SAMUEL BECKETT AND THE NONHUMAN
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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS
Panel 1A: Humanism, History and Inhumanity

Shane Weller (University of Kent, UK)
‘Humanity in ruins’: Beckett and Humanism

In his unbroadcast radio script ‘The Capital of the Ruins’ (1946), written in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Beckett evokes a new vision of the human, a vision of what he terms ‘humanity in ruins’. On the one hand, this vision is clearly one of human beings finding themselves among ruins of their own making. The devastation wrought by the aerial bombardment of the Normandy town of Saint-Lô resulted in the almost total destruction of the town, in a manner akin to many other European towns and cities during the war. In this sense, ‘humanity in ruins’ is clearly humanity amid the ruins resulting from its own inhuman or, perhaps, all-too-human drives. In his later work, Beckett would return to what he term a ‘ruinstrewn’ landscape, as, for instance, in Sans / Lessness (1969/1970) However, Beckett’s conception of ‘humanity in ruins’ extends beyond this idea of being-amid-the-ruins to that of humanity itself in a state – or, rather, a process – of ruination. This paper will consider what might be understood by such a process of ruination, and how it reflects Beckett’s engagement with the Western conceptions of the human in terms of freedom, power, and knowledge (most notably in the idea of humanism), the place of the human in relation to other forms of being (both animate and inanimate), and the extent to which Beckett’s conception of ‘humanity in ruins’ may be seen as a thinking of the non-human or the post-human. The argument of this paper will be that, rather than any simple abandonment of the idea of the human in favour of either the non- or the post-human, Beckett comes in his post-war work to explore from within the experience of a humanity governed by a principle of interminable unmaking, a process that has its own (nominalist) poetics, ethics, and politics, and in which the relation between the human and the non-human plays a decisive role.


William Davies (University of Reading, UK)
Beckett and the Inhumanity of History

This paper explores Samuel Beckett’s vocabulary of ‘anthropomorphism’ and the ‘inhuman’ and the use of these terms in both his art commentaries and responses to Nazi propaganda in the ‘German Diaries’ of the 1930s. In doing so, this paper considers the extent to which the confluence of aesthetic and historical sensibilities that these terms come to represent underpins the use of history and historical detail in Beckett’s post-war writing. Recent criticism has demonstrated the importance of Beckett’s rejection of ‘anthropomorphism’ in painting for the development of his visual imagination and his aesthetic sensibilities more broadly. As Conor Carville shows, Beckett’s notion of the ‘inhuman’ in painting, located in the work of Cézanne, for example, is an articulation of ‘how the art object can formally inscribe the limit-point between the human and the inhuman’ (Samuel Beckett and the Visual, 106).
Beckett discovered this notion too through the work of Jack B. Yeats, a painter whose work demarcates a ‘rupture in the lines of communication’ (‘Recent Irish Poetry’) between art and observer by revealing ‘dispassionately [...] the heterogeneity of nature & the human denziens’, an aesthetic far removed from the ‘humanized & romantic’ depictions of nature in Constable and Turner (SB to TM, 14 Aug 37). Beckett uses such vocabulary throughout the 1930s. However, it is during his visit to Nazi Germany that Beckett’s sense of the ‘anthropomorphism’ of experience would move beyond the realm of the aesthetic. Following his reading of pro-Nazi history books which claimed National Socialism as the right and proper culmination of German history, Beckett deplores the treatment of history as anything other than a ‘chaos’ of ‘inhuman and incomprehensible machinery’. In Nazi propaganda, Beckett identifies the worst and most dangerous examples of the ‘anthropomorphisation’ of ‘the chaos’: ‘the expressions ‘historical necessity’ and ‘Germanic’ destiny’ [...] start the vomit moving upwards’, he writes. With reference to ‘First Love’ and Mercier and Camier, this paper examines how these texts register Beckett’s conception of history as ‘inhuman’ chaos as developed through his encounters with Nazism’s process of refashioning history.

Dr William Davies is a Samuel Beckett Research Centre post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Reading. His work on Beckett includes essays and journal articles on Beckett’s relationship to T. S. Eliot, the politics of form in Watt, and Vichy propaganda imagery in the post-war trilogy. His monograph, Samuel Beckett and the Second World War is forthcoming with Bloomsbury and he is the co-editor with Dr Helen Bailey of Beckett and Politics, forthcoming with Palgrave. He is also working on a series of essays examining the legacy of the Second World War in post-1945 English poetry. The first of these, ‘Donald Davie and Englishness’, is published in The Review of English Studies.

Hannah Simpson (University of Oxford, UK)
‘Le maigre dos tourné à l’humanité’: Eleutheria et le réfus de l’humanité

En 1977, Beckett explique qu’il s’est impliqué dans la Résistance française pendant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale en raison de la souffrance visible autour de lui : ‘L’étoile jaune et tout cela. Ce n’était pas une question de politique. Simplement quelque chose d’humain. Je ne pouvais pas rester détaché’. Depuis lors, les études beckettienennes tendent souvent à commettre le contresens biographique qui consiste à chercher la démonstration d’une empathie équivalente avec la souffrance d’autrui dans ses œuvres d’après-guerre. Bien que cette communication n’envisage pas de débattre de la morale relative de l’engagement personnelle de Beckett lui-même dans la guerre, elle réside à l’assimilation automatique de la conduite de Beckett à l’anticipation d’une éthique humaniste de compassion dans ses écrits, et surtout dans Eleutheria (1947). En effet, ses pièces d’après-guerre offrent plus souvent un refus d’empathie avec la souffrance d’autrui, comme le démontrent les exemples multiples d’indifférence ou même de cruauté catégorique dans Eleutheria : ‘une vue de l’humanité juchée précairement sur un abîme inhumain’, comme l’écrit Julian Murphet un sujet de la position européenne après Auschwitz. Cette communication lit Eleutheria comme une réponse sceptique à ce que Kevin Brazil nomme ‘le débat philosophique concernant l’humanisme, peut-être le débat central en France après la Libération’. Eleutheria manque de démonstrations de la compassion empathique que des critiques comme Emilie Morin, Kirsten Shepherd-Barr et Jackie Blackman prétendent avoir vues dans l’œuvre d’après-guerre de Beckett. La pièce met plutôt


Panel 1B: Landscape, Environment and the Architectural

Scott Eric Hamilton (University College Dublin, Ireland)
‘to hell with all this fucking scenery’: Theatre, Landscape, and the Nonhuman

What is being called the nonhuman turn is an interdisciplinary endeavour investigating the human in relation to its organic and inorganic Other. Theodor Adorno posits the “experience of natural beauty obeys the complementary ideology of the unconscious” (Aesthetic Theory, 89). Schopenhauer is explicit that “The world is entirely idea” (The World as Will and Idea). Landscapes, and by extension scenery, may be nonhuman but are nonetheless anthropomorphic constructs because of their experience through human ideology. The human, then, is the subject by which the nonhuman object, as well as the human Other, is subsumed. Film is famously premised on Esse est perciπ: O exemplifies the turmoil that to exist is to be perceived through anthropomorphic parameters. As such, nature, in itself, is generally ambivalent to human existence and interference and Beckett’s work is antagonistic to nonhuman landscapes, at least in part, to the staging of landscape in traditional theatre and fiction as another form of anthropomorphism. Even though Beckett’s characters seem to be moving toward becoming nonhuman, they are never quite able to exhaust their human qualities remaining somewhere between the nonhuman and human. Breath is the closest any Beckett play comes to extinguishing any trace of the human, but the recorded breathing and purely artificial landscape retains the slightest degree of humanity. Landscape scenery as reflecting human ideology not only renders the nonhuman as varying degrees of human but also potentially renders the human becoming nonhuman. In Happy Days, Winnie becomes more landscape than human character. The human as nonhuman can result in an increased experience of suffering and pain. The suffering Lucky endures is emphasised by the burden the objects he carries inflicts and Pozzo’s cruel imperative ‘think pig!’, for instance. Therefore, it will be argued that Beckett’s theatrical landscapes expose ‘real’ landscapes as essentially stages on which the, often dehumanising, drama of the human condition is performed and witnessed.

Scott Hamilton teaches writing composition and literature at University College Dublin. He has essays published in various journals. Along with Samuel Beckett studies, Scott is interested in Zombiism and the ethics of extinction and is co-organizing possibly the first purely academic conference on
Zombiism in UCD this July called ‘Theorizing Zombiism’. His monograph project, ‘Samuel Beckett’s Excavatory Aesthetic’, focuses on archaeology, landscape, and time in Beckett’s work. The initial steps of formulating the conceptual framework for a chapter on drama will be presented in his paper today entitled, “to hell with all this fucking scenery”: Theatre, Landscape, and the Nonhuman.

Alicia Byrne Keane (Trinity College Dublin, Ireland)
Rethinking ‘The Cult of the Home’: Jane Austen, Samuel Beckett and Architectural ‘Vaguening’

The relationship between humans and architecture in Beckett’s prose is a troubled one. While much of Beckett’s ‘vaguening’¹ of cultural detail may apply to outdoor topography, it is interesting to note that it also extends to his depiction of interior space. Malone, for instance, knows he is confined to a room but not how he arrived there; in Watt, Mr. Knott’s house appears largely to mystify. Beckett wrote to McGreevy detailing his frequent reading of Jane Austen, stating that she had ‘much to teach’ him: however, he criticized what he called ‘the cult of the home’ in her work.² Austen’s novels view society at large through the prism of indoor space; while Beckett appears to have been dismissive of such (perhaps ‘feminine’) writing, many of his novels are themselves set in microcosmic indoor worlds. Similarities abound between Austen’s and Beckett’s treatment of architecture: for instance, both Ill Seen Ill Said and Northanger Abbey subvert Gothic architectural tropes. There has been much documentation of Beckett’s turn to French as a stylistic decision in order to escape the verbosity of the English literary tradition. Can a parallel be discerned between Beckett’s attempt to write outside of the canonical strictures of the English language, and his ‘vaguening’ of indoor spaces? Does the English language itself become a space here, to be escaped? Has Beckett attempted to write what he elsewhere refers to as ‘drawing-room conversation’, except without the drawing-room? Given the pervasive connection in Gothic literature between the house and the self, it is interesting that Beckett’s indoor spaces can be characterized by absence, blankness, or disconnect. Monika Shafi states that houses can be viewed as ‘the building blocks of culture’³: this talk will address Beckett’s views of national literary identity as reflected through interior space.

Alicia Byrne Keane is a Second Year PhD student at Trinity College Dublin, University of Dublin, where she is in receipt of an Irish Research Council PhD Scholarship and the Henry Hutchinson Stewart Literary Scholarship. She completed her undergraduate degree at TCD in English Literature and French, writing her dissertation on bilingualism and writer’s block with relation to Samuel Beckett and Stéphane Mallarmé. She went on to a Masters at Oxford University, where she wrote on the invention of Ireland in the fiction of Kevin Barry. She is currently working on her PhD thesis on translated literature supervised by Sam Slote, titled ‘Beckett and Murakami’s “Vaguened” Worlds.’

Aleksandra Kaminska (Jesuit University Ignatianum Cracow, Poland)
‘Perhaps Some Day the Earth Will Yield and Let Me Go’: Samuel Beckett, Caryl Churchill and Female Eco-Apocalypse

The main premise of ecofeminism lies in exposing interconnections between female oppression and devastation of the natural environment. The proposed paper traces this idea in Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days* (1961) and Caryl Churchill’s *The Skriker* (1994) and *Escaped Alone* (2016). As Pierre Chabert points out, in Beckett’s dramatic works the body is treated as ‘raw material, which may be modified, sculpted, shaped and distorted for the stage’; it is ‘worked, violated even’ (Chabert 1982: 23); according to MacMullan, these ‘distorted and dismembered bodies’ are so iconic that they have now ‘become part of the global cultural imagery of the twenty-first century’ (MacMullan 2012: 1). In no other play, however, this image is as striking as Winnie’s entrapment in a mound – amidst an ‘expanse of scorched grass’, which Joe Keheller aptly describes as ‘poisoned ground’ (2015: 127). While physically connected with nature, Winnie is also physically threatened by her: the earth is swallowing her up piece by piece; the light, rather than brightening the stage, brings further destruction. This finds an interesting parallel in Caryl Churchill’s *The Skriker* (1994), where a young pregnant woman finds herself swallowed by the earth in the figurative sense: she finds herself in a mythical underground world, where everything is twisted due to environmental pollution. Through her use of symbolism, Churchill links ‘[a]pocalyptic meteorological phenomena’ and ‘the increase of sickness’ with the oppressed (pregnant) female body. ‘Spring will return and nothing will grow’, promises the Skriker (evil spirit). ‘I’m going to witness unprecedented catastrophe’. This prophecy seems fulfilled in Churchill’s latest full-length play, *Escaped Alone* (2016), in which four women sit in a confined space, while outside the apocalypse wreaks complete havoc, causing the whole world to fall apart. Boundaries between bodies and machines become blurred (‘sometimes the cancers began in the lungs and sometimes on the fingertips or laptops’), and yet it is always the female body which seems to be the main stage of apocalyptic events. The paper discusses links between ecology, apocalypse and the female body in the three abovementioned plays, drawing primarily on theoretical works by Jaques Derrida (1982, 1984), Susan Bordo (2003 [1st ed. 1980]) and Carolyn Merchant (1990).

Aleksandra Kaminska is a PhD candidate in the Institute of English Philology at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, working on a doctoral dissertation on the apocalyptic tone in Samuel Beckett’s and Caryl Churchill’s plays. Research interests: British drama, drama theory, apocalyptic studies, women’s studies, ecocriticism.
transformations of the spotlight, from the first performances in German and English to more recent digital and virtual renditions, including Sarah Kenderdine’s interactive AR installation Unmakeablelove, and Nicholas Johnson’s work on Virtual Play (2018). In many of these recent transmedial renditions of Play, the ethical role of the spectator and their implication in the torture carried out by the spotlight is evoked, notably through the use of security cameras, VR headsets, and handheld torches. I will argue that these technological transpositions, from spotlight to other sources, give an illuminating perspective on the relationship between the human and the nonhuman. It may be that such explorations offer a paradoxical means of reintroducing the human into Beckett’s work, imbuing it with extra- “human” relevance in the virtual age. *Solas means light in Irish. It is also the name of the Irish lighting company founded in 1935, with which Beckett would have been familiar.

Dr. Dúnlaith Bird is Senior Lecturer in English at the Université Paris 13. She organised the ‘Beckett Between’ International Conference at the École normale supérieure de Paris in 2010, co-editing and contributing to the subsequent Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui special edition with Sjef Houppermans in 2013. Her current research focuses on the role of electricity in the work of Samuel Beckett, with conferences in Utrecht, Paris, and Prague. She is also organiser of the ‘Beckett Brunch’, held in 2010, 2017, and in 2019.

Thomas Gurke (Universität Koblenz-Landau, Germany)

Not A.I.? Negotiations of the Human and Posthuman in Ping (1967) and Not I (1972)

When Beckett first published Ping in Encounter (February 1967) his text sparked a debate about the experimental role of avant-garde literature and whether or not the author was in fact ‘seeking the extinction of literary culture’ (Lodge 1968, 85). ‘Extinction’ is indeed a fitting description as most of the criticism surrounding the story seems to regard its ‘plot’ as ‘the rendering of the consciousness of a person [...] probably at the last gasp of life’ (Lodge 1968, 86). But it is plausible that Beckett’s text not only presents a liminal stage between life and death, but is itself an ‘in-between’ of pre-cognition and the (always-ready) posthuman. Shortly after its first performance in 1972, Beckett’s Not I was also quickly being discussed in terms of ‘Being and Non-Being’ (Zeifman 1976). But by ‘starting at the top... then working down... the whole machine...’ (Beckett 1972/1986, 380) this text similarly refers to technological negotiations of the posthuman body. Both Ping and Not I exhibit perspectives on body and consciousness as machines, reeling in feedback-loops between perception and action, between actualization and the virtual. The ‘tendency to understand our own bodies and brains in relation to the model of our machines’ (Massumi 2006) is not just a recent one within the posthuman discourse but was proposed in the perceptual theory of Henri Bergson – a philosopher whom Beckett encountered during his studies at Trinity College Dublin with Arthur Aston Luce (Uhlmann 2006, 66).

Thomas Gurke is a lecturer at the University of Koblenz-Landau and has a degree in English Literature and Musicology. His PhD-dissertation focused on the intersemiotic, aesthetic and affective dynamics of music and literature in the texts of James Joyce and is currently under consideration as a monograph for the Florida James Joyce Series at the University Press of Florida. His current book-project explores concepts of authorship within ‘narratives of addiction’.
Céline Thobois (Trinity College Dublin, Ireland)
A Conceptual Study of the Hybridisation of Beckettian Creatures
This paper aims at exhuming Beckett's evolutionary reflection through the study of the hybridisation of Beckett's characters in his work and on the Beckettian stage. The study of the interplay between technological devices and the characters involves the introduction of a new lexicon in the ongoing discussions on Samuel Beckett and his humanistic perspective(s). The identification and the definition of Beckett's hybrid creatures, thanks to contemporary philosophical concepts – such as the ‘trans-human’, the ‘techno-human’, the ‘post-human’, or the ‘cyborg’ – shed light on Beckett’s oeuvre as an evolutionary experiment and an ethical reflection. Indeed, the identification of an extensive presence of technological devices in Beckett's work and practice, not only their increasing number, but also the recourse to medial genres, and the essence of the theatre in itself, combine to create singular figures most recognisable in their hybridity and their resistance to categorisation. Most of Beckett's characters are always in a form of transition in space, time, and in/out of their own human shell. These hardly definable creatures draw our attention to what it means to be a human being as such, and specifically in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This Beckettian aesthetics of hybridisation fully participates in political, ethical, philosophical and scientific debates around the future of humanity. The blurred boundary between the living and the technological in his prose, theatrical and medial works demands a reassessment of whether there is such a thing as a ‘human nature’ and raises the question of the boundary between the material world and (a) virtual world(s), which is one of the challenges that our society is facing. In looking at Beckettian hybrid creatures through the conceptual lense of contemporary philosophy, this paper will attempt to stress the relevance and the need to keep the Beckettian laboratory alive in the twenty-first century.

Céline Thobois is a PhD student of Drama Studies, as well as a Teaching Assistant of French at Trinity College Dublin. After obtaining her B.A. in English Studies, she graduated with honours in the masters program specialised in English and Irish Literature and Civilisation at Lille 3 (France). In her PhD research supervised by Nicholas Johnson, she is focusing on the interplay between the living and technology through the prism of behaviourism in Samuel Beckett's oeuvre. She has been awarded the Postgraduate Research Studentship of Trinity College for this project in July 2018.

Panel 2A: Humanity, History and Barbarism

Llewellyn Brown (Lycée international de Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France)
The Humanity of Beckett’s Nonhuman: The Example of ‘For to End Yet Again’

The ‘non-human’ is considered as being, by definition, a dimension of the human. Its presence in Beckett's work is particularly insistent in the mineral, mortified, environments of certain late prose works, and in the impersonal modality of the narration, of which ‘For to end yet again’ offers a prime example. The human dimension is ostensibly and insistently annulled by the overwhelming presence of petrified human forms, anonymous creatures and the uniformly grey environment which, as a whole, maintain a problematic relationship to the enunciation. It is therefore a question of the manner in which the human, in creation, can be understood as a response to, and an elaboration with, the non-human, the latter being necessarily the part of the human that is reel. This will be approached in a Lacanian perspective in relation to a problematic status of the imaginary register,
which reflects the bodily image. However here, rather than have been consolidated and humanized by the original ‘assent of the Other’, this image remains impersonal, mortified and externalised rather than subjectified. On the topological level, the function of writing offers the means to bind the imaginary to the symbolic and the real. The logical dimension involved – situating the imaginary not as the comprehensible signified but as a function – seems also to be non-human, it will however be seen as the way the human is anchored in a part that, being opaque and ‘real’, escapes both the bodily image and subjectivity. The mortified imaginary register of this text offers both a (meta-)fiction of creation, and a representation of the logical binding of the three registers involved, and which is endowed with substance by the enunciation. The real appears as what the text’s unfolding gives existence to as a product, and leads, retroactively, to the “ending” as being a process undertaken endlessly, and whereby the writer passes through the (same) successive loops that also engender incessant renewal of forms, whose material nature radically resists meaning.


Jean-Michel Gouvard (Université Bordeaux Montaigne, France)
Samuel Beckett et Walter Benjamin: (in)humanité et barbarie

Je me propose de penser la dimension ‘non-humaine’ de l’oeuvre de Beckett en l’articulant avec la notion de ‘barbarie’ chez Walter Benjamin. Le personnage beckettien est à l’image de l’homme moderne tel que Benjamin le définit dans ‘Expérience et pauvreté’, un homme ‘sans expérience’, en ceci qu’il n’a plus rien à transmettre, et qu’il n’a plus que cette ‘pauvreté’ pour seul bien, ce qui l’oblige ‘à reprendre à zéro, […] à construire avec presque rien’. L’artiste moderne en est réduit à se focaliser non plus sur l’expression d’une ‘vie intérieure’ devenue insignifIANTE, mais sur la forme de son oeuvre, et à construire ‘des espaces dans lesquels il est difficile de laisser des traces’, afin de ‘se libérer de toute expérience’ et de ‘faire valoir [sa] pauvreté, extérieure et finalement intérieure […]’, si clairement et si nettement qu’il en sorte quelque chose de valable : une nouvelle façon d’être ‘humain’, qui résulte du ‘désensorcellement’ de la notion ‘d’humanité’. Tout en m’appuyant aussi sur les analyses de Leskov et de Kafka que propose Benjamin vers la même période, je montrerai que la barbarie ainsi entendue caractérise assez bien le projet général de Beckett, tel qu’il transparaît par exemple dans L’Innommable, mais aussi qu’elle éclaire d’un jour nouveau des procédés comme les pastiches de la rhétorique scolastique (ex. Watt), et des thèmes comme l’astrologie et le yoga (ex. Murphy et Molloy), autant de phénomènes, parmi d’autres, dans lesquels Benjamin voit les traces matérielles de la disparition d’une certaine idée de ce que c’est qu’être un homme.


Francesco Clerici (Humboldt Universität Berlin, Germany)
‘There are / still songs to sing beyond / humankind’: Samuel Beckett and Paul Celan

My paper addresses the question of the ‘non-human’ from a literary perspective, analysing the works of Samuel Beckett and Paul Celan. Although both living in Paris for the most part of their adult life (in different years they both taught at the École normale supérieure as well) Paul Celan and Samuel Beckett never met personally. A chance presented in 1970, as Franz Wurm, a mutual friend, invited Celan to meet Beckett. Yet, the meeting never took place; few weeks after (April 20, 1970) Celan took his life, drowning unobserved in the Seine. In many different ways, the works of Beckett and Celan echo and call each other from the distance, as if they were actually preparing that encounter which could never take place, creating bridges by means of words at the threshold between worlds and languages. Celan was surely aware of the profound affinity between their works: he considered Beckett as probably ‘the only man he could have an understanding with’ (as John Felstiner also noticed). Beckett was not only aware of Celan’s poetry, but surely knew his work. Arguably Adorno first observed how Beckett and Celan embodied in their works an attempt to write literature not only after Auschwitz, but also “in cause” of Auschwitz. That is, writing radically questioning the relationship between culture and barbarism, at the threshold between (non-)human (in-human and post-human) and representation, literature and testimony, silence and the possibility to speak for and in the name of an otherness. Analysing passages from Beckett’s The Unnamable and a small selection of poems from Celan’s Atemwende (Breath-turn, 1967) and Fadensonnen (Threadsuns, 1968), my paper explores the complexity of Beckett’s and Celan’s representational strategies in the effort to write literature not only after or beyond the human, but most importantly after and beyond ‘humanism’. If the anthropic is often absent, if not exiled, from their works, what remains of the human in Beckett’s and Celan’s writings? What is the purpose of writing after and ‘in cause’ of Auschwitz? What remains of literature and poetry? Is it still possible to give form to an ethic of literature after the Shoah and World War 2?

Francesco Clerici studied in Milan, Kiel, Jerusalem and Berlin. He’s currently Ph.D. candidate at the Freie Universität in Berlin. Clerici’s main research interests include comparative literature (German, French and English between 19th and 20th Century), German-Jewish Thought, and Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis. His Ph.D. thesis investigates the work of the Negative (A. Green) in the writings of Franz Kafka and Paul Celan. His most recent publications include essays on Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka, and Johannes Imari Auerbach, as well as the Italian edition of Peter Sloterdijk’s 2014 book Die schrecklichen Kinder der Neuzeit (I figli impossibili della nuova era, tr. e cura di F. Clerici, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2018).
Mehmet Zeki Giritli (Koç University Istanbul, Turkey)
Objects as Main Actors in the Earlier Theatrical Works of Beckett

The underlying reason for Beckett’s distinction as a playwright was his deviation from the conventional approach to playwriting mostly based on story-telling. Beckett’s theatre aimed to create an ‘artistic form/reality’ on stage rather than to imitate/reproduce the outside reality. As well as being a challenge to the conventions of playwriting, this deviance from storytelling also challenged the acting methodology of Stanislavski encouraging ‘being’ another person on stage by using the psychological techniques to reach the subconscious. The basis of Beckett’s theater was the ‘play element’, as defined by Johan Huizinga. To create this ‘play element’, Beckett made use of a variety of nonhuman elements such as lightning, voice, and objects on stage. These nonhuman elements were not the supporting actors of Beckett’s theater, as they were in the conventional theater, but rather performed as the main actors on stage. It is possible to attribute this estrangement from the ‘human’ element, to the postwar trauma of the 1950s. Stories and psychological motives of individual characters were replaced by Beckett’s concrete objects, which endowed the plays their universal and timeless quality. Beckett’s objects are not symbols for other meanings but rather stand for themselves and create their own meanings. This paper will analyze the role of objects in the emergence and endurance of Beckett’s theatrical style as well as in challenging the secondary role of nonhuman elements in theatre. It will also investigate the relationship between the objects and the actors on stage in terms of suggesting a new acting style. The paper will focus on the earlier works of Beckett: Waiting for Godot, Endgame, and Act Without Words I&II, all of which were written in 1950s to emphasize the influence of World War II in the position of nonhuman elements in Beckett’s theater.

Dr. Mehmet Zeki Giritli graduated from Boğaziçi University Western Languages and Literatures Department in Turkey. He completed his PhD study on Comparative Literature at Istanbul University. His PhD dissertation is titled ‘(Re)Defining Mimesis Through Anti-Realist Approaches in Post-war Theatre’. He is currently working as an Instructor at Koç University/Istanbul. He is also a professional theater actor and director at a private theater company in Istanbul. He has staged plays of Beckett, Pinter, and Sartre. He has published theater reviews on a number of theatre journals in Turkey. He has pursued academic studies at Malmö University, American University of Beirut, Trinity College Dublin, and Aarhus University as visiting scholar/lecturer.

Rosaleen Maprayil (University of Reading, UK)
The Agency of Objects Within the Scenographical Field of Godot

This paper aims to address and explore Waiting for Godot in performance through a phenomenological reading of specific props and items of costume within its theatrical landscape. In this paper I wish to look at the interrelationship between the body, space and objects in order to understand ‘the way that objects and things powerfully script, choreograph, direct, push, pull and otherwise animate their human collaborators’, seeing them as ‘active agents performing alongside rather than behind or in service to human performers’ (Schweitzer and Zerdy 2014, 6). I will consider the way in which objects play a crucial role in Beckett’s radical deconstruction and re-imagining of the domestic that begins with Eleutheria and recurs throughout his work. By considering how notions of home and domesticity are explored through the set, the aim is to examine the way in which the space around
the performance affects our reading of the mise en scène and the manner in which the objects that frame the action respond in different ways. In order to explore the practical and performative implications I will choose examples of how these props operate and change signification with reference to a selection of performances of Godot that have been staged at moments of socio-political and economic crisis/change. In doing so the aim is to evaluate the agency and resourcefulness of objects to underline the themes of displacement and itinerancy while underlining the relationships between the sets of characters in ways that address a range of audiences in different locations and historical moments.

Rosaleen Maprayil is a second year PhD student at the University of Reading, where she studies under Professor Anna McMullan and specialises in analysing Beckett’s mise en scène in his theatrical output. By using the framework of phenomenology and scenography and working with modern theatre companies her thesis explores the way in which modern directors and designers reassert Beckett’s relevance through their dynamic and challenging stagings of his work.

Panel 2C: Ecology, Biopolitics and the Anthropocene

Marc Farrant (University of London, UK)
Earth, World and Forms of Life: Samuel Beckett and the Ethics of Ecological Disaster
This paper proposes to investigate the complicated relations in Beckett’s works between different modes of being and the problem of place, of being-placed. The radical disjunction between word and world, both dramatized and performed by Beckett’s Unwording aesthetics, not only challenges the anthropocentric foundation of human reason - and of the human as the rational animal - but also emphasises the ineluctability of place as both a mental construct and a material context. Patterns of expression and ways of thinking cannot but escape pre-inscribed forms, just as the body requires, as in Worstword Ho, ‘A place. Where none. For the body. To be in’. Often Beckett criticism has taken the materiality of the mind (Beckett’s frescoes of the skull) to epitomise a solipsistic and disembodied negation of the material world, as J.M. Coetzee argues: Becett’s world is one of: ‘[C]onfined spaces or else bleak wastes, inhabited by asocial and indeed misanthropic monologuers helpless to terminate their monologue, tramps with failing bodies and never-sleeping minds condemned to a purgatorial treadmill on which they rehearse again and again the great themes of Western philosophy’ (Inner Workings, 169). Yet what if the intransitive and non-referential forms that comprise the linguistic matter of the works in fact, far from rejecting the world, instead map more logically onto it than a more conventional aesthetics or, indeed, a philosophical discourse? To explore this question, especially in light of inexorable climate change, this paper draws upon the forms of Beckett’s writing (both linguistic and intellectual) as a means to negotiate the existential threat not only to the individual life of the self, but to the collective life of the species. A particular framework for considering Beckett’s prose, with a focus on the late shorter fiction, will be the distinction between earth and world (drawing on the writings of Jean-Luc Nancy and Martin Heidegger). Consequent questions that arise from this paper are: How might the entropic drive towards nothingness that characterises so many of the writings yield a new nihilistic ethics for the Anthropocene? How might the Beckettian pairing of necessity and impossibility, when it comes to speaking of life and death, be repurposed in an era of environmental catastrophe and ecological disaster? In other words, this paper posits
Beckett’s ‘inhuman’ aesthetics as key to understanding the link between the all-too-human and the non-human in our contemporary reality.

Marc Farrant is currently teaching at the University of Bonn, Germany, and is a research associate with the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis. He has just finished his PhD, on Samuel Beckett and J.M. Coetzee, at the University of London.

Farhad Mehrabi (University of Reading, UK)
Beckett, Agamben and the Art of Passive Resistance

Apart from a great distance in some areas between Giorgio Agamben’s philosophy and Samuel Beckett’s literature, in both, we find a new and at the same time powerful and strong exploration of a ‘supplementary’ and ‘fragmented’ subjectivity which has been the result of a desubjectification process. The impoverishment of this subjectivity becomes the key factor in reinventing the new field for reassessing the very foundations of ethical and biopolitical implications of the Cartesian ‘cogito’ and enlightenment promises. By following Agamben and Beckett’s aesthetics in parallel, I have tried to find a way of guaranteeing the possibility of altering ‘constituting’ power from the ‘constituted’ and sovereign power, and this is the main field that Beckett’s art inhabits; and by this reason shapes the whole political and ethical theories of ‘late modernist’ philosophy. In the era of neoliberalism, the resistance of Beckett comes forth exactly at this stage when he simultaneously tries to combine his artistic illustration of ‘impotence’ with the power of resisting the totalitarianism of conceptualisation force. Accordingly, any understanding of the modern era should fundamentally be a final ‘incompletion’. A perpetual process of supplementation and fragmentary narrations whose subjectification never ends. And exactly at this point, I have tried to introduce a Beckettian ‘circular’ and ‘interrupted’ narration of modernity based of the Agambenian idea of ‘potentiality’ and the idea of passive resistance in his philosophy. A repetitive narration of modern time that simultaneously offers us banality of our lives, from one side, and its promise, on the other.

Farhad Mehrabi is currently a PhD student and sessional Lecture of English Literature and Literary Theory at the University of Reading, UK. He studied social sciences in B.A and M.A degree at the University of Tehran from 2002 to 2008. He did then another MSc Degree in Philosophy of Social Sciences at LSE (London School of Economics) in 2011, and then a Master degree in Comparative Literature at UCL (University College London) in 2014. His PhD thesis has concentrated on Beckett and Agamben. He has published more than 20 articles in the field of literary theory and film theory in Iranian magazines since 2007. His main areas of interest are politics of literature, the question of meaning and nihilism in modern literature, and Film Theory.

Douglas Atkinson (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium)
Language After the World: Post-Lapsarian Ecology in The Unnamable

‘Corpsed’. While the pervasiveness of apocalyptic imagery in Beckett’s work has long been a source of reflection concerning the thematic centrality of negation and destruction in his writing, surprisingly little engagement has been made with either Ecocriticism in general or, more recently, the advances in Environmental Philosophy made in the schools of eco-phenomenology and eco-deconstruction. In order to address this absence, this paper will expand on Husserl’s thought experiment concerning the end of the world with the more hermeneutically explicit relation
between world and language. If, as Beckett noted, language is all we have, then his attempts at reframing the ontological status of literature must be seen as a means of raising the possibility of (re)defining our experience with language as a post-lapsarian environment, one which, tragically, bears a striking resemblance to our current destruction of the biological environment within which we always already find ourselves.

Douglas Atkinson teaches Critical Thinking, Argumentative Writing, and Advanced English Proficiency at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). He holds a PhD in philosophy, with an emphasis on continental philosophy of language. His current research focuses on the philosophical import of Maurice Blanchot in different fields, most notably Samuel Beckett and Japanese Literature.

Panel 3A: Animals, Nature and Natural Science

Joseph Anderton (Birmingham City University, UK)
‘Living flesh’: The Human-Nonhuman Proximity in Beckett’s Four Nouvelles

This paper argues that Beckett’s representation of deconstructed human beings and their encounters with nonhuman animals in the four post-war nouvelles (1946) evokes a prescient human-nonhuman proximity. Firstly, making use of Simone Weil’s categories in her contemporaneous The Need for Roots (1949), I examine how Beckett destabilises various human properties and requirements in the depiction of his creatures (including language and storytelling, cognitive intelligence, physical ability and social status) to invent what Shane Weller calls ‘forms of weakness’ or ‘un-beings’. Although such dehumanisation might suggest a stable conception of what the human is and is not, in the second part of the argument I close-read Beckett’s creatures’ encounters with nonhuman animals (horse, pig, ass, cow), which reveal their marginalisation from human communities and accentuate the contiguities, continuities and conflations of the human and nonhuman. I consider this human-nonhuman proximity as a potentially liberating anti-anthropocentric gesture and a prophetic identity structure that speaks to twenty-first century critical animal studies and ecocriticism. The epistemological process whereby it takes the constructed identity of the nonhuman animal as a foil to reveal what it means to be human has become commonplace in critical animal studies, notably in Giorgio Agamben’s concept of the ‘anthropological machine’. However, recent reflections on the human’s ecological place and the term ‘the Anthropocene’ have reviewed the human-nonhuman divide and introduced alternatives focused on connectedness, such as the ‘cthulucene’ (Donna Haraway) or pre-Severing (Timothy Morton). The human-nonhuman proximity in Beckett’s four post-war nouvelles – expressed in these texts as the collective term ‘living flesh’ – recognises such connectedness, occurring through an anti-humanist negation of the idea of the human.

Dr Joseph Anderton is Lecturer in English Literature at Birmingham City University. He is the author of Beckett’s Creatures: Art of Failure after the Holocaust (Bloomsbury, 2016). Joseph has published various articles on Beckett, literary animals studies and modernism including essays on equines in Beckett and Animals, anthropomorphism in Kafka and Beckett in Performance Research, nonhuman others and life writing as a self-othering process in Kafka, Beckett and Auster in Twentieth-Century Literature and creaturely silence in Beckett and Coetzee in Beyond the Human-Animal Divide. A forthcoming chapter on vegetation and its characterisation of late modernism is due to appear in Modernism/modernity.
Characters in Beckett’s oeuvre give ear to sounds that are oddly associated with animality. Estragon and Vladimir in *En attendant Godot* feel that ‘the dead voices [...] make a noise like wings’. Henry in *Embers* summons a horse by invoking the sound of hooves. Mouth in *Not I* mentions buzzing in the skull, which recalls the bee. The makers of these sounds are not always identified as animals because they sometimes come from humans in the form of voice. ‘Neat’ identification is therefore dangerous in Beckett. ‘Little people’ in *Le dépeupleur* are called ‘bodies’ in the fiction, and the narrator refers to ‘a faint stridulence as of insects’, which is produced by the light in the cylinder. We have difficulty in attributing these bodies solely to humans, because the critique of ‘anthropomorphization’, which is treated by young Beckett in his early letters, is at work here. The bodies could be viewed as particles circling in the air, being portrayed as ‘people’. Such atoms also appear as dancing ‘motes’ in *The long observation of the ray*, which are comparable to the ‘motes’ in the third zone of ‘Murphy’s mind’. Moreover, these bodies in the chamber might be compared with Jungian ‘complexes’, which the psychiatrist calls ‘little people’, using the same expression as Beckett’s. According to Jung, the complexes ‘speak in voices which are like the voices of definite people’. In *Company*, ‘one in the dark’ listens to the voices that come to him, evoking disparate pasts, and addressing him in terms of ‘you’. In these remembrances, not only people but also animals and insects are called to mind one after another, to ‘you’ lying in the dark. The French verb ‘gésir’ (to lie) was crucial to the composition of this text, and as Knowlson points out, it is borrowed from La Fontaine’s *Fables*. These ‘partial personalities’ in the fragmentary pasts constitute the ‘alone[ness]’ in the form of ‘company’.


Patrick Armstrong (University of Cambridge, UK): ‘Going through the motions’: The Limits of Natural Science in Samuel Beckett’s Prose Fiction

This paper argues that scientific language and theory, combined with Samuel Beckett’s autodidactic study of philosophy, helps to shape the representations of movement patterns in his post-war ‘Trilogy’ of novels. Taking its cue from Beckett’s writing on Marcel Proust and his concurrent engagement with scientific writing in the late 1920s and early 1930s, this essay explores the physical and imperceptible forces that complicate the movements of characters in his prose fiction. The advances in quantum physics, which resonated with Beckett’s attraction to both ancient Atomism and the seventeenth-century ‘Natural Science Period’ of philosophy, inform his prose style and structural principles. I am not aware of any critical study that has sufficiently explored the relation between Beckett’s
engagement with science and the movements of his creatures. By uniting these two mutually illuminating dimensions, and making use of newly available material, I show that the terminology of natural science frequently reverberates through his writing, especially in his peculiar descriptions of moving bodies. For instance, external forces seem to draw Molloy, who appears more atomic or astral than anthropoid, towards the clustered mass of urban space. I suggest that, for Beckett, the artistic process becomes a contraction, reducing motion to its fundamental terms in an attempt to understand the processes that underpin it. Movement, nonetheless, remains unpredictable, ceaseless, and technically difficult to represent.

Patrick Armstrong is a PhD candidate in English (Modern and Contemporary Literature) at the University of Cambridge, where he is completing a dissertation entitled *Microscopes, Microbes, and the Minuscule in Modern Fiction (1870-1940)*. As part of the MPhil in Criticism and Culture, he wrote a dissertation that focused on the influence of natural sciences on the representation of movement in Samuel Beckett’s post-war ‘Trilogy’ of novels. His essay, ‘Optical Instruments: Microscopic and Telescopic Lenses in Thomas Hardy’s Two on a Tower’, was published in the Winter edition of the *Thomas Hardy Journal* in 2017.

Panel 3B: Prosthesis, Ailment and the Posthuman Body

**Megane Mazé (Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3, France):**

*Dans l’atelier épistolaire de Samuel Beckett: défiguration et élaboration d’un corps perpétuellement souffrant*


Étudiante à Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris 3) en préparation pour l’agrégation d’anglais, je travaille en parallèle à l’élaboration d’un dossier doctoral sur la figure de l’auteur, Samuel Beckett, dans sa correspondance. Ce projet aura pour dessein de montrer comment un personnage-auteur s’élabor

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et se modifie au fil des lettres et en fonction du destinataire, et comment sa spectralisation est mise en scène et défigurée par ses propres mots. Après un Master de recherche soumis à l'UBO (Brest, Bretagne), j'ai effectué une année de lectorat à University College Dublin où j'ai eu l'opportunité de suivre de nombreuses interventions sur la littérature irlandaise, et plus particulièrement sur Samuel Beckett, afin de pouvoir alimenter mes propres recherches.

Thomas Thoelen (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium)
'I have crutches now, I will go faster, all will go faster': Prosthesis as Metaphor and Metaphor as Prosthesis in Molloy

In the 1950s, American writer Flannery O'Connor wrote that ‘sentimental attitudes toward handicapped children, which encourage the habit of hiding their pain from human eyes, are of a piece with the kind of thinking that sent smoke billowing from the chimneys of Auschwitz’. It goes without saying that people with disabilities – never mind children with disabilities – are prone to being contained within sentimental frameworks, rife with tropes of pain and suffering, weakness and vulnerability, dependency and victimhood. What O’Connor appears to be getting at, then, by drawing the comparison to Auschwitz, is that the sentimental attitude facilitates social violence by dehumanizing those towards whom the attitude is directed. Rather than accepting disability as part of the human condition, sentimentality invites people with disabilities to hide their pain from human eyes because, by virtue of their pain, they do not (or no longer) belong to that category themselves, the category of human being. The present paper examines in what ways notions of disability in Beckett’s Molloy can be considered as a narrative response to the problem of narrative representation. If, as disability theorists David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have posited, narrative performs a prosthetic function in that, like the (medical) prosthesis, ‘narrative issues to resolve or correct – to “prostheticize” – a deviance marked as improper to a social context’, then what is at stake in Beckett’s narrative, I shall argue, is rather the failure of the prosthetic operation, including and above all that of narrative itself. In Molloy, narrative representation ‘fixes’ the problem of disability only and precisely insofar as it ‘adds’ the problem of the prosthesis – from the Greek ‘pros’ (‘in addition’) + ‘tithenai’ (‘to place’): ‘to place in addition.’

Thomas Thoelen holds an MA in English literature from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and a BA teaching degree in chemistry and English from the University College Leuven Limburg (UCLL). In 2015, he was awarded a PhD Fellowship by the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO), for which he is currently preparing a doctoral dissertation on Samuel Beckett's prose at the Centre for Literary and Intermedial Crossings (CLIC), also at the VUB. His essay “misery to stay, misery to go: (Dis)Covering Joyce's Shipwreck in Beckett's Molloy' appeared in vol. 28.2 of Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui. Together with David Gullentops, he co-edited the first volume of the multilingual Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings, titled 'Tekst en muziek/Texte et musique/Text and Music'.

Panel 4A: Writing (Dis)Embodiment and Nonhuman Space

Amanda Dennis (The American University of Paris, France)
Writing the Body: Style and the Non-Human

I explore anxieties about the shifting border between the human and the non-human in contemporary theory by exploring an overlooked facet of Beckett’s ambivalent
relation to style. Instead of taking the usual approach to Beckett and style (his shirking of Joyce and the Anglophone literary tradition to gain independence), I argue that Beckett’s late style subverts humanistic ideals of individuation. Focusing on *Comment C’est/How It Is*, I suggest that, rather than an expression of intention, style explores the rudiments of language as gesture, and it arises (almost involuntarily) from the body. Beckett’s stylistic innovations recast style as an expression of embodiment. This resembles Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theory of style, developed in ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’. I show how Beckett’s innovations enact a phenomenological definition of style as an ‘effect’ of our material being as bodies. Traditionally style signals humanist values; its link to artistry and form implies power over nature (with its movement towards chaos), and insistences like Compte de Buffon’s — ‘le style, c’est l’homme même’— link it to individuality. Beckett subverts this ideal in part by portraying the human as joined in sadistic dependence, a move that suggests the violence underpinning desire for individuation (something Derrida also hints at in *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*). Finally, my paper relates Beckett’s revision of style to the theoretical underpinnings of new materialism, namely Latour’s claim that false separation between human and environment ushered in modernity, culminating in an exploitative relation to the natural world. Beckett’s theory of style, as enacted in *Comment C’est*, anticipates contemporary insistence on the human’s belonging to its material environment, a move common to contemporary theoretical approaches to the non-human: Braidotti, Bennett, Barad and Haraway. Beckett’s linkage of style to embodiment undermines a strict separation between the human and the non-human, implicating us in the fate of our environment.

Amanda Dennis is Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at The American University of Paris. Her book project, *Bodying Space: Beckett and the Question of Agency*, engages phenomenology to explore how the physical body – especially in relation to its environment – suggests alternative forms of subjective agency. Her articles have appeared in *The Journal of Modern Literature* and the *Journal of Beckett Studies*, and she has published elsewhere on philosophy and literary aesthetics. She has held fellowships and visiting lectureships in France, the UK, the US and Spain.

**James Little (Charles University Prague, Czech Republic)**

**Beckett’s Inhuman Habitations: All Strange Away and Imagination Dead Imagine**

In the opening essay of *The Inhuman*, which outlines a thought experiment regarding the possibility of human thought existing beyond a solar apocalypse, Jean-François Lyotard famously asks: ‘Can Thought go on without a Body?’ Focussing on the reduction to which Beckett subjects the figure of the human in his so-called ‘closed space’ prose pieces, this paper departs from the question of whether the confined habitations Beckett created could go on being produced without the human body. As a theatre artist, Beckett was well-known for creating difficult physical conditions for his actors—from Winnie’s mound in *Happy Days* to the urns of *Play*. However, it is in the so-called ‘closed space’ prose pieces of the 1960s and 70s that Beckett created his most extreme restrictions on the body. While for Yi-Fu Tuan, ‘Enclosed and humanized space is place’, the extent to which Beckett’s enclosed spaces are ‘humanized’, inhumane, or simply inhuman is open to question. This paper considers the importance of the body in *Imagination Dead Imagine* performing physical acts
which go ‘beyond what is humanly possible’. Furthermore, it asks why the figures of *All Strange Away* are located in a confined habitation which is repeatedly specified as being distinct from life ‘on earth’. Should we consider the figures that remain in Beckett’s rotundas as fully human bodies? And what implications might our answers to this question have for interpretations of these texts? Concluding with a discussion of ‘Long Observation of the Ray’, the only one of Beckett’s closed-space prose pieces not to feature a body, this paper argues that the confined body is key to what Jean-Michel Rabaté has called Beckett’s ‘humanity at the limit’.

James Little is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures, Charles University, Prague and Visiting Professor at the Department of English and American Studies, Masaryk University, Brno. He has published research on Beckett, Václav Havel and J. M. Synge, he is co-editor on the *Not I / That Time / Footfalls* module of the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project ([www.beckettarchive.org](http://www.beckettarchive.org)) and he is also co-editing ‘Draff’, a bilingual special issue of *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui* on neglected aspects of Beckett’s work (forthcoming, 2019).

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**Julie Bénard (Université Paul Valéry Montpellier III, France)**

La représentation du corps à travers la notion de ‘figure’ dans *L’Image* (1959) et *Comment C’est* (1961)

À la fin de la seconde mondiale, dans un rapport intitulé ‘The Capital of the Ruins’ (1946), Samuel Beckett évoque une étrange métamorphose ovidienne, celle du glaive et du soc pour qualifier les matériaux recyclés de la guerre qui servaient à recouvrir les plafonds et les murs du nouvel hôpital provisoire, alors dirigé par la croix rouge irlandaise à St-Lô, en France. La métaphore ovidienne choisie par Beckett est en réalité une référence à la conversion des armes de guerre en outils de la vie civile, mais également à leur capacité à infliger des blessures, autant au corps qu’à la terre. La métaphore est d’autant plus vive dans *L’Image* (1956), un texte court en prose qui préfigure le dernier roman de Beckett, *How It Is* (1961). Dans ce texte, le travail de la langue qui se charge de boue nous rappelle celui du soc et du glaive qui meurtrissent la terre. Avaler et recracher sont les mécanismes pavloviens qui permettent au narrateur d’avoir des visions qu’il décrit sporadiquement par touches impressionnistes. Mais alors que la langue se charge inlassablement de boue de manière à faire durer le plus longtemps possible la vision du narrateur, le reste du corps, lui, se traine dans un mouvement reptilien. Complètement désarticulé, il est sur le point de se décomposer et de devenir un être de boue. Le corps du narrateur ne semble alors plus lui appartenir, illustrant dès lors une disjonction entre le sujet et l’objet. Cependant, la présence enveloppante de la boue ainsi que du noir permettent à Beckett d’explorer la représentation du corps, au seuil de l’humain et du non-humain. C’est plus précisément la notion polyphonique de ‘figure’, possiblement ‘figure-forme’, ‘figure-rhétorique’ et ‘figure-visage’, qui guidera notre présentation et notre analyse de *L’Image* et de *How It Is*.

Evelyne Clavier (Université Bordeaux Montaigne, France)

*Quadrat I + II (1989): déshumanisation et ‘spectrovision’*

La communication se proposera d’analyser *Quadrat I+II* (1981) comme une ‘spectrovision’ qui tend à effacer le corps et le visage des interprètes pour en faire des fantômes aux limites de l’humain. L’originalité de ‘cette folle invention pour la télévision’ consiste à ne pas situer le fantomatique dans l’au-delà mais dans la vie même, celle de la normalité sociale ou encore de la ‘normopathie’ qui amène les êtres à se soumettre à des schémas mentaux et à avoir des gestes et des comportements non individués. *Quadrat I+II* interroge donc cette nouvelle fabrique du consentement qu’est la télévision et peut apparaître comme un appel à découvrir les conditionnements individuels et collectifs qu’elle génère. Avec *Quad I* redoublé de *Quad II* et le retour des fantômes ‘mille ans après’, Samuel Beckett semble ainsi dire l’impossibilité d’un avenir et d’un devenir pour ceux et celles que les technologies de ‘la société unidimensionnelle’ oublient de son histoire façonnent et déshumanisent en les condamnant à agir de façon automatique et à vivre au ralenti. Ainsi, la danse des fantômes de *Quad I+II* peut-elle lue en creux comme un travail sur les images télévisuelles qui facilitent, par la banalisation de la violence et les nouvelles icônes et idoles qu’elles produisent, le retour du même et la tentation du pire. Il s’agira de dégager l’influence de la pensée du philosophe Herbert Marcuse sur la recherche artistique de Samuel Beckett au début des années 1980 ainsi que le suggère Émilie Morin dans son ouvrage *The Beckett’s Political Imagination*. Il s’agira également de voir dans quelle mesure *Nacht und Traüme* (1982) inverse le dispositif de déshumanisation à l’œuvre dans *Quad I+II* et amène à repenser des gestes qui vont dans le sens de l’humain.


Achim Zolke (University of Düsseldorf, Germany)

*Horror Stories: The Living Dead in Samuel Beckett’s Media Plays*

‘A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine’. The famous opening line of Company introduces a threat. It suggests the existence of an invisible being that is aware of and targeting the listening person. At sudden and without warning, it is emanating

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words from no detectable source, in a shady atmosphere. A voice in the dark could initiate the most terrifying situation. In Beckett’s works, many vocal sounds are heard – yet most of them are coming from non-living humans, or those who are no longer able to utter anything, or even non-human sources, suggesting an uncanny presence. What do we think of when listening to the hissed speech approaching the protagonist of *Eh Joe*? How is Henry’s late wife in *Embers* able to perceiveably speak? And where are the shrouded voices for the moribund Listener in *That Time* really coming from? If we just take a look at the stylistic aspects and sheer impressions of Beckett’s media plays rather than at the common solipsistic interpretation, arguably there has never been an author who delved so deep and with such a high frequency into the scariest settings as Beckett. He imposes the most horrific situations onto the majority of his characters – and onto his actors, too, as widely documented. ‘I don't see why I couldn't teach Beckett and horror in the same course. Read some Beckett, and then watch Texas Chainsaw Massacre’, said Prof. Welch Everman (University of Maine), not because Beckett’s ghostly stories are always commencing horrific impressions, but probably because they trigger different sensations, often including dread. Anthony Minghella chose to even intensify this effect when he presented the characters of *Play* with clear reference to zombie aesthetics for *Beckett on Film*. Many of the perceivable entities in Beckett’s works are arising from the beyond, or from the near-dead condition of a barely living human. In ‘Horror Stories’, I would like to take a look into a creepier, horrific Beckett; to relate to definitions of the horror genre; and, if I may, to advance ‘The Living Dead in Samuel Beckett's Media Plays’.

Achim Zolke, M. A., is currently working on a PhD thesis on ‘Beckett and the Media’, in which he analyses Beckett’s stage plays, radio and camera works alike by focusing on the anthropomorphisation of technology. Achim has studied German and English philology in Düsseldorf and Reading. He has been working as a features editor and, since 2004, as spokesman for international enterprises. In 2016, he took over the position as head of the communications department at the University of Düsseldorf, Germany.

**Olga Beloborodova & Pim Verhulst (University of Antwerp, Belgium)**

**Human Machines Petrified: Play’s Mineral Mechanics and Alain Resnais’s Les statues meurent aussi**

*Play* is usually regarded as the starting point of Beckett’s late theatre, introducing a radically new approach to body and language that set a benchmark for subsequent plays including *Not I*, *That Time* and *Footfalls*. Moving on from *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Happy Days*, *Play* further dehumanizes its *dramatis personae* through the audiovisual technologies that Beckett was experimenting with at the time. In this process, actors were reduced to mechanical devices or mouthpieces for speech instead of sentient beings of flesh and blood. The nonhuman aspect of *Play* is also enhanced by its foregrounding of the mineral, with the characters’ ‘faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of the urns’. In some productions, this effect was achieved by plastering the protruding actors’ heads with all sorts of debris like eggshells, giving them a statuesque look. While the influence of radio and (tele)film on *Play* has already received attention, and James Knowlson has noted Beckett’s fascination with the sculptural arts, this paper aims to merge the two strands by discussing the docufilm *Les statues meurent aussi* (1953) – a co-production of Alain Resnais and Chris Marker – as another potential but overlooked source for Beckett’s
play. To illustrate the point of the title that statues die when they become museum pieces, the film uses close-ups and pans of spotlighted busts that make them appear like deathmasks. In addition to Beckett’s admiration for Resnais’s court métrages, his use of similar lighting techniques and white boxes like pedestals instead of urns in the drafts, warrants an exploration of Play in the context of Les statues meurent aussi. By thus merging the technological and the sculptural, Beckett stages a mineral mechanics that verges closely on the nonhuman but is not fully dehumanized, as characters continue to laugh and hiccup, just barely retaining a trace of humanity.


Panel 4C: (Non)Human Waste: Humus, Crap, Excrement

Ronan Crowley (University of Antwerp, Belgium)
Evacuating the Necessary House: Objects in the Loo in Murphy and Premier amour / First Love

In the instructions for the disposal of his remains, the protagonist of Murphy (1938) refers to ‘what the great and good Lord Chesterfield calls the necessary house’. The allusion is ultimately to Philip Dormer Stanhope’s succès de scandale Letters to His Son (1774), and it returns in epigenetic fashion in Beckett’s revised translation of Premier Amour as First Love (1973). The French text’s ‘atroces séances aux cabinets, aux water’ was first translated by Raymond Federman as ‘atrocious sessions in the toilet, squatting on the pot’ and subsequently, by Beckett, as ‘atrocious sessions in the loo’ before ‘cruel sessions in the necessary house’ sealed the join with the eighteenth century and Georgian England. The proposed paper will follow Beckett into the privy, taking stock of the objects that appear and disappear in his renderings of the testated excretion of Murphy and the pained efforts of the anonymous narrator-protagonist in Premier Amour/First Love. In reading Beckett’s necessary houses, the paper will explore the necessities required in a ‘dispeopled kingdom’ and will seek to articulate the status of human remains and excreta as nonhuman objects.
Bruno Geneste (Collège de Clinique Psychanalitique du Sud-ouest, France)
Beckett avec Lacan: l’humus de l’humain

Notre proposition se situe à l’intersection de la psychanalyse lacanienne et du texte beckettien. Il s’agira de faire saillir un point nodal sur l’affinité entre le résultat exigible d’une cure psychanalytique et la pratique de la lettre chez Beckett. La cure analytique vise à un ‘plus’ d’humanité à partir de la mise au point d’un savoir sur l’horreur qui constitue chacun, ce qui, dans le langage freudien, prend le nom de Chose (das Ding) et dans la logification lacanienne, d’objet a : cœur d’ ‘inhumanité’ où l’haleine humaine (Comment c’est) hume la haine d’être sujette au langage et au discours. Ce que la psychanalyse souligne, c’est que l’abord de l’inhumanité au cœur de l’être parlant est condition de dégagement de l’human dans l’homme. Beckett vise au cœur, sans plus en passer par l’expédition analytique, de ce que nous appellerons ici l’humus de l’human. Le terme d’humus, présent dès Bande et Sarabande pour qualifier le visage de ‘L’ébouriffé’, déroule son fil dans l’œuvre sous diverses métonymies : cendre, trace, boue, déchet, etc. Il faut noter que c’est à partir du déchet que Lacan rend hommage à Beckett dans Lituraterre. Leurs ‘poubellications’ se valent dans la pesée des balances de l’être. Beckett a ce mérite supplémentaire de ‘sauver l’honneur de la littérature’ après Joyce, qui lui, l’a ‘laisse sur le flan’. ‘Beckett-l’humus de l’human’, ce serait déjà lui donner un nom. Mais ce sera avant tout soutenir la thèse que Beckett engage le dire et le corps vivant dans une écriture qui a uniment conservés vivaces l’axe de l’objet indicible, ‘le nord’ de la mort au cœur de la vie (cf. Le dépeupleur), le cap du dire, tel qu’il échappe à toute entreprise de signification. Que reste-t-il de la vie une fois les ‘chères humanités’ (ces tyrannies de la vérité et de la beauté) désarticulées ? Beckett a su commuer ‘ce lamentable gâchis’ de l’existence en ‘precious little’, reste vivable, humanité ‘réelle’ : antidote aux poissons que l’effet de langage nous instille. C’est ce que notre modernité veut ensevelir, alors même que des détresses commanditées par le capitalisme font retour sinistre dans le réel. C’est ce qui n’échappait déjà pas plus à Beckett qu’à Lacan.


Panel 5A: Virtual and Digital (Re)Embodiments of the Human

Nicholas Johnson (Trinity College Dublin, Ireland)
The Evolution of Embodiment: Beckett, Technology and the Human

During Samuel Beckett’s lifetime, his interest and engagement with analogue technology is indexed in his oeuvre: his narratives often include a fascination with glitches, repetition, distant voices, recording, and the dynamics of control over production and reception of text. These interests are mirrored in Beckett’s directing practice as well, rendered visible especially as he brought his texts to the stage and screen, developed intermedial translations of his own work, or suggested adaptation possibilities for his prose. The human subject, in the era in which Beckett was producing his work, was already a technological subject, whose embodiment either affected, or was affected by, machines. Three decades after Beckett’s death, both technology and embodiment have evolved, with substantial implications for the ongoing production and reception of his texts. The shift from the analogue to the digital in technology has resulted in what Matthew Causey has called a shift from ‘simulation’ to ‘embeddedness’ in the human. In this context, translation and reception of Beckett’s texts automatically integrates the technological, and contemporary performance practice largely bears this out: new uses of the stage technologies of sound, light, and video, not to mention role of internet/computer-based and VR/AR disseminations of Beckett’s texts, show that the evolution of the technological is bound to alter both individuals (making/receiving the text) and the social context (the market of performance, the community of scholars). This paper will seek to link Beckett’s insights into technology and embodiment to contemporary performance practices, proposing a theoretical model that conceives of this relation as ‘evolutionary’. One useful antecedent will be Bernard Stiegler’s ‘general organology’, in which he individuation is actually a three-way dynamic process that modulates the relationship between the psychosomatic (individual), the social (organisation) and technical (organs). His notion of this ‘triple individuation’ admits technological organs to the process of evolution.

Nicholas E. Johnson is Assistant Professor of Drama and convener of the Creative Arts Practice research theme at Trinity College Dublin. Recent Beckett credits include Virtual Play (direction), Beckett’s First Play with Dead Centre under commission from the National Theatre (dramaturgy, 2017), Cascando with Pan Pan (dramaturgy, 2016), and No’s Knife at Lincoln Center (direction, 2015). He co-conceived and performed in Abstract Machines: The Televisual Beckett (ATRL, 2010) and Three Dialogues (ATRL, 2011). He has contributed to The Plays of Samuel Beckett and Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland (both from Methuen) as well as Contemporary Theatre Review, Theatre Research International, the Journal of Art Historiography, and Forum Modernes Theater. Johnson is a literary translator (from German), with current and past projects on Toller, Kafka, Frisch, Trakl, and Brecht. He co-edited the Journal of Beckett Studies special issue on performance (23.1, 2014) with Jonathan Heron, with whom he founded the Samuel Beckett Laboratory in 2013. He is a founding co-director of the Beckett Summer School and co-convener of the Beckett Working Group for IFTR. In 2016 he held a visiting research fellowship at Yale University.

David Houston Jones (University of Exeter, UK)
Witnessing and Simulation in Visual Media: from Samuel Beckett to John Gerrard

This paper takes as its starting point the two apparently contradictory understandings of Beckett’s work arising from the Urbanomic event Simulation, Exercise, Operations, held at the University of Oxford in 2012. The first, tragic witnessing, is proposed by Shane Brighton as a means of understanding the debt of contemporary
media artist John Gerrard’s work to Beckett. Brighton relates John Gerrard’s *Exercise (Djibouti)* (2012) to the constrained movement of Beckett’s characters, and their confinement to interstitial and peripheral spaces. The second position, meanwhile, advanced by Mark Fisher, argues that the ‘flatness of affect’ required in Beckettian performance inevitably makes the involvement of human actors unsatisfactory, and that the desired effect can only be rendered through computer simulation. Gerrard’s work arguably offers such a solution, creating highly detailed computer simulations of the movement of human figures through a landscape. Like Beckett’s *Quad* (1981), Gerrard’s *Exercise (Djibouti)* and *Infinite Freedom Exercise (near Abadan, Iran)* (2011) offer apparently exhaustive explorations of the movement of the human body through space. The key difference between Gerrard’s and Beckett’s works lies in the apparent elimination of the living human actor from Gerrard’s simulation, suggesting a logical ‘exhaustion’ of permutations rather than physical exhaustion. On viewing *Quad* slowed down and in black and white, Beckett imagined an entropic version of his existing scenario, ‘a hundred thousand years later’. Gesturing as it does both towards the disappearance of human agents and their continuing existence, albeit in provisional, recessive forms, Gerrard’s work acts as just such an uncanny future counterpart to Beckett’s work, and one which allows us to assess the viability of the category of post-Beckettian witnessing across media.


Annette Balaam (University of Bristol, UK)
**Post Beckett/Beckett: Towards a Post-Digital Beckett within the Endlessness of Quantum Reality**

Beckett’s death occurred at the inauguration of the digital age in 1989 activating certain latent tendencies in Beckett’s work and de-activating others. The digital re-imaging of performance Beckett provokes this paper’s investigation into how Beckett pre-figured our experience in the digital world. Two lines of enquiry will be opened and draw on Beckett’s, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s and Pierre Lévy’s questions regarding the nature of art and the process of virtualization in order to consider this post-digital moment, which is witnessing the blurring of any distinctions between the object and subject, presence and absence, organic technology, a blurring between being and nothingness. A major feature of interest will be how the body-space relationship is articulated in this terrain. Does this locus in-between the extremes of being and nothingness speak of a possible ontological locus – a locus for Being human, in the post-digital condition? The first enquiry draws on my compounding of Merleau-Ponty’s early and late principles regarding the nature of what constitutes subject and world construction – how we bring a three-dimensional world and I into being. Both Beckett and Merleau-Ponty were interested in the artist Paul Cézanne because his use of space visualizes this process of emergence. Identifying key characteristics of Beckett’s take on Cézanne may determine the extent Beckett’s
strategies sit in this locus, a no-man's-land where we are forever in the ‘act’ and process of bringing a world and I into being, a locus of ‘continuous incompletion’ or ‘continuous creation’. The second part applies these principals to practitioners of Beckett; Pan Pan’s All That Fall 2011-2016, Company SJ’s The Women Speak 2015-2017 and Gare St. Lazare’s How It Is 2018. Considering a non-catastrophic point of view for the Digital or future Quantum human, ultimately asks the question of whether the human has always functioned as an AI or Artificial Intelligence.

Annette Balaam is a PhD student and Assistant Teacher in the Theatre Department in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Bristol. In 2015 she was awarded a Postgraduate Scholarship from the University of Bristol to complete her PhD. Her thesis focuses on Samuel Beckett, performance and digital philosophy with a view to realising a digital ontology of space. The thesis also looks forward to a post-digital condition, whereby a future Quantum Human evolves with Artificial Intelligence. This non-catastrophic point-of-view of the future co-existence of man and machine draws on the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Lévy.

Panel 5B: Beckettian Evasions from the Human

Cosmin Toma (University of Oxford, UK)

Becoming Space: Ill Seen Ill Said's Topological Humanoids

After Molloy and Malone’s endlessly counted and recounted possessions, to say nothing of How It Is’s narrator and his scant yet uncountable paraphernalia, Beckett’s decisive break with the novel in the 1960s coincides with an ever-increasing, pitiless focus on torture and dehumanisation, shifting away from an ostensibly hierarchical, possession-based relationship between subject and object towards one of embodiment and thus metaphor. Beyond the well-known, often theatrical figure of the human-urn or urn-human, which visibly objectifies the subject ‘so-called’, or that of the humiliated captive, staged in Catastrophe and What Where (among other playlets), there is another subset of objectifying dehumanisation, most notably (and not coincidentally) present in his short fiction, that merits further attention, in part because the target object or objective may, in fact, not be an object at all. Indeed, lapidary works such as ‘Ping’, ‘Lessness’ and ‘For to End Yet Again’ depict, in an almost painterly manner meant to suggest a still life – recalling Beckett’s essays on the van Velde brothers, which expressly grapple with the subject-object relation in art – the human figure in the process of becoming place, even space. Perhaps the most sustained and ambiguous instance of this uncanny metamorphosis in Beckett’s oeuvre is Mal vu mal dit (Ill Seen Ill Said), wherein the elderly lady of the house, who (or which) acts as the book’s focal point, is described in terms that are deliberately suggestive of the dwelling itself. Beyond the vestiges of objects – mundane tools, for the most part – that continue to haunt the old woman’s abode, there is something else entirely, namely space’s permeating strangeness, its thingness: As such, the very topos that Ill Seen Ill Said’s narrator desperately seeks to grasp cannot be said to be human, even when it wears the face of an old lady, just as it cannot be viewed as wholly inhuman, since it hinges on something more than a merely localisable spatiality. Via a close rereading of Ill Seen Ill Said, this thing and its ‘itsness’, so to speak, will be my paper’s main concerns. I will thus thread my way through subject and object, as well as through the human and his/her/its others, in order to gain a better sense of how Beckett’s writing inhabits – ethically no less than architecturally – what Blanchot called ‘the space of literature’.

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Cosmin Toma is a visiting postdoctoral fellow (Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture) at the University of Oxford – St Hugh’s College. He holds a PhD in French-language literature from the Université de Montréal, having written a thesis on the concept of res literaria in the works of Samuel Beckett and Maurice Blanchot. His writing has appeared in the journals Les Cahiers Maurice Blanchot, Formes poétiques contemporaines, Études françaises, The University of Toronto Quarterly, Word and Text and Voix plurielles, as well as in the edited volumes Défi de lecture. Thomas l’Obscur de Maurice Blanchot and Understanding Modernism. He is also a translator, most notably of Jacques Derrida (in Penser à ne pas voir, Écrits sur les arts du visible, 1979-2004 and Les Arts de l’espace. Écrits et interventions sur l’architecture). His current research focuses on Maurice Blanchot’s persistent influence on contemporary French and English literature.

James Martell (Lyon College, USA)
‘...never really been born’: The Horror of Absolute Phenomenological Suspension in Beckett

Mais qu’est-ce que ‘naitre’ ? Si on la distingue rigoureusement de l’origine, du commencement, de la provenance, etc., la ‘naissance’ est peut-être encore une question d’avenir, une question toute neuve.
Jacques Derrida, De quoi demain…

Zudem hatte die Hebamme mich schon abgenabelt; es war nichts mehr zu machen.
Günter Grass, Die Blechtrommel

In the last couple of years three different strands of Beckett studies have developed, focussing 1) on the relations between Beckett’s work and phenomenology; 2) on those between his work and poststructuralism; and 3) on the feminine and/or maternal in Beckett. These three strands show a common preoccupation and interest in Beckett’s scholarship with questions about the origin or beginning that go beyond the ‘aseptically’ metaphysical or ontological into the organic and, singularly, into the links between a notion of beginning or commencement and birth. As we know, birth in the Beckettian universe—like in Kafka’s—is not a given. As a matter of fact, many of his characters or voices appear to share the destiny of that girl from the anecdote Mrs. Rooney tells in All That Fall (an anecdote borrowed from the lecture by Jung that Beckett attended to): ‘never really been born’ (196). The claim of this paper is that this horrific suspension between non-existence and birth present in Beckett can be linked to phenomenology’s own ultimate suspension, epoché, as the essential moment for the foundation of a ‘first science’, as well as to the foundation of Derridean deconstruction through its investigations on the notion of origin and beginning in Husserlian phenomenology. In this way, Beckett’s work’s presents a notion and series of enactments of origin and birth that illuminate Husserlian phenomenology’s preconditions as well as Derridean deconstruction in their attempt to conceive of an arché beyond the metaphysical, at the same time that it adumbrates the forgotten and, as Elissa Marder calls it, non-human maternal body surrounding any origin as birth. As I will show, this horrific suspension at and of the origin as birth makes of Beckett’s work the critical point of the modernist task of remaking oneself through a new birth.

James Martell is Assistant Professor of Romance Languages at Lyon College. He is the co-editor—together with Arka Chattopadhyay—of Samuel Beckett and the Encounter of Philosophy and Literature (Roman Books, 2013). He has published articles on Derrida, Deleuze, Beckett, and the cinema of Béla Tarr in journals like Mosaic, Oxford Literary Review, and Sanglap. His latest article on Derrida and tattooing appeared in the OLR in December 2017. He co-edited together with Fernanda
Negrete a special volume of *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, titled ‘Beckett Beyond Words’, due later this year. His current book-length project focuses on modernism and matricide.

Christopher Langlois (Concordia University Montréal, Canada)

A Posthuman Ethics of Suffering: Reading Beckett, Reading Slahi

Beckett’s writing is often, and rightly, praised for intuiting the ethical *a priori* of post-1945 aesthetic and philosophical comportment, namely, as Adorno puts it in *Negative Dialectics*, that ‘the need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth’. Less often remarked in assessments of Beckettian ethics that stress Beckett’s compassion for the suffering figures that inhabit his fiction is the more disquieting possibility that Beckett’s writing is necessarily complicit in such suffering. Indeed, the reduction of Beckett’s voices and figures to emblems or embers of alterity, which this paper will identify through a reading of *Fizzles* and ‘All Strange Away’, must not dissuade readers of the suspicion that Beckett’s writing is, in some measure, conscious of its complicity in the ordeal of these fragile, voiceless figures. The first part of this paper, accordingly, will be devoted to a consideration of precisely how and why the figural forms that inhabit Beckett’s fiction, forms that read as remnants of the indestructibility of the human in the face of its limitless destruction, are made to persist in textual spaces that seem to thrive on their posthuman (post-historical) affliction. Without seeing Beckett grapple with this problematic and failing, of accepting what is necessary is impossible, and *vice versa*, the argument here is that we miss what is so extraordinary about Beckett’s dialogue with the ethical limits of writing in the face of historical disaster. The second part of this paper will use these considerations to place Beckett’s textual figures in relation to Mohamedou Ould Slahi, author of *The Guantanamo Diary*, Slahi’s testimony, as he puts it, of ‘living literally in terror’ as a prisoner at Guantanamo Bay. This part of my paper will respond directly to one of the concerns of this conference more generally, which is to assess whether Beckett’s writing holds relevance in the twenty-first century context of terrorism and the War on Terror. It will do so by demonstrating what the mode of suffering experienced by Beckett’s textual figures has to teach us about the implications of Slahi’s condition of becoming responsible, in tragic autoimmunitary fashion, *pace* Derrida, for the experience of his very own affliction.

Christopher Langlois teaches in the Departments of English at Dawson College and Concordia University, Montréal, Canada. He has research interests in the global Anglophone novel, comparative modernisms, and contemporary critical theory. In addition to having placed articles and essays in such journals as *Twentieth-Century Literature, College Literature, Mosaic, Modernism/modernity, European Journal of English Studies, The Faulkner Journal*, and *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui*, he is also the author of *Samuel Beckett and the Terror of Literature* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017) and the editor of *Understanding Blanchot, Understanding Modernism* (Bloomsbury, 2018). He is currently editing a volume of essays on *Irish Literature as World Literature*, as well as a forthcoming special issue of *Ariel* (50.4) commemorating the 40th anniversary of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*.

Panel 5C: Identity, Impersonality and the Ungendered

James Brophy (Boston University, USA)

Endmusik: Beckett’s Lyric and the Ends of Personality

Beckett’s poetry presents difficulty to the critic, evidenced by its remarkably light
treatment compared to the voluminous commentary on the plays, novels, and experimental prose. When the poetry is treated, it is often as evidence toward historicist arguments, rather than a consideration of the work’s poetics formally, or its position in modernist lyric lineages. In part, this is because of the limits Beckett tests: how do we distinguish what a poem is with Beckett, as opposed to often narratorless experimental prose, issuing as if from the dead? I focus on pieces presented by Beckett explicitly as poems, each gathered for the Poems 1930–1989 volume, with particular attention to his epigrammatic lyrics, including ‘Da Tagte Es’, ‘Echo’s Bones’, ‘Saint-Lo’, and the late ‘Brief Dream’. Through these test-cases, I ask what Beckett’s poetry suggests about ends and about limits. As T. S. Eliot wrote, it is lines that distinguish poetry’s syntax from prose: the differentiation of line from line, without punctuation, producing formal ambiguous potential, is what seems to mark poetry for Beckett also. At various times, particularly the very beginning and very end of his career, Beckett consciously wrote poems, capitalizing on their definitive prosodic possibility, aphoristic ambiguity, and gnomical power. His poems often deal with death - early on, his father’s death; later, confronting perhaps his own. Death is itself an end, the dissipation of a humanity, of an aggregated cultural personality. Poetry, offering no narrative voice nor dramatic character, most confronts the confusion of ‘speaker’ as at once a cultural-admixture and an autonomous lyric subject. Beckett’s poems demand the question: who is the contemplating, meditating, lyric ‘I’, and what is its humanity; this thing that is both a personality, and, as vessel of external cultural forces, Eliotically impersonal. Still, the poetry is idiosyncratic, recognizable, and consistent: it forms the very personality that we encounter as Beckett.

James Brophy is a Doctoral student and fellow at Boston University, currently researching his dissertation on personality and literary construction in modernism, stretching from constructions of the personality presented by Walter Pater’s material aestheticism, to dissolutions of the personality offered by Beckett in his work. He has presented widely on aesthetics and modern British literature.

Stiene Thillmann (Goldsmiths, University of London, UK)
‘Why should I have a sex?’: Past a Feminist Theory of Narrative: The Fading of Gender and Humanity in Samuel Beckett’s The Unnamable

‘Why should I have a sex, who no longer have a nose?’, wonders the voice in Samuel Beckett’s 1953 novel The Unnamable. This paper directly addresses themes of dehumanisation and post-humanism: it uses the text and its narrator to expose the limitations of feminist narratology, to then find alternative readings in the fields of queer studies, anti-humanism, and post-genderism. The main question centres around who or what The Unnamable actually is: s/he/they/it/? After a concise overview of how feminist narratology emerged as one of the main post-structuralist currents, I use The Unnamable’s narrator to disprove theories in the field and call into question the importance and necessity of a narratological theory based on biological sex and binaries. As my research shows a gendered reading does not result in anything, I examine possible alternatives. Firstly, I follow the logical route to queer narratology: I explore how narrative theory’s feminist branch was a necessary stop in the evolutionary process and discuss The Unnamable’s narrator as a prime example of what could now be interpreted as a queer, non-binary character. Secondly, after having explored a contemporary reading of the text’s narrator, I examine a future one, through post-humanism and post-genderism. As early as
1970, Shulamith Firestone stated in *The Dialectic of Sex*: ‘[The] end goal of feminist revolution must be […] not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself’. In this section, I analyse the novel from an anti-humanistic point of view, as a critique of the Holocaust, and a tribute to its dehumanised victims. Then, I go beyond queer narratology to do a post-genderist reading of *The Unnamable* and its narrator. I discuss the significance of a genderless voice in the literary landscape, and conclude my explorations on who or what the novel’s unnameable voice is.

Stiene Thillmann is a master’s student in Modern Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research is interdisciplinary and focuses on Samuel Beckett, gender, voice, theatre, film and visual arts. She is currently preparing her MA dissertation on sound in Beckett’s theatre. After she finishes her MA, she intends to pursue a PhD in the field of Beckett studies.