

'On Such and Such a Day...In Such a World': Beckett's Radical Finitude.

Steven Connor

The text of a keynote talk given at *Borderless Beckett, An International Centenary Symposium*, Tokyo, 1st October 2006.

They told me I was everything. 'Tis a lie. (King Lear)

Modern philosophy has become at once violently allergic and pathologically addicted to the question of limits in general and its own limits in particular. One might say that the exercise of modern philosophy, like the conduct of modern scientific enquiry, has been preeminently the overcoming of limits - limits of ignorance, confusion, incapacity. Since Nietzsche, philosophy has been a matter of strenuous exceeding and overgoing. In contemporary philosophy, nothing succeeds like excess. The only way to do philosophy, especially if, as some, in apocalyptic mood, have wondered, philosophy may be near to being over, is to overdo it.

A philosophy of limit never quite arrives: it always becomes a melancholy or invigorating account of the limits of philosophy, which provokes the desire to exceed those limits, or to engineer an asymptotic approach to the absolute limit - so that the concept of limit comes to encode an immoderate urge to go to the edge, of the known, the possible, the thinkable. This idea is implicit in the very word 'limit', which derives from Latin 'limen', threshold, which implies that to go to the edge may always promise the possibility of going beyond - otherwise how would one know it was the edge? And yet, the 'liminology', the fact that, as David Wood has said, 'philosophy has an essential relation to the question of limits, and its own limits' (Wood 1990, xv) includes the queasy awareness that the desire of triumphantly overcoming limits is itself a cramping ambition, one that must therefore in its turn be overcome (undercome, one might impossibly have to say).

two finitudes

What is meant by finitude? Finitude first names that which is destined to end, rather than to endure - or rather it names the attempt to accommodate oneself to that necessity. The principal and overwhelming form of finitude for Heidegger, from which many philosophical considerations of finitude take their point of departure, is the condition of *zum Tode sein* or 'being-towards-death'

that is a distinguishing feature of Dasein and imparts its tension and tincture to the whole of life.

There are subsidiary forms of finitude, or being-towards-ending. As is well-known, or at least unignorable, which is not quite the same the thing, Beckett is drawn to the endingness of things in general. Where an ordinary reader might wonder 'what happens next?', Beckett always defaults to the question 'what happens last?' or 'how will the last thing of all happen'? It is in this sense that Beckett is a secular, or vernacular eschatologist, inclined always to the *eschaton*.

The finitude of mortality seems like an arbitrary, incomprehensible violence to the cheerful ego that means to live for ever and goes on living as though it thinks it will. But the finitude of death also offers an abatement of empty time, the possibility of the sense of an ending in a world in which nothing otherwise can ever finish becoming. The one kind of finitude presents itself as a scandal and a disaster, the cankering of all human projects; the other may present a tantalising prospect of consummation. Beckett's work compounds these two aspects of finitude in the use of interruption. Beckett's finite world is always subject to interruption, which can, of course, thwart the movement towards completion. But Beckett will sometimes borrow the force of interruption, seeking to synchronise with it, for example with his fondness for unexpected or apparently arbitrary forms of breaking off: 'Leave it at that' (Beckett 1980, 26); 'Molloy could stay, where he happened to be' (Beckett 1973, 91).

A recurrent quibble in Beckett concerns the question of how complete any apparent ending can be. That finitude does not always coincide straightforwardly with mortality is made clear by the fact that death itself is so indefinite in Beckett's work - one can suffer from being dead, but not necessarily 'enough to bury'. 'Over' ('Over!') (Beckett 1980, 18) is one of the most suspected words in Beckett. One might recall, too, the little moment of perplexity that furrows Molloy's account of his difficulty in getting his mother to understand the meaning of the four knocks he imparts to her skull:

She seemed to have lost, if not all notion of mensuration, at least the capacity of counting beyond two. It was too far for her. By the time she came to the fourth knock she imagined she was only at the second, the first two having been erased from her memory as completely as if they had never been felt, though I don't quite see how something never felt can be erased from the memory, and yet it is a common occurrence. (Beckett 1973, 18)

In order to be erased, in order for something to be there no more, it must once have been there, which always seems to the ember-anxious Beckett to come a miserable second to never having been there at all. This is a worry that ending may itself be limited, that it may not be definitive enough to cancel out the blot of having been, which may persist, unexpunged, unretractable and, perhaps worst of all, revivable.

So much, roughly speaking, for the finitude of mortality. This gets me into the vicinity of another idiom of finitude, which will in fact be the one on which I will be concentrating. This finitude means the inescapability of limit or restriction. The emphasis here is not on coming to an end, but on falling short, on deficiency rather than mortality. Finitude signifies a kind of privation in the heart of being, an awareness of the ever-present possibility of loss, and the looming necessity of death, which means that one is never 'quite there', as Beckett said of 'M' in *Footfalls*, and prevents one living wholly in the here and now. This aspect of finitude makes it hard to distinguish absolutely from indefiniteness. Finitude comes up short of the definite. This mode of finitude overlaps with that of temporal finitude, since, after all, death is often experienced or represented as just such a limit, or arbitrary curtailing. Finitude here means, not the certainty of coming to an end, but the certainty of ending unfinished, dying, as we all must, before our time.

But, if finitude means never being able quite to coincide with one's being here and now, it also means the inability to live anywhere else *but* in the here and now. Finitude means embeddedness, the impossibility of ever being otherwise than at a specific place and time, 'en situation', in a specific set of circumstances that cannot be discounted or set aside as merely incidental - 'the life of Monday or Tuesday', in Virginia Woolf's words (Woolf 1925, 189), which must nevertheless have been written on one day of the week or other. 'Death has not required us to keep a day free', says Beckett (Beckett 1965, 17), reminding us nevertheless that there is a definite date in our diary assigned to it, as yet unknown to us, just as we first saw the light 'on such and such a day' (Beckett 1980, 8). As Philip Larkin madly asks in his poem 'Days': 'Where could we live but days?' The response he offers is loonier still: 'solving that question /Brings the priest and the doctor/In their long coats/Running over the fields' (Larkin 1964, 27)

Perhaps we might say that finitude names the coiled conjuncture of these two contrasting aspects, the lack or insufficiency that haunts being at its heart, and the irreducible excess of beastly circumstance in which we are always embedded.

Comedy is often implicated in this thinking of and at limits. This is nicely illustrated by Beckett's allusion to Jackson's parrot, which utters the words 'Nihil in intellectu' but refrains from or stops short before what Beckett calls 'the celebrated restriction' - 'quod non prius in sensu' (Beckett 1973, 218). The joke depends upon the fact that the bird seems to be saying, not that there is nothing in the mind that has not first been in the senses, but that there is nothing in the mind at all. But, since the bird is restricted, or restrains itself, from delivering the restriction, this leaves open the possibility that the mind might have unrestricted access to other things, things other than those which come to it through the senses (the idea of 'nothing', for example). But Beckett's account includes, by allusion at any rate, the restriction that the bird does not allow, inviting us to see the rhyme between what the bird does and doesn't say and the fact that it is a bird saying it (and so not really *saying* it at all). Parrots, and the philosophical popinjays who unthinkingly parrot slogans like this, may indeed have 'nihil in intellectu', nothing in their minds at all, because everything that they say will be a matter only, and exclusively, of the sensible, with nothing of the intelligible.

Comedy often arises, or at least coincides with this ironic interference of finitude and infinitude. This suggestion is assisted by Freud's diagnosis of the economic basis of the joke, which works by first establishing a restriction or inhibition, and then relaxing its pressure: the joke works through the elasticity of the idea of finitude, the way in which the stress of finitude, when suddenly released, can seem to release a surplus of unbound energy - though never of course infinite energy, since jokes are as subject to the second law of thermodynamics as anything else. So we find Beckett offering us a unique taxonomy of jokes, not in terms of their modes, objects or success, but in terms of their periods of expiry, yielding the distinction between jokes that had once been funny and jokes that had never been funny.

I am helped to my intent with regard to Beckett's finitude by Jean-Luc Nancy's characterisation of what he calls 'finite thinking'. Finite thinking, for Nancy, is impoverished or disabled thinking - thinking as a kind of existence, thinking without ground or destination, the orientation towards a kind of 'sense', that could not hope to resume or reappropriate itself. Nancy calls it 'a being-to itself [that] no longer belongs to itself, no longer comes back to itself' (Nancy 2003, 8). So a finite thinking 'is one that, on each occasion, thinks the fact that it is unable to think what comes to it' (Nancy 2003, 15). Finitude here means incapacity to achieve completion, deficiency, shortfall - a singularity that refuses to be generalised, a *hic et nunc* never to be promoted to an anywhere or anywhen. There is no 'consolation or compensation' in this kind of finitude,

writes Nancy (consolingly enough, one might feel): 'in finitude, there is no question of an "end," whether as a goal or as an accomplishment ... it's merely a question of the suspension of sense, in-finite, each time replayed, re-opened, exposed, with a novelty so radical that it immediately fails' (Nancy 2003, 10). Going along with Nancy would give us readily enough the Beckett of intemperately renewed failure, of infinite suspension or deferral of finality - a Beckett who might therefore strike us as suspiciously congenial, because too readily familiar.

this

If finitude means having to inhabit the inhibited condition of a self that does not come back to itself, Nancy also maintains that finitude means cleaving to the 'hic et nunc' of that which is not taken up into factitious infinitude. This seems curious: what kind of here and now can it be that cannot be grasped - not as the convergence of the grasper with the grasped, nor even perhaps as the convergence of a here with the now? A kind of its own: an experience of the unencompassability of the here and now, that is possible of access only in the here and now. Only in the actuality of the moment can the irreducible passage - the moment mined with a motion - be grasped immediately, though this is to say, never on time, always prematurely or too late. Living in the moment is supposed to give intensity, decision, or calm, depending, because it is supposed to relieve the mind of distractions - the protractions of the past and the attractions of the future. But those distractions are of course part of the finitude of living in time, part of the constitution of the fabled moment. So living in the moment must also include the experience of the nonappropriability of the moment. The only way to live in the moment is not to seek to grasp it, which is to say to miss it. One cannot both be and have the here and now, because of the here and now's finitude, which is actual and indefinite. Indefinite, because unfinished and inappropriable by itself, as seems to be demonstrated by *Krapp's Last Tape*, when the old man (K3) listens to the ringing tones of the younger man he once was (K2) affirming that he has no need of anything now but the incandescent present: 'Perhaps my best years are gone. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now' (Beckett 1986, 223). K2 is limited, finite, in not knowing what he will become, as we, and the later Krapp (K3) will know it. Yet nobody else can inhabit this finitude as he only he can (that is what finitude means), which means that nobody else can inhabit his uninhabitability of his now, precisely because his finitude is unfinished business until it is disclosed by the attention of K3 (or rather his inattention, since he is listening out for something much more important in his past). This is another reason why finitude can never be definitive. If K2 could

have pulled it off, he would have achieved the kind of finite thinking that Nancy describes, one that 'on each occasion, thinks the fact that it is unable to think what comes to it' (Nancy 2003, 15). But he could only think this in general, in terms of an abstract preparedness for what the future may not bring, rather than any here-and-now finitude. Beckett does not merely seek to acknowledge finitude, he sometimes seems to want to appropriate it, to take its measure, to encompass it absolutely and without restriction (and so: *infinitely*). But the finitude of the here and now does not belong to it: it is a yet-to-come, proleptically-belated, here and now.

Beckett's master and semi-begetter Joyce also had a preoccupation with the capture of the indefinite definiteness of the here and now, which he called 'epiphany'. The Joycean idea of the epiphany involves the interfusion of the finite and the infinite, or an eruption of the eternal in the temporal, and his practice tends towards the attempt, not to show the godly in the momentary, as though a screen were suddenly made transparent to a blazing light behind it, as to show the radiance of the momentary itself, untransfigured, but lifted into itself. Duns Scotus's word for this is 'haecceitas', usually translated as 'thisness', the thing that defined what something was in itself, distinct from all others. But Beckett has a different sense of the *haec*; indeed, the very word seems to focus and carry his finitude. The last published work that Beckett ever wrote funnels down through this word, this thisness, which is now as far away from the unstinting apparition of being celebrated in Hopkins and Joyce as it is possible to be. 'This' names that which is both unbearably proximate, so close at hand that all one needs to do to designate it is to point, and at the same time unnamable, too close, too inundatingly immediate for naming:

folly seeing all this -
 this -
 what is the word -
 this this -
 this this here -
 all this this here -
 folly given all this - (Beckett 2002, 113)

The original French version is even more insistent and yet, because of the relative abundance of demonstrative particles, gives the sense not so much of a kind of lockjaw or stuck groove, as of a frantic splintering under the extreme stress of ostension:

comment dire -
 ceci -
 ce ceci -
 ceci-ci
 tout ce ceci-ci (Beckett 2002, 112)

Thus, where the English allows us to hear a simple intensification in the repetition of 'this', the French 'ce ceci' gives us a doubled, reflexive 'this', in which the second 'this' is the object of the first, and for which an accurate rendering would be 'this thisness here'. 'This' must always name something immediately given in the actual or imagined vicinity of the speaker. And yet, precisely because the referent of 'this' is not contained in it, nor ever can be if 'this' is to retain its power to designate whatever lies to hand, to bring whatever it designates into the condition of the close-at-hand, 'this' will never be enough to name what it conjures. This, this 'this', the 'this this here' of 'What Is the Word?' provides a perfect résumé of the condition of indefinite finitude.

I and some of my kind have devoted hours of long and more-or-less honest toil to showing the ways in which Beckett's work dissolves the claims of presence. Today, I feel more inclined to protest that what characterises Beckett's work is the effort to find his way to a presence, though a presence denuded of all determinations, its traditional, infinitive attributes - of permanence, essence, adequacy-to-self; a parched, patched, penurious presence.

difficilis facilis

My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin. Hamm as stated, and Clov as stated, together stated *nec tecum nec sine te*, in such a place, and in such a world, that's all I can manage, more than I could. (Harmon 1998, 24)

This notorious statement, made in a letter to Alan Schneider of 1957, has become a canonical nut that must ceremonially be cracked, an impediment ritually swerved around, like the dreaded centre of the square in *Quad*, if criticism of Beckett's work is to proceed, and it must, it must. But let us take note of what Beckett seems to be saying here. The first thing to note is that the 'as such' on which Beckett insists is insufficient, finite - it is 'all I can manage, more than I could' (and perhaps I am not alone in finding that 'could' oddly

suspensive, as though it were a modal which lacked the word which would complete its sense - 'more than I could have hoped for', 'more than I could, once'?) It is sometimes assumed by the hopefully indolent that Beckett is saying that there is nothing for exegesis to do, that criticism and interpretation are useless and indulgent superfluities, adding complexity to a work that has no need of it, because it is so simple, straightforward, and thus self-interpreting. They are of course given support for this by the fact that, a moment earlier in the letter, Beckett has suggested that he and Schneider 'insist on the extreme simplicity of dramatic situation and issue. If that's not enough for them, and it obviously isn't, or they don't see it, it's plenty for us' (Harmon 1998, 46). Even here, there is difficulty. To allow the extreme simplicity of the words themselves, to let them be 'as stated', one would have to take care not to find anything to notice in the phrase 'extreme simplicity'; why not simple simplicity, and leave it that - why the need to take simplicity to extremes, the need for simplicity to be 'plenty'? There is no simplicity that is truly single, with no wrinkle of implication in it.

And Beckett folds a bit of exegetical opportunity in what he writes. That '*nec tecum nec sine te*', referring presumably to the impossibility for Hamm and Clov either of living with or living without each other, requires annotation for one not completely incurious or naturally au fait with the epigrams of Martial: 'Difficilis facilis, iucundus acerbus es idem:/Nec tecum possum vivere, nec sine te', writes Martial to his Lesbia: 'You are difficult and easy, comfortable and rough/I cannot live with you, nor without you' (*Epigrams* XII, 46, Martial 1993, 3.126-7). In fact, Martial may himself borrow the phrase from Ovid's 'nec sine te nec tecum vivere possum' (*Amores* 3.11.39, Ovid 1987, I.214). The phrase has the seesaw that Beckett liked: ('Do not despair: one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one was damned'; 'I will neither help nor hinder you'). But it also names the predicament of conjoined contraries, in which opposites are inextricably implicated in each other. Beckett may well have thought that exegesis was folly, but this is not what he says here. The '*nec tecum nec sine te*' may also hint that, just as Beckett cannot work in the theatre without the help of a director, cast and crew, he cannot expect his work not to provoke exegesis, which he can therefore neither live with nor without. What he says here is that he refuses to be involved with critical interpretation, and takes no responsibility for easing its passage; and says this precisely because this would loosen the lock of the predicament he is attempting to state, both with extreme simplicity and 'as fully as possible'. (As for those 'fundamental tones': my student Tom Mansell has connected and contrasted Beckett's dislike of echoes and overtones with his peculiar habit of applying universal *sostenuto*, by keeping the sustaining

pedal pressed firmly down when playing the piano, another tricky kind of extreme simplicity).

In short, Beckett's point is not primarily to criticise or discredit exegesis, but to keep it at a distance. In other words, this is not an attack on the practice of criticism, but an attack on its linking with whatever it is that he is doing, in forming the 'matter' of his work. For Beckett to become involved in exegesis would be for him to loosen the very tension of the non-relation that is his relation with criticism, simplifying the difficulty of the *nec tecum nec sine te*.

Beckett certainly at times nursed violent fantasies of giving the works to critics and other interpreters of his work who had gone to work on him - he wrote to Schneider a little later that he dreamed 'of all German directors of plays with perhaps one exception united in one with his back to the wall and me shooting a bullet into his balls every five minutes till he loses his taste for improving authors (Harmon 1998, 59). But I think his austere apartness preserves the possibility of a certain kind of company. I recently heard Sophie Calle speaking about her work at the Riverside Studios. Somebody from the audience asked a long, formidably thoughtful and intelligent question about the relations that might obtain between her work and theories of mourning and melancholia. The suppliant finished his epic enquiry by asking 'so, do you think your work can be seen in these terms, or is it just me?' Sophie Calle considered, and replied: 'Yes, I think you're right. [*A beat.*] It's just you.' This apparently queenly swat generated the inevitable laughter, though I could detect no irritation or desire to humiliate in its tone. Sophie Calle was asking her interlocutor to take responsibility for his interpretation, was refusing to pretend to lift herself and him out of finitude, the condition of amidness in the work she made, and whatever was to be made of it.

This is rough comfort and difficult ease indeed. The point of the Beckett's finitude is to resist being drawn out (the literal meaning of *exegesis*) into validation, promotion, authorisation, exculpation, explication - into public relations. Hence perhaps the 'incoercible absence of relation' (Beckett 1965, 125), of which Beckett spoke, his disinclination to have a relation to himself or any other subject than being of or amid it - 'Je ne peux pas écrire *sur*' ('I cannot write *about*'), he wrote in 1949 to Georges Duthuit (Gontarski and Uhlmann 2006, 20)) What is important for Beckett is finding a way of interested being, being *inter esse*, not the compound interest formed in the afterlife of explication. Beckett lived in a period in which the pressures to infinitise, to lubricate the issueless predicaments of finitude, had already begun to multiply massively. In his time, and ours, Beckett's work has been subject to huge amplification and

enlargement - across genres, media, languages and cultures. He has been made the centrepiece of what might be called a contemporary aesthetics of the inexhaustible, which assumes the sovereign value of endless propagation and maintains a horror of any kind of limit. Beckett found himself, as part of his own historical finitude, having to invent, always anew, ever in the middle of the way, the means of his abstention from this infinitising.

the progress of alimentionation

Perhaps the most obvious embodiment of the factitious infinite is the internet, whose claims to illimitability are often based upon the multiplicative power of its links: the power of the internet consists not only in the very large number of items that it makes accessible, but rather in the incalculably huge numbers of ways in which they can link to each other. The internet presents a pseudo-infinity of relations, a literalisation of Henry James's insight in the preface to *Roderick Hudson* that '[r]eally, universally, relations stop nowhere' (James 1961, vii).

One of the ways in which, for all his easy assimilability to the interests of the internet, Beckett remains jaggedly indigestible, is in the antagonism to linking. It is not too much to say that there is a horror of universal association that matches the horror of eternal life in Beckett. Perhaps the most obvious and difficult form of finitude in Beckett's work is its insistence on distinction, exception, apartness. A convenient method of disposing of this would be to suggest that it belongs to a neurotic and dominative desire to protect essence against accident, where essence underpins the power of ruling minorities, traditional elites. But what are we to make of a finitude that will not relinquish the essence of accident, the irreducibility of an essence reduced to that, to this, to 'this'?

W.R. Bion's essay 'Attacks on Linking' has frequently been brought to bear on the work of the writer he had analysed twenty years before. I have myself considered it in more detail than I have time or need to recapitulate here (Connor 1998). Bion follows Melanie Klein in seeing in certain schizophrenic patients a reversion or fixation at the stage of projective identification, during which the young child will tend to split off good and bad objects from one another - typically, the good and bad breast. Despite being split off, however, these fragments are still available to the subject to form a relation with, unless, as Bion believed might happen in certain psychotic conditions, that very remaining link is itself subject to angry denial and dissolution (Bion 1993, 107).

Beckett's attacks on linking do not have the Kleinian function of keeping good and bad safely quarantined from each other. Rather they arise from a more obscure and general horror at the collapse of definitions, and the prospect it seems to open of a universal equivalence that is in fact a condition of maximum entropy. The problem is that the one who pushes the attack on linking to its limit, insisting on absolute noncorrelation, is liable to turn instead to a kind of atomisation which is functionally indistinguishable from a world of universal equivalence. These two alternatives have gastronomic analogies. Maximal combinability is imaged in Mr Knott's stew made of all manner of good things; maximal nonrelation is signified in the emetic or anorexic relationship to food - for example in the fiercely stinking cheese favoured by Belacqua Shuah in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, which seems to allow him to remain aggressively distinct from his food even as he consumes it (Beckett 1970, 17).

There is no doubt that the recoil from links does at times reach phobic proportions for Beckett. But it does not necessarily preclude sociality or enjoin asocial or atomistic solitude. For Beckett, relation is only possible with distance and differentiation, everything else threatening incorporation or appropriation. As Heidegger somewhat grudgingly acknowledges, and Hans-Georg Gadamer more fundamentally insists, a primary form of human finitude is our *Mitsein*, or being-with-others:

The genuine meaning of our finitude or our thrownness consists in the fact that we become aware, not only of our being historically conditioned, but especially of our being conditioned by the other. Precisely in our ethical relation to the other, it becomes clear to us how difficult it is to do justice to the demands of the other or even simply to become aware of them. The only way not to succumb to our finitude is to open ourselves to the other, to listen to the "thou" who stands before us (Gadamer 29).

But this is no simple, self-evident, or merely given company. It is difficult ease: *nec tecum nec sine te*.

unborderless

We think that the given, limited, actual world is what presses most stiflingly upon us, and that it requires strenuous exertion or careful vigilance to break the fascinating grip of facticity, in order that we can project ourselves into possibility, futurity, transcendence, infinity - or what Badiou calls 'the happiness

of a truthful arousal of the void' (Badiou 2003, 36). Finiteness, we dream, is the merely given, infinity that which is made or imagined in excess of the given. But it is in fact the realm of the given, or the so-called self-evident, that is most intractable to human thought. We find it almost impossible to grasp or coincide with this realm of the given, the incontinently-renewable once-and-for-allness of every instant, the statute of limitations of every project. Our apprehension skeeters off the actual into whatever might prolong or retard it, making what shift we can, through fantasy, religion, literature, commerce, to remit its finitude.

I spent the first half of my sentient life pointing to everything in Beckett that seemed to qualify, complicate, defer or infinitise - all the near-misses, failures of correspondence, 'vaguening's', temporisings, that seem to tend towards infinity - and trying to loosen the adherence to finitude that haunts that work everywhere. My first book on Beckett attempted to negate the closure of repetition, prising open its fist to show the various forms of inexhaustibility that characterise his work. That work, though necessary, at one time, if only for me, now seems to me in the light of an evasion, an attempt to turn unwisely tail from the exacting penury of the finite in Beckett's work. Nancy quotes a warning from Heidegger against this evasion: 'When being is posited as infinite, it is precisely then that it is determined. If it is posited as finite, it is then that its absence of ground is affirmed' (quoted Nancy 2003, 9).

Among the many unique accomplishments alleged by human beings of themselves is their capacity to grasp the inescapability of their own deaths. On the contrary, the great human sickness is infinitude, the incapacity to seize finitude seriously and sustainedly. It is not just that we do not take seriously the 'one day' of abstract death; it is that we find it almost impossibly hard to apprehend the limited and finite nature of the lives we live every day, the fact that we can live only the life we can live, in such a place, in such a world. To say that Beckett's work constitutes a radical finitude is to say that it strives to permit itself the very least remission it can manage from this awareness of always having to live, move and have its being 'in such a world... on such and such a day', never in the world in general, or 'as such'. Beckett is, as Heidegger alleged animals were, 'poor in world', poor in the worldhood of 'the world'.

Nancy names four ways in which finitude is disallowed, or deported from itself: extermination; expropriation; simulation and technology. One might add to this the lexicon of the illimitable that has flourished in philosophy and criticism. This lexicon includes, but is not restricted to, *jouissance*, the semiotic, *différance*, the immaterial, the differend, flow, the impotential, desire, and, of

course, and, the original perhaps of these many *noms de plume*, life. Against these, Nancy offers an ethics of finitude: 'Since the here and now is finitude, the inappropriability of sense, every appropriation of the "here" by an "elsewhere," and of the "now" by an "afterward" (or by a "beforehand") is and does *evil*' (Nancy 2003, 19).

Some of the rare moments of saturated calm in Beckett's work come from this refusal of deported being, the acceptance of the only possible towards which all things hobble: 'There we are, there I am, that's enough' (Beckett 1986, 133). Nancy evokes an 'enjoyment - if the notion of enjoyment is not that of appropriation, but of a sense (in all the senses) which, here and now, does not come back to itself' (Nancy 2003, 21), which seems close to the 'happiness' seemingly glimpsed at the end of *Ill Seen Ill Said*, in which calm comes, not from satiety, but from its prospect, the momentary opening of the prospect of closing off:

Farewell to farewell. Then in that perfect dark foreknell darling sound pip for end begun. First last moment. Grant only enough remain to devour all. Moment by glutton moment. Sky earth the whole kit and caboodle. Not another crumb of carrion left. Lick chops and basta. No. One moment more. One last. Grace to breathe that void. Know happiness. (Beckett 1996, 86).

Alain Badiou sees rare moments like this as 'events', that serve both to dissolve and to infinitise the subject that is otherwise pent in its finitude:

The Two, which is inaugurated by the encounter and whose truth results from love, does not remain closed in upon itself. Rather, it is a passage, a pivotal point, *the first numericality*. This Two constitutes a passage, or authorises the pass, from the One of solipsism (which is the first datum) to the infinity of beings and of experience. The Two of love is a hazardous and chance-laden meditation for alterity in general. It elicits a rupture or a severance of the *cogito's* One; by virtue of this very fact, however, it can hardly stand on its own, opening instead onto the limitless multiple of Being. (Badiou 2003, 28)

Like Lyotard, Badiou makes of the event a kind of epiphany, an opening that makes way for something else. The event opens on to the undetermined nature of things, constituting a break in the chain of determinations. The event exposes the subject to the privation of being un- or under-determined -

confronted by the *'il y a'*, with only that to go on. For Badiou and Lyotard, events are both rare and exemplary, and thus at least potentially consequential: they extend, propagate, ramify. But events in Beckett are neither rare nor consequential. Every new moment renews, without deepening, exposure to finitude. Beckett's finitude is radical in this sense, that it casts no shadow, inaugurates no series. Finitude has no syntax; it is perseverance without project. This accounts for the power of repetition, the awareness of 'that again', the epiphany that shows and gives rise to nothing, and yet recurs, paratactic, a privation deprived of improvement. It is this which makes it a 'finite thinking' in Nancy's sense. More than just thinking that keeps finitude in mind, as a precaution or memento, it is a thinking that is itself finite. Nancy's work helps us to characterise Beckett's finitude, provided we recognise that the latter does not provide itself with principles in this way: that it does not allow itself to persist indefinitely in the finite condition of not being able to make an end. It refuses the infinitising tendency - and consolation - of Nancy's finite thinking, does not allow the certainty of there being an end, to everything, inevitably, to sediment into an abstract, and therefore end-averting certification.

This means that Beckett's work should be held back from philosophy, should be allowed to fall short of philosophy, to come up short before it, precisely because of its desire not to infinitise finitude. When Bem and Bom report the failure of their attempts to extort confessions, V. says 'It is a lie'. I want to hear in that the echo of King Lear's cry 'They told me I was everything. 'Tis a lie. I am not ague-proof' (*King Lear*, 4.6, 104). If we want Beckett to be everything, we are on our own. My point is that, in delivering Beckett up to the infinitude from which he shrank, whether in construing his work as itself a 'jouissance de limites', as Evelyne Grossman called it in her paper at this conference, as an Aladdin's cave of hermeneutical opportunity, or a source for henceforth unconstrained performative reappropriations, as Stan Gontarski suggested in his paper, or as a work wholly unconstrained by season or territory, a work without borders, we do a violence to what may be the most difficult and distinct provocation of his work. Evelyne Grossman saw in Beckett's work what she called a 'counter-depressive decomposition': recalling the Ignatian practice of 'composition of time and place', I might be said to be asserting a counter-euphoric composition.

Radical finitude, I have said. By this, I do not mean rigorous, programmatic or totalising infinitude, the root-and-branch, eradicating wholehogger that always seems to come in the train of what is called 'radical thought'. Beckett's finitude is both a predicament and a choice, the choice of a predicament ('in search of the difficulty rather than in its clutch', Beckett 1983, 139). It is a finitude that is

never used up, or said and done a finitude never to be fully accounted for, abbreviated or economised on, because there will always be, what there only ever is, more of the here and now. A finitude that, seemingly without let or cease, itself remains finite. This surely might be an addition to company, if only up to a point.

References.

Badiou, Alain (2003) *On Beckett*. Various translators. Ed. Alberto Toscano and Nina Power. London: Clinamen Press.

Beckett, Samuel (1965). *Proust and Three Dialogues With Georges Duthuit*. London: Calder and Boyars.

----- (1970). *More Pricks Than Kicks*. London: Calder and Boyars.

----- (1973). *Molloy. Malone Dies. The Unnamable*. London: Calder and Boyars.

----- (1980). *Company*. London: John Calder.

----- (1983). *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*. Ed. Ruby Cohn. London: John Calder.

----- (1986). *Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.

----- (1996). *Nobow On*. New York: Grove Press.

----- (2002). *Poems 1930-1989*. London: John Calder.

Bion, W.R. (1993). 'Attacks on Linking.' *Second Thoughts: Selected Papers on Psycho-Analysis*. London: Karnac, 93-109.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *A Century of Philosophy: Hans-Georg Gadamer in Conversation With Ricardo Dottori*. Trans. Rod Coltman and Sigrid Koepke. London and New York: Continuum.

Gontarski, S.E. and Uhlmann, Anthony (2006). *Beckett After Beckett*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press.

Harmon, Maurice, ed. (1998). *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press.

James, Henry (1961). 'Preface.' *Roderick Hudson*. (New York Edition of the Novels and Tales of Henry James.) New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, v-xx.

Larkin, Philip (1964). *The Whitsun Weddings*. London: Faber and Faber.

Martial (1993). *Epigrams*. Ed. and trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey. Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard University Press.

Nancy, Jean-Luc (2003). *A Finite Thinking*. Ed. Simon Sparks. Stanford; Stanford University Press.

Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso) (1987). *Amores: Text, Prolegomena and Commentary*. Ed. J.C. McKeown. 4 Vols. Liverpool: Francis Cairns.

Wood, David (1990). *Philosophy at the Limit*. London, Boston, Sydney and Wellington: Unwin Hyman.

Woolf, Virginia (1925). 'Modern Fiction.' *The Common Reader. First Series*. London: Hogarth, 184-95.