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Beckett and Surrealism in Dalí: The Language and Ideology of the Absurd

Little by little the contradictory signs of servitude and revolt reveal themselves in all things. The great constructions of the intelligence are by definition prisons: that is why they are persistently overthrown.

Georges Bataille, "The Lugubrious Game" (1929)¹

It is not always in a straightforward or self-evident way that two artistic personalities like Samuel Beckett, in literature, and Salvador Dalí, in the plastic arts, are put together for a comparison. There are certainly traits in common in both artists' achievements, mainly those related to important ideological issues supporting their views on the aesthetic quality of their representations, but there are also profound differences setting them apart. Therefore, contradictory as they may seem at first sight, both in their means of expression and their attitudes towards life and the world in general, still a comparison is always possible, though tentative and never definitive, based upon the absurd, somehow incongruous, quality of their art, as well as the shocking impact their works hardly ever fail to produce on the public. Whether in art-galleries, art-shows, museums or theatres, Dalí's and Beckett's works claim a real audience and endeavour to appeal to its full commitment in a very peculiar way, that being precisely where their utmost symbolic and pragmatic force is to be

¹ "Jeu Lugubre" is the original title of Bataille's article which, in turn, uses Dalí's title for one of his paintings of 1929. However, far from expressing admiration for the painter's Surrealist works, Bataille shows rather a definite refusal and disapproval of the sadistic nature of their utter ugliness: "I am trying to say, almost without preamble, that the paintings of Picasso are hideous, that those of Dalí are of terrible ugliness" (*apud* Harrison / Wood 2003: 485).

found. Perhaps this should also be my starting point for the text that follows.

Surrealism in painting relies mostly on the symbolic force of represented objects, as they appear in their deconstructed shapes, fragmentary pieces of an ideal whole that reality no longer can cope with. The Theatre of the Absurd departs from remaining symbols and motives of a world that has been scattered around by man's lack of sensitiveness and understanding, his carelessness or even his fear and anxiety, to find out that every meaning is a void meaning, and all action is a mere illusion, either of movement and of any possible evolution, or of any form of hope and redemption. Whether more sceptical and critical or confident and optimistic, Surrealism tends to show a way out, even if that be a dreamlike, fantastic path. Absurdism, on the contrary, has no obvious intention of showing some kind of escape or positive solution for any of the problems at issue; symbols and other representations, like characters, sceneries, actions, movements and gestures, dissolve themselves in the self-contained irony of each play as a whole, so as to be regarded and interpreted as meaningless. Of course, meaninglessness is for the Theatre of the Absurd just an ironic figure for all hidden meanings it chooses to keep silent.

Nevertheless, even if a critical approach departs from the viewpoint of symbols and silent hidden meanings, a comparative reading of Surrealist painting and Absurdist theatre has to be fully conscious of the specific means as well as semiotic and ideological codes each of them uses for representing and expressing references, the question remaining open, however, on the kind of reference or set of references we are to find in a such a context. As a counterpoint to Beckett's Absurdism, particularly in the so-called "absurd plays" such as *Waiting for Godot* (1952) or *Happy Days* (1960), Dalí's Surrealism is a possible illustration of a common ground of concepts and forms of expression relating the two currents of art and thought in the twentieth century. From Dalí were chosen the following works, in a rather small sampling of his best known paintings: *Bust of Mae West possibly to be used as Surrealist Appartment* (1934-35), *Face of War* (1940-41), *Poetry of America: The Cosmic Athletes* (1943) and *Young Virgin, Self-Sodomized by the Horns of her own Chastity* (1955). No chronological order was attempted in the selected examples from the works of both artists, as the sequence aims merely at illustrating the underlying point of view of my argument.

1. Most typical of Dali's imaginative and utterly unconventional plastic genius is his "project" of interior architecture centered on the popular "myth" of Mae West (*kitsch*-like cult, so to say), one of the most glamorous Hollywood divas of the 20s and 30s, in her world-wide reputation as a sex-symbol: *Bust of Mae West possibly to be used as Surrealist Apartment*. Furthermore, inspired by the actress's lips as they are modelled in the painting, the artist designed a piece of decoration, a lip-shaped sofa, in *rose-shocking* silk, for the famous *haute-couturière* Madame Schiaparelli: *Mae West Lips Sofa* (1936-37). Both the sofa and its unusual colour were Dali's original creations and would then become cult references for art dealers and collectors all over the world.²

Focusing just on the painting, we notice that it is a most typical work of Dali's middle and later periods, expressing the artist's provocative criticism against a more conservative trend in Surrealism, which he accused of being less daring and less demolishing.³ *The Bust of Mae West...* is in fact a notable example of how familiar objects or notions, normally of some popular and mythical appeal, are transformed into irrational objects of symbolic functioning. They are intentionally made to shock the viewer, making him question and eventually reject his already accepted expectations of Surrealism's ideological assumptions and representations. Instead, Dali wishes to oppose a more dramatic as well as eccentric understanding of what we call "reality" – as *over-reality* – to the exhausted themes of an adulterated and decadent Surrealism, whereby only misleading images and descriptions of dreams were admitted within the somehow vague conceptual frame of automatic writing or painting, often covering up for lack of artistic skills and talent.

Nearly three decades later, during the years of the cold war, in Beckett's *Happy Days* (1960), an elderly couple appears on stage – Winnie

² Also for Mme Schiaparelli, Dali designed a real fashion set of eccentric clothes and accessories, such as hats, ties, edible buttons or other ornaments (e.g. real lobsters, mayonnaise). The artist refers to fashion as the tragic constant of human life, as it represents the idea of disguise which is but a consequence of our birth trauma, the first and greatest we ever experience. Fashion is the tragic constant of history as well because through it, observing models in fashion magazines and shows, we actually see the real pageant of death, for models – mannequins – are indeed terminator angels (Neret 2000: 43-44).

³ Identified in its most conspicuous figure and voice, André Breton, who was closely followed by Aragon. There were also political issues at stake in this rather fierce conflict between Breton and Dali, namely those concerning the latter's artistic admiration for Hitler, which he vehemently sustained was strictly artistic and had nothing to do with politics. For Breton, the "artistic" explanation had no justification at all.

and Willie – each one exhibiting a strange pose and behaviour throughout the play. Winnie is literally buried in a tall mound of sand, up to her waist in Act I, and up to her neck in Act II, all her movements being progressively hindered, till she eventually hardly moves and cannot even reach her handbag full of trinkets and a revolver, with which she keeps on fumbling in Act I, as if playing with toys.

In Dalí's painting, Mae West's head is half-rising from the Surrealist apartment floor; the lower half of her face including cheeks and mouth – the pink lip-sofa – are part of the floor, whereas the golden yellowish hair stands for the curtains. Body fragmentation and its subsequent decay and transformation is obviously an obsessive representation in Dalí's work, both in its literal strong claim on the public's eyes and in its allegorical depth, as it brings forward all symbolic associations of body and soul, human and animal, living and inanimate things, still-life, and death.

Looking back now at the lip-sofa Dalí extracted from *Mae West's* painting – *Mae West Lips Sofa* – and analysing it as a separate object, in its own aesthetic value, a quite peculiar analogy may be found in Beckett's central motive of the mouth in his play *Not I* (1972): in fact, it is almost the only visible and audible presence on stage. The sombre character of the Auditor, who should appear dressed in a black cloak or black overall, as being so difficult to stage – in Beckett's opinion, due to inadequate lights⁴ – is often left unseen in theatre performances, despite its acknowledged importance in the written play itself.

2. A similar though deeper resemblance is present in Dalí's *Face of War* (1940-41), where a despairing and deformed human face – most seemingly feminine – rises above a large deserted yellow landscape, completely lifeless, and bearing human skulls in both eyeholes as well as inside the open mouth. *Face of War*, reflecting extreme fear before extreme tragedy, represents ultimately that immense and profound dread any mortal being experiences before the absolute end brought by death, which the painter found lurking everywhere he went in every single moment of his life – and yet provided the most poignant impulse to live in a unique, excessive way. Life and death were for Dalí made exactly out of the same blood, out of the taste and smell of blood, that animated existence, all

⁴ Beckett was actually called to stage the play and experienced many difficulties in turning the literary drama into a theatrical performance.

mixed up with everything edible, everything vomited or born out of our own entrails, including giving birth or excreting. Stronger even than fear of war or fear of death, this primaevial blood meant for the artist the only taste and substance of life, at once beautiful and grotesque, sublime and absurd, realistic and surrealistic; it was the ultimate grasp upon life as well as its irreversible turn towards death. In this sense, Surrealism is emphatically a Hyper-realism, to use Baudrillard's expression (Baudrillard 1987: 33), in a sense that can be again associated with Beckett and his work, mainly from his middle years, both in his plays and prose fictions, particularly those influenced by the philosophy of Existentialism in its close acceptance and often praise of Absurdism.

As mentioned above, Beckett's characters in *Happy Days* are elderly people, who live in an unacknowledged fear of death, eager to fight the ageing process, as they try in vain to move around in their daily routine. In Winnie's case, this effort involves also a struggle to keep verbal communication alive, by means of a broken dialogue with her husband:

Well I don't blame you, no, it would ill become me, who cannot move, to blame my Willie because he cannot speak. [Pause] Fortunately I am in tongue again. (...) Have you gone off on me again? [Pause.] I do not ask if you are alive to all that is going on, I merely ask if you have not gone off on me again. (Beckett 1986: 153)

In fact, Willie lives in a cave behind her, and although he can still move, he is just able to do it on his fours, like a toddler or a four-legged irrational beast. This seemingly Alzheimer process Willie is going through as he grows older assumes therefore not only a human form, though sad and ironic (inasmuch as the experienced adult turns to a degenerating infant who cannot talk and walk upright), but is more shockingly compared to an animal, in which only the sexual drive, irrational and even grotesque, seems to be awake. Willie hardly answers his wife, who is constantly calling him into her own conversation, and when he eventually does he utters words like "fornication" and is very keen to explain, in a completely awkward and rude manner, that "hogs are castrated male swine, raised for slaughter".

Considering then Dali's and Beckett's representations of fear before life and death, we sense an all-pervading atmosphere of uneasiness and hopelessness in whatever exists or may – may not – exist in a highly improbable future. Inherent meanings of Sur-real or Hyper-real stem from the same sense of the absurd involving this controversial period of Western civilization in the 20th century, a time marked by successive wars

and brutal changes in human attitudes and feelings towards one's most cherished values. Most appropriately, while assuming the necessary relationship between the work of art and time – “the experience of the work necessarily exists in time” –, Michael Fried wrote the following on Surrealism, as he commented on Robert Morris's “Notes on Sculpture”: “Surrealist sensibility, as manifested in the work of certain artists.... [is] theatrical”; as he explains, “the connection between spatial recession and some such experience of temporality – as if the first were a kind of natural metaphor for the second – is present in much Surrealist painting...”, temporality being here understood as “manifested, for example, as expectation, dread, anxiety, presentiment, memory, nostalgia, stasis – [and] is often the explicit subject of their paintings” (Fried 1967: 14).

By symbolizing the irreversibility of time and the impossibility of redemption and escape, many Surrealist works show a lot of resemblances among themselves, especially in the kind of bitter sarcasm whereby happiness turns out to be absolutely absurd. Consistently with this, in Beckett's *Happy Days* Winnie's optimism and good-humour, her loving though displaced care towards her husband, despite all depressing factors around her, contrast with Willie's indifference, dumbness and deafness, as he seems to be living in a completely different time and place. In a more brutal way, in which reality is pushed to the brink of its own destruction, this is precisely what Dalí also intends to show in his *Face of War*: fear is bound to all associations of degradation, annihilation, disgust, nausea, visceral and sexual instincts.

Shocking though as they are, Beckett's images still keep a lyrical sense of humour quite their own, black as it may be, in a paradoxical blend of nonsense, absurd, and poetic optimism:

Estragon – All the dead voices.
 Vladimir – They make a noise like wings.
 Estragon – Like leaves.
 Vladimir – Like sand.
 Estragon – Like leaves.
 (*Silence*)
 Vladimir – They all speak together.
 Estragon – Each one to itself.
 (*Silence*). (Beckett 1965: 62-63)

Or just in Vladimir's words:

The tiger bounds to the help of his congeners without the least reflection, or else he slinks away into the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come – (*Ibidem*: 80)

Dali's sense of humour, on the other hand, is violent, radical, and annihilating. He keeps, nevertheless, a very peculiar kind of optimism, deeply inscribed in the dramatic – theatrical – exuberance of his creations. He loves grandiosity, luxury, excess, madness or folly, and that is what really makes a point – the only one possible – in all matters of life, which naturally include death. “Nor can we tell if the three great images – excrement, blood and putrefaction – are not precisely concealing the *wished for* Treasure Island, says Dali in “The Stinking Ass” (*apud* Lippard 1970: 97-100).

3. Moving on to Dali's third canvas, dated from 1943 – *Poetry of America: The Cosmic Athletes* – we are immediately struck by the exquisite mixture of autobiographical references with cultural symbols: childhood memories in Catalonia come together with emphatic elements of novelty and fascination caused by his discovery of the New World in the 30s where the painter was to live throughout World War II. Following a series of “irrational” devastating paintings from the late 20s – *The Stinking Ass* (1928),⁵ *The Lugubrious Game* (1929), *The Great Masturbator* (1929), *The Enigma of Desire* (1929) and *Accommodations of Desire* (1929) –, *Poetry of America* is above all one of Dali's most successful attainments of his so called critical-paranoic and prophetic method, so loudly proclaimed by the painter himself around 1930. The immense sand-yellow flatland extending throughout the whole surface of the canvas most probably represents the planes of Ampurdán that Dali knew so well from childhood recollections. Also the tower at the back centre of the painting, topped with a cupola, while recreating the idea of a stylized obelisk that might function as a mausoleum, is possibly the same tower he knew at the Pichot's estate in Catalonia. As a landscape representation, *Poetry of America* is no exception in Dali's work, reproducing the painter's

⁵ Having worked with Luis Bunuel on the film *Un chien andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*), Dali reports “The Stinking Ass” – the essay – to one of the film's disturbing surreal images. The text was first published in *La Femme Visible*, Éditions Surréalistes, Paris, 1930.

most beloved places as highly amazing scenarios made up of scattered pieces of a unique experience. Yet, these works are far from simple and literal, being rather controversial forms of autobiographical record; as much as they depend upon personal memories for their real source of inspiration, they actually bring forward, whether in a conscious or unconscious manner, inner experiences that lie deeply beyond any self-explanatory expression, and reveal instead a complex compromise between senses, instincts and spiritual aspirations as might well be best interpreted by psychoanalysis.

Poetry of America presents two male characters in the foreground of the canvas who seem to be playing – or fighting, so to say – quite violently against each other a rather strange variety of American football, normally known as rugby. Instead of a real football match with two opposing teams in the pitch, there are only two players: one is black, the other is white, both with helmets and outfits modelled in the Italian Renaissance fashion. The white player has an empty nutshell that stands for the head with only a lit candle inside; his body, made out of some soft fabric, appears mutilated in hands and arms and, rather disturbingly, from his right nipple a coca-cola bottle is dropped, dripping down on the ground some strange black liquid, that looks like old blood spilt on a pond.⁶ From the black player stems another man, in miniature size, the man of the future born from the new Adam of a new mythology, who manages to hold in his fingertip the egg of the New World. The black America, however, terrified, refuses to see the utmost self-destruction of the white mate – or brother – as a kind of premonition of all difficulties that would meet both black and white communities in post-war America. Also the inevitable decline of Africa is symbolized in the canvas, as its map is hanging like a cloth from the wall of the mausoleum-like tower, while the clock functions as a timer marking the inevitability of fate. Again, we confront the passage from Surrealism to Hyper-realism, whereby the human need for spectacle gains its own space and demands crude representation in a sort of neurotic voyeurism that can even accept, for its own sake, war and destruction:

⁶ Twenty years later Andy Warhol would paint the same coca-cola bottle within the ideological frame of Pop Art's aesthetics.

For humanity can accept physical annihilation, but cannot agree to sacrifice the spectacle. The drive to spectacle is more powerful than the instinct of preservation, and it is on the former that we must rely. (...) Hail the secret rule of the game whereby all things disobey the symbolic law! (Baudrillard 1987)

The same sense of the hyper-real spectacle, though not so excessive and grandiose as Dali's, emerges in Beckett's "absurd" plays, in the theatrical poise reflected in the dramatic tension between sceneries and characters. With regard to *Waiting for Godot*, the sense of an immense yellow desert we find in Dali's *Poetry of America*, disturbed only – though impressively – by a few symbolic objects (figures or characters), takes a more radical turn in the play: the scenery is practically a void space, save for a road leading somewhere or nowhere and a tree. No other symbolism is to be found but that of a silent emptiness, annihilating not only space but also time as empirical sequences that stand respectively for distance and duration. In a void space time is necessarily suspended. As in Dali's painting and Beckett's *Happy Days*, *Waiting for Godot* presents also two main characters, two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, known as well by their nicknames, Didi and Gogo. Beckett's characters do not fight violently and physically with each other, as Dali's fighters (ironically, players) in the painting, but they rather experience a certain animosity, a peculiar feeling of despair that hides behind their comic and intensively poetic verbal expressions, in the vivid though nonsensical language of the play's dialogues. Their exchange of words, accompanied by clownish gestures and movements around the stage, reminds us of circus performances, pantomime and slapstick tricks, making us realize that eventually all efforts on stage – as a metaphor of the world –, all doings and words are good for nothing and will lead to absolutely nothing, because waiting for Godot is not a real waiting, as intransitivity in waiting is simply an absurd. To wait for Godot is but a pretext, a rhetorical device, for their being there, for existing without a purpose. Taken to an extreme of absurdity, where the real logic of being is to be found, life resumes itself to a purposeless waiting unless death as a void may count as its purpose: the coming of Godot. Life has meaning only as far as death exists – and death exists just to give no meaning to life, because death is an absolute end, a final stop: a dead end, literally. "Waiting and longing for silence are equivalent in the last analysis to waiting and longing for death", as Vivian Mercier puts it as he recalls the Judaeo-Christian tradition whereby "death itself may not be the end" and all human waiting upon earth may as well

represent the waiting for the second coming of the Messiah (Mercier 1977: 178). Without ever dismissing the purgatorial quality of man's existence, whether it be a waiting, a single mouth on the stage or an aberrant life stuck in a sand-mound, for Beckett, however, religious resonances, though discrete and subtle as they normally appear, are necessarily filtered by important literary references, such as Dante, Giordano Bruno, Vico, or Joyce, being therefore intertextual and meta-literary rather than metaphysical and religious. "To have lived is not enough for them." / "They have to talk about it." / "To be dead is not enough for them", say in turn Vladimir and Estragon (Beckett 1965: 63).⁷

In *Happy Days*, the dialogical situation proves to be non-existing, after all, because Minnie ends up monologuing to herself, stuck inside her own sandmound: "I say I used to think that I would learn to talk alone". Like Dalí's rugby "fight", Beckett's message is definitely about the absurdity of human struggling, for all victories, or would-be victories, in the form of our expectations and hopes, end up being defeats some way or another. Here is an example of Beckett's "word fighting" in *Waiting for Godot*, with all its stress on pointlessness mingled with a comic, nearly obscene tone:

Vladimir – Ceremonious ape!
 Estragon – Punctilious pig!
 Vladimir – Finish your phrase, I tell you!
 Estragon – Finish your own!
Silence. They draw close, halt.
 Vladimir – Moron!
 Estragon – That the idea, let's abuse each other.
They turn, move apart, turn again and face each other.
 Vladimir – Moron!
 Estragon – Vermin!
 Vladimir – Abortion!
 Estragon – Morpion!
 Vladimir – Sewer-rat!
 Estragon – Curate!
 Vladimir – Cretin
 Estragon – (*with finality*). Crritic! (Beckett 1965: 75)

⁷ Beckett's bitter sarcasm on the religious-metaphysical significance of traditional dogmas is well expressed in the following quote: "A last word about Purgatories. Dante's is conical and consequently implies culmination. Mr Joyce's is spherical and excludes culmination. (...) in what sense, then, is Mr Joyce's work purgatorial? In the absolute absence of the Absolute. Hell is the static lifelessness of unrelieved viciousness. Paradise the static lifelessness of unrelieved immaculation. Purgatory a flood of movement and vitality released by the conjunction of these two elements. (...)

Dali's message, however, manages to have some positive content, something that escapes Beckett's play, for the painting uses absurdity as a symbolic pragmatic device, which endeavours to enact an active response from the public, dim or even dull and insufficient as it may be.

4. Analysing finally Dali's *Young Virgin, Self-Sodomized by the Horns of her own Chastity* (1955), we come before another impressive Surrealist painting greatly influenced by the actual circumstances and facts of the surrounding world, in their majestic public appeal. Mass destruction caused by H-bomb explosions in Japan (1945) is here reflected in the form of all-deforming and deconstructive effects of atomic pulverization. Quite disturbingly again, and obviously in tune with all dominant features of Dali's works, *Young Virgin Self-Sodomized* starts by deconstructing and subverting Vermeer's *Lacemaker* (1669-70), a humble and chaste young woman, wholly concentrated on making her lace. In his portrayal of this young "self-sodomized virgin", Dali wishes to make Vermeer's chaste lacemaker swell till she bursts out and scatters into pieces like a watermelon. Moreover, the painting is also supposed to represent the painter's sister, Ana Maria Dalí (a rather short and plump girl, prone "to swell", as it were), finding though its source of inspiration in a photo drawn out of a pornography magazine. Again, a dear memory from his early years is revisited in its redoubled vitality, something that in Dali's creative process means a bizarre fusion of artistic devices, symbols and motives which at once reveal his analytical perception and understanding of the world and life as inseparable from the violent, grotesque and absurd nature of all his erotic or even obscene ghosts and fantasies.

In Beckett's *Happy Days*, random pieces of a lifetime together make the couple literally occupy two separate "holes" in their homeyard, as if "home" as a unit would no longer exist for them because it is no longer meaningful. In a clear resonance of some familiar concepts in European mid-century Existentialism, the absurdity of the play's situation relates to the absurdity of a life where *to be* no longer means to inhabit somewhere, to have a place, a home of your own: "La façon dont tu es et dont je suis, la manière dont nous autres hommes sommes sur terre est le

On this earth that is Purgatory, Vice and Virtue – which you may take to mean any pair of large human factors – must in turn be purged down to spins of rebelliousness. (...) And no more than this; neither prize nor penalty; simply a series of stimulants to enable the kitten to catch its tail" (Beckett 1972: 21-22).

buan, l'habitation. Être homme veut dire: être sur terre comme mortel, c'est-à dire: *habiter*" (Heidegger 1958: 73).⁸ An impossible linguistic communication between the couple is only redeemed by the outcome of the play itself as a written literary piece and perhaps still by some possible understanding men and women, human beings in general, can reach through the listening of an old song. At the end of Act II, just before the curtain falls, Winnie talks about a time to sing, and the inevitable unchanging sadness that follows, the same that follows sexual intercourse:

And yet it is perhaps a little soon for my song. [Pause.] To sing too soon is fatal, I always find. [Pause.] On the other hand it is possible to leave it too late. [Pause.] The bell goes for sleep and one has not sung. (...) One says, Now is the time, it is now or never, and one cannot. [Pause] Simply cannot sing. [Pause.] Not a note. [Pause.] Another thing, Willie, while we are on this subject. [Pause.] The sadness after song. (...) Sadness after intimate sexual intercourse one is familiar with of course. (Beckett 1986: 164)

Then, she can sing, after Willie half pronounces her name, "Win":

Though I say not
What I may not
Let you hear
Yet the swaying
Dance is saying,
Love me dear! (...) (*Ibidem*: 168)

In *Waiting for Godot* the broken, atomized pieces of diverse speech utterances emerge in full strength in the utmost irrationality of "Lucky's tirade"⁹ (wholly constructed by loose pieces of theories by the Irish

⁸ This must be referred to Existentialism, most particularly Heidegger's, for whom the meaning of home, as one's house or place to be, defines *being* (*Sein* together with *Dasein*). See Martin Heidegger's essay, "Bâûir, habiter, penser", included in his volume of *Essais et Conférences*, from where I extracted the present quotes: "Là où le mot *bauen* parle encore son langage d'origine, il dit en même temps *jusqu'ou s'étend* l'être de l'habitation'. *Bauen, Buan, bhú, beo*, sont en effet le même mot que notre *bin* dans les tournures *ich bin, du bist*, et que la forme de l'impératif *bis*. Que veut dire alors *ich bin*? Le vieux mot *bauen*, auquel se rattache *bin* nous répond: 'Je suis', 'tu es' veulent dire: 'j'habit e, tu habites'" (73).

⁹ Cf.: "During *Lucky's tirade* the others react as follows: 1) *Vladimir and Estragon* all attention, *Pozzo* dejected and disgusted. 2) *Vladimir and Estragon* begin to protest, *Pozzo's* sufferings increase. 3) *Vladimir and Estragon* attentive again, *Pozzo* more and more agitated and groaning. 4) *Vladimir and estragon* protest violently. *Pozzo* jumps up, pulls on the rope. General outcry. *Lucky* pulls on the rope, staggers, shouts his text. All three throw themselves on *Lucky* who struggles and shouts his text.

philosopher Bishop Berkeley), and pervade all nonsensical dialogues between Didi and Gogo. Mankind appears as if sodomized by its most sacred dogmas – in Dali, the symbolism of the Virgin’s horns – which can be metaphysical, religious and moral. The kind of assuredness language can provide as a common code of reference and immediate means of communication in a given community, is here definitely destroyed, put at a loss, when all its references are suddenly devoid of meaning. Linguistic signs no longer establish their usual relationships to the objects they refer to in reality, and language becomes a solipsistic exercise of isolated characters who still keep their nostalgic illusion of making sense out of their words and actions. Eventually, this illusion is the euphemistic word for absurd, as Godot is someone or something that never appears and most probably does not exist.

Like Dali’s painting of an atomized, self-sodomized, feminine figure, hopelessly disrupted by rhinoceros’s horns, *Waiting for Godot* represents a hopeless waiting because, as mentioned before, the break-up is definitive and there is no possible way back to the wholeness, the entirety – before Sodom in Dali, before Godot in Beckett – of our most reliable convictions and ideals, even if in the end they are mere illusions:

Vladimir – (*sententious*). To every man his little cross. (*He sighs*). Till he dies. (*Afterthought*). And is forgotten.

Estragon – In the meantime let’s try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.

(...)

Estragon – What do we do now?

Vladimir – While waiting.

Estragon – While waiting.

Silence

Vladimir – We could do our exercises.

Estragon – Our movements.

Vladimir – Our elevations.

Estragon – Our relaxations.

Vladimir – Our elongations. (Beckett 1965: 62, 76)

LUCKY: Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqu with white beard quaquaquaqu outside time without extension who from the heights of apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but the time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment plunged in fire (...) the labours left unfinished crowned by the Acacacademy of Antropopometry of Essy-in-Possy of Testew and Cunnard (...)” (Beckett 1965: 42-43).

The play's comic pantomime, involving the clownish pulling up and down of the trousers by the characters on stage, reflects, or rather distorts into the absurd, all senses of human sexuality, strong and vital even in its pornographic appeal, transforming however the shocking violence and poignancy of Dalí's imagery into a subtler but not less sarcastic metaphor.

And time's slow pace alone is ominous.

Walter de la Mare, "The Feckless Dinner-Party" (1933)

Both in Beckett's absurd texts and in most of Dalí's works, absurdity or incongruity comes forward as the only way to make sense of a world doomed to vanish into the nothingness of destruction and death. A paradoxical, somehow nonsensical meaning of life seems to be comprised within art itself, in the aesthetic value of all its works, provided they assume, in their entire dignity and sublimity, the difficult task of sacrificing our common-sense ethics as far as our most valued and accepted codes of reference are concerned: in our immediate imitations of life and facts, in our illusions or disillusionings of good and evil, of beautiful and ugly, as well as in our beliefs in what is sacred or profane. Art thus becomes man's only possible home, his sanity throughout his despair and hopelessness, a space to be – either upon the surface of a canvas or on a stage – where still the intransitivity of waiting has a meaning, absurd though as it may be:

Le rapport de l'homme à des lieux et, par des lieux, à des espaces réside dans l'habitation. La relation de l'homme et des espaces n'est rien d'autre que l'habitation pensée dans son être. (Heidegger 1958: 188)

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