten minutes. Not Camier, but Mercier, was first to arrive” (8 emphasis added). The reader cannot continue reading the novel without pausing to realize that
there exists confusion about their arrival. Camier arrives first, then Mercier; but Mercier was there before by ten minutes. The verb “forestalled,” which describes Mercier’s arrival before Camier, means to prevent, to keep from happening, but it also means to anticipate in advance ahead of time. These meanings do not accurately explain the real paradox that Mercier arrives first when the novel also states that Camier arrived first. Beckett’s novel deserves a close consideration in order to understand but not to resolve.

The reader of Mercier and Camier experiences a text that eludes him: a question without an answer. Although, one thing the reader knows, that Mercier and Camier encounter each other. The problem is how their arrival happens and the discussion of such arrival. Beckett’s French text makes us understand Beckett’s aporia differently. The French text states: “Camier arriva le premier au rendez-vous. C’est-à-dire qu’à son arrivée Mercier n’y était pas. En réalité, Mercier l’avait devancé dix bonnes minutes. Ce fut donc Mercier, et non Camier, qui arriva le premier au rendez-vous” (8-9 emphasis added). When Beckett translated his novel into English he chose to translate “devancé” into “forestalled,” which is not an accurate equivalent to the French “devancé.” The intention is not to find the reason why Beckett selected “forestalled” as the most accurate translation but to analyze the French verb “devancé.” According to Le Robert dictionary, “devancé” means “arriver avant dans le temps, précéder, prévenir.” This meaning is close to forestalled. Conversely, a “devancier” is a person who precedes another person in action; this person is defined as a “prédécesseur,” precursor. The precursor is the person who precedes another person in what he does, implying both backward and forward movements. The “prédécesseur,” or Borges’ precursor, anticipates the person in the past, explaining how Mercier arrives before Camier even when Camier arrived before Mercier. According to Borges, this also would explain how Zeno is Kafkaesque, since time is not understood chronologically. However,
while Beckett understands time as movement (durée), Borges understands time as quantitative (a paradox for an idealist writer). Thus, Borges, embracing Zeno’s paradox instead of questioning it, separates time from space while Beckett understands time and space together.

Mercier and Camier perceive a separation of time and space and are unable to understand the separation. Even though the place they both arrive at has the same importance as the time of their arrival, “Certainly things shall never be known for sure” (Mercier and Camier 10). After that, Camier proposes they must decide to stop trying to understand at what time they had arranged to meet until he proposes to drop the subject. The problem is not who physically arrives, but how this arrival is understood or placed in time. Mercier and Camier testify to their arrival, but they are not able to understand it quantitatively, in the abstract. Interestingly enough, they are not able to measure their experience through logical or rational matter. Still, Mercier and Camier realize there is something wrong with that. Bergson, in his critique of Zeno’s paradox on movement, argues that motion and space are different. There is not immobility and it cannot be argued that one moves and stops. Mercier and Camier try to understand their arrival with a mathematical equation in which Mercier arrives before Camier, but they do not pursue it as far as Bergson does. Certainly, the characters do not resemble Bergson’s understanding of movement: in the equation, both stop in different instances before arriving at the meeting place, and we know that every stop is solely apparent; they both keep moving, and if they quantify their movement through stops in time, they do it afterwards. It seems they experience their arrival through intuition but they are not capable of recalling it or understanding it. After all, their conversation creates a continuation for an ancient philosophical discussion even if only relying on questions.
In the end, Beckett is not interested in proving Zeno’s paradox or Bergson’s idea of movement but the writing itself. For now, let’s consider for a moment that Mercier and Camier are readers/writers, and the place of movement and arrival is the text. In order to do this, one cannot ignore Borges’ definition of precursors, because, and ironically, even though Borges spatializes time, he concludes that time should not be spatialized. Like Mercier and Camier, the text meets its reader/writer. Both arrive to the text in a non-temporal and a non-linear order. Following Borges’ idealism, the reader arrives to the text, creating the writing of the text as he reads. Zeno’s text of “Achilles and the Tortoise” changes through Beckett’s *Mercier and Camier*, and Beckett’s novel acts as precursor for Zeno’s story. We can say the same about Kafka: Hamm’s lack of a painkiller is a precursor for the Kafkaesque’s messiah and contemporary with Godot. Camier arrives first in space but Mercier arrives first because he does it in time. The paradox is obvious for the two characters but not for the readers, as this non-separation of time and space is stated in the verb *devancé*.

On one hand, Bergson mentions Zeno’s “paradox” in *Matter and Memory* to refute the impossibility of movement. According to Bergson, the past comes into the present; it could be voluntary or involuntary. This resembles Heraclitus’ river in which no one steps twice. On the other hand, *Devancé*, “prédécesseur” or precursor positions Beckett in the same category with Eliot’s definition of the literary tradition. However, Borges takes from Berkeley’s idealism the idea that once one has closed his eyes, if someone else has their eyes open, the world still exists. According to Borges, the reader (as an idealist) has the same function. Still, Borges pretends to be a pure idealist denying the relation between time and space, calling it a *paradox of movement*.

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30 “‘The Messiah will come only when is no longer necessary, he will come only one day after his arrival, he will not come on the last day, but on the last day of all.’” (Franz Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks* 28)
In *Discusión*, Borges explains the paradox on movement and some of the refutation that has been made since then. However, he does not take a position in respect to the “paradox of movement,” but uses it as a literary tool. According to Borges, this is the same scenario of Kafka’s K moving toward the castle, which explains Kafka’s position before Zeno. This means that the literary tradition moves backwards but also, following Borges’ arguments, the movement is not linear. Again, Borges concludes that movement exists through a text that proves otherwise. Still, Joyce, Kafka, Beckett, and Borges do not correspond to a particular order in the literary tradition. Any one of them can be positioned prior to, of following another. Still, Eliot’s concept of the tradition assumes a chaotic order and content. Borges extrapolates from Eliot’s argument when he analyzes Zeno’s story, as a paradox that proves movement, through the incorporation of others’ contradictory philosophical implications. Conversely, in this scenario, the writer/reader is able to explore the different possible meanings of the world through his artistic creation. For that reason, the end of the artistic creation is to present a new finished work with contradictions, which constantly sets a new beginning. As Eliot describes the metaphysical poet: “When a poet’s mind is perfectly equipped for its works [the literary tradition], it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary” (“The Metaphysical Poet” 64). Conversely, we can tell that Borges believes in order, in *le juste mot*. Maybe for that reason, he finds in Zeno’s text a reference to elaborate his theory of the tradition. Both of them conclude the same in respect to the literary tradition, but they do not share an opinion of how literature must be, or the elaboration of their respective arguments.

Ironically, the literary tradition as Borges describes it does not embrace Zeno’s text. In “La perpetua carrera de Aquiles y la tortuga,” Borges exhibits the weakness of Zeno’s argument. Borges recognizes that many critiques undermine Zeno’s texts. Yet, he does not want to reject
Zeno entirely. Borges’ justification to keep Zeno’s texts consists in the recognition and acceptance of space and time through idealism, with simultaneity neither of time nor of space.  

This is Borges’ paradox: “Admitamos lo que todos los idealistas admiten: el carácter alucinatorio del mundo” (Discusión 171). The assumption of this justifies his project of the total library or “Babel’s library” in which all possible texts exist as pantheist ideas in which all readers are writers, such as Pierre Menard.

Analyzing the literary tradition through Zeno’s “paradox” is not as adequate as Borges posits. Borges assumes a non-linear understanding of the literary tradition that is not fixed thematically. Certainly, there are themes or motifs that connect artists and their works, which assumes an insular consideration of the text and an unraveling to the point of aporia. Instead, themes or motifs are products of consciousness. For Borges, in Kafka’s The Castle Zeno’s “paradox” is retold/revised again, but wrongly interpreted by Borges. On the other hand, Odysseus wandering is retold/revised in Joyce’s Ulysses through durée. Notably the end process of recalling the same paradox is a way to integrate the literary tradition in time and space. In this respect, the tradition does not encounter a straight beginning but multiple new beginnings, or reading/writing processes, which are always in-between. Heraclitus’ statement that no one steps twice in the same river is essential for understanding the literary tradition that is established by conscious artists. Modernist artists follow a previous tradition knowing that a repetition is not possible, not denying their wills as artists that work through their consciousness. Paradoxically, what Borges denies in his essay is affirmed in the story “Pierre Menard autor del Quijote.” In “Pierre Menard,” Borges drops Zeno’s “paradox” and embraces the Bergsonian durée. Borges’

31 “Zeno es inconstentable, salvo que confesemos la idealidad del espacio y del tiempo. Aceptemos el idealismo, aceptemos el crecimiento concreto de lo percibido y eludiremos la palutación de abismos de la paradoja.” (Discusión 149)
32 “Let’s admit like all idealist does: the hallucinatory quality of the world.” (Discussion 171 translation mine)
Pierre Menard, rewrites some parts of Cervantes’ *Don Quijote*, copying word by word the same texts. Menard’s text is, as he affirms, not the same text as Cervantes’, although, Menard’s text is, word for word, a copy from Cervantes’ novel. His text is different because he is writing in a different context. Menard, thus, creates different reading/writing processes.

Becoming precursors is only possible in-between a pre-existent tradition, which is constantly in the making, and the possibilities that the present forestalls for the future. Politics is part of becoming precursors. The reading/writing process starts something new within a new discussion, a new talk, like the one by Mercier and Camier. None of them inaugurates the talk on who arrived first, which shows how communication is a constant struggle. Arendt states, “what is important… is the thought process itself” (*Essays in Understanding* 3). In addition, “every thought,” she continues, “is an afterthought, that is a reflection on some matter or event” (20). Zeno, Kafka, Borges, and Beckett are part of the same stric beginning, of the same “afterthought” and the same process of action created by the tradition. What remains is the language that while happens in-between becomes literature, which takes part in politics through action. The language by virtue of its in-between-ness that becomes literature is the same language discussed by Blanchot, Gombrowicz, and Bergson. The same language is explored by Rothko and Serra in their art work but also reflected on and put into action by Kandisky. Such language creates questions, interrogates the questions themselves, and generates differences. It also shows the struggle in which modernist art is constantly created and re-created by the exchange between the artist and the audience.
WORKS CITED


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Antonio was born in Hatillo, Puerto Rico. He earned his bachelor’s degree on European History at the University of Puerto Rico in 2003 and his master’s degree in Comparative Literature at the University of Puerto Rico in 2007. His interests are 20th century literature and critical theory, particularly the works of Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Milan Kundera, Jorge Luis Borges, Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze and Hannah Arendt, and their influence on contemporary writers. His research interest traverses other disciplines, such as paintings and sculpture, in which the issue of memory and language appears as part of the experience of art as a political struggle. Antonio currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.