



10.2478/ewcp-2021-0007

Affective Refuge in the Work of Samuel Beckett

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Abstract

Drawing upon Sara Ahmed's "cultural politics of emotion" and Claire Colebrook's conceptualization of "Cartesian affect," this article puts forward the notion of affective refuge, a phenomenon which is investigated through an analysis of Samuel Beckett's *Watt*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Ohio Impromptu*. First, I highlight the opposing perspectives as well the potential common ground between Ahmed's and Claire Colebrook's theories in order to argue that the thought of affective refuge might actually be defined as the movement away from seeing affect as that which "make[s] us aware of [our] bodily dwelling" (Ahmed 26) and towards recognizing "the Cartesian moment of ... never being proximate to one's own body," as understood by Colebrook in her 2020 essay "Cartesian Affect" (442). I then go on to claim that, in *Watt*, affective refuge emerges as a reaction to fear, as the protagonist strives to process the surfaces of things and bodies around him via elaborate systems of perception, while in *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Ohio Impromptu*, the pain of remorse the characters experience regarding their own grieving practices comes to shatter the remainder of the affective refuge which had unfolded in their relationships to their departed loved ones.

Keywords: affect theory, mobility, refuge, corporality, spatiality, Cartesian affect, Deleuze studies, Beckett studies

I. Introduction

Art has come to bear a special status as a form of affective shelter which accompanies our movement away from our place of settlement and back again. Portable music, books, and visual media dilute the temporality of trips into a bearable duration, and we have come to relate the affects created by certain works of art to some feeling of belonging or rootedness. I claim that this interdependence between our notion of free human mobility and an affective power that is always ready to shelter us on our way through a globalized world is itself something which needs to be closely investigated. Nonetheless, these instances of emotional refuge have also emphasized the importance of emotional support systems created through human connection in a rapidly dynamic and interconnected world. I would subsume these phenomena to the notion of “affective refuge” and also argue for the value of imagining what a disintegration of this concept would look like. However, before developing this idea, I need to first pose the obvious question: if the current Western culture trains us to take shelter in “affective refuge,” what is it that we take shelter from? Maybe by answering this question, we could let go of the emotional dependency on the media commodities that global capitalism has engendered. To this end, I will employ Sara Ahmed’s and Claire Colebrook’s contrasting views on affect in order to investigate how a thought of affective refuge can surface in certain texts by Samuel Beckett, namely *Watt*, *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Ohio Impromptu*.

II. On Affective Refuge

To develop the concept of “affective refuge,” I will start with Ahmed’s “cultural politics of affect,” whereby emotions function “by working through signs and on bodies to materialize the surfaces and boundaries that are lived as worlds” (191). Crucially, she argues that the “‘surfaces’ of individual and collective bodies” are constituted in their encounters with the

outside world, so that “bodies take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others” (1) – a claim to which I will return later on. Despite the fact that Ahmed explores various affects in her work, the present study will employ her political conceptualization of two emotions that seem to be associated with extinction: pain and fear.

I will start by looking at her understanding of how pain helps to construct the self, as these ideas will show that the notion of “affective refuge” would have to be understood in its relation to mobility and to the object world. Ahmed’s formulation of this dependence is quite convincing: “the intensity of feelings like pain returns us to our body surfaces,” making us “aware of [our] bodily dwelling” (26). As such, “the affectivity of pain” plays a decisive role in constituting the organism as a “material and lived entity” (24). However, pain is also contingent “on other elements, and also to touch” (28). In turn, this “touch” is what guides our “attachment” to a certain place or entity, but it also calibrates our “differentiation” of the bodies which surround us (Ahmed 28). Things become a bit more complicated when we also want to offer our loved ones the empathy and validation which comes with recognizing their pain. In this case, what takes place is an “appropriation that transforms and perhaps even neutralises their pain into our sadness” (Ahmed 21). On the other hand, this can be seen as an exercise in “giving pain a life outside its borders,” owing to the fact that “while the experience of pain may be solitary, it is never private,” as even loneliest of pains, such as that of major depression, still “seeks a witness” (Ahmed 29), albeit tacitly and subconsciously. Importantly, Ahmed goes on to assert that “an ethics of responding to pain involves being open to being affected by that which one cannot know or feel” (30).

This conceptualization of affective flexibility can be expanded following Ahmed’s argument that the emotion of fear “re-establishes distance between bodies whose difference is read off the surface, as a reading which produces the surface” (63). Such a dynamic reveals some surprising insights into the referentiality

inherent in the feeling of fear. Ahmed starts by analyzing a passage from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, in which the African-American author remembers passing by an American child who voices to his mother his fright at the sight of the author. It is in this context, while also moving beyond it, that she notices a "sideways momentum between objects, which works to stick objects together as signs of threat [and which] is shaped by multiple histories," thus enacting "a trace of how such histories remain alive in the present." This is because "the anxiety about *the possibility of loss* becomes displaced into *objects of fear*" (Ahmed 66). However, these latter objects may itself escape the mastery of the subject:

If fear had an object, then fear could be contained by the object. When the object of fear threatens to pass by, then fear can no longer be contained by an object. Fear in its very relationship to an object, in the very intensity of its directedness towards that object, is intensified by the loss of its object. We could characterise this absence as about being not quite present rather than, as with anxiety, being nowhere at all. (Ahmed 65)

Therefore, if our agency over the threatening entity is undermined in its free mobility, and fear is "intensified by the very loss of its object" (65), then this affect, "in the desire to avoid the object of fear," continually strives "to contain some bodies such as they take up less space," rendering the experiencers of fear less autonomous and dynamic (Ahmed 69). In addition, if this object of fear vanishes from sight or understanding, the subject's environment becomes "a space that is anticipated as pain or injury on the surface of the body that fears" (Ahmed 69). Therefore, "the differential organisation of fear" is deeply influenced by its "relationship to space and mobility," but also to "futuraity" (Ahmed 68).

By contrast, Colebrook's theoretical output strives for a political thought bereft of affection, which seems to happen by understanding the very "*concept of affect*" as "a formation that would shatter the organism's emotive enclosure" in *Death of the Posthuman* (88), and the "destabilizing power that would wage war

on the rigidity of norms” in *Sex After Life* (25). This would be in line with Colebrook’s previous writing on the work of Gilles Deleuze. Throughout her essay “The Space of Man: On the Specificity of Affect in Deleuze and Guattari,” she explains that one could “envision life beyond the organism” in thinking of “affect beyond the era of humanity,” since “individual identity” is never “fully universalizable” (“Space” 205). In *Death of the Posthuman*, she states that “it should not be easy to distinguish between art that makes us feel joyous—tapping into our sensorimotor apparatus—and art that is joyous, that intimates a joy outside humanity and organisms,” which would mean that affect could be captured through art as “not simply its distinction from symbolic orders and cognition (as in Massumi) but in its inorganic or incorporeal moment” (*Death* 93). Essentially, Colebrook wants to undermine and challenge the notion according to which affect itself only takes place within the individual human mind. What she strives for is an understanding of affect in its collective unfolding, one which is shared with the non-human world. She eventually concludes an investigation into the contemporary post-apocalyptic imagery to be found in pop culture with the following statement:

It would be telling, then, in the face of this tendency to imagine or contemplate joys, depressions, horrors and screams outside the lived—and right at the moment of possible human self-annihilation—if theory were unable to think affects beyond the lived world of the bounded organism. (*Death* 94)

Colebrook sets such a potentiality in contrast to the “hyperhypo-affective disorder,” the symptom of an era in which an “over-consumption and boom of marketable affects is accompanied by affect fatigue,” and which seems to have also facilitated the theoretical “affective turn” (*Death* 74) in the contemporary academia – a turn whose proponents include Ahmed herself. For Colebrook, this phenomenon springs from the West’s cultural disequilibrium between the “two tendencies of temporal economies” at play in any artwork: “the connective delays of

cognition" (76), meaning "a delay in assessing what counted as a unit of information or input" (78), is reduced in favour of "the immediacy of affective stimulus" and "the instant gratification of affects" (*Death* 76). In her more recent essay entitled "Cartesian Affect," Colebrook goes as far as to argue that a true understanding of "affect" may emerge outside of the "morality of affects" (442) that is enflaming reactionary politics today. To this end, she hints at the possibility of a "Cartesian moment of not knowing – of never being proximate to one's own body – as an affective condition, but one in which affect is not the feeling of what happens," thus revalorizing "Cartesian affect" in its capacity to open thought toward "an unmoored, orphan, rogue or highly deterritorialized mode of thinking" ("Cartesian" 442). In this conception, Ahmed's notion of "bodies [that] take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others" can be said to follow the same logic of "hyperhypo-affective disorder" (*Death* 74) with its "morality of affects," since affect is seen as "the feeling of what happens" ("Cartesian" 442). Nonetheless, I would suggest that the notion of affective refuge might actually be defined as the movement away from affects which "make us aware of [our] bodily dwelling" (Ahmed 26) and towards "the Cartesian moment of ... never being proximate to one's own body" ("Cartesian" 442). As such, both Ahmed's and Colebrook's conceptualizations of affect will be essential for the notion of "affective refuge."

Consequently, Ahmed's claim that "[fear] re-establishes distance between bodies whose difference is read off the surface" (36) might be expanded through Colebrook's pleas to deterritorialize the notion of refuge itself towards inhuman potentialities. In an article on the notion of climate refuge entitled "Transcendental Migration: Taking Refuge from Climate Change," Colebrook makes the case for a shift outside the "confused temporality of sovereignty" (124). The nation state, when seen through the lens of "time and movement," is revealed to be a concept of "fetishized stability," having "emerged from a field of migration that it negates while at once harnessing its energies"

("Transcendental Migration" 124). However, this is not to argue for any return to primitivism, but rather for "the expansion of sense beyond its localization in man," thus allowing one "[to think] of space independently of man" ("Space" 204). In this view, the "system that caused displacement" ("Transcendental Migration" 128), the same as the one harboring "apparatuses of actualization and implantation" ("Space" 199), always already subsumes the "seeking of refuge," as the "need of refuge" becomes possible in the wake of the artificial "fixity" ("Transcendental Migration" 118) generated, among other things, by imperialism.

How can we draw upon these concepts to gain a better understanding of the way in which "affective refuge" (both in the political sense and in the internal-emotional one) has come to work, as well as to imagine its potential disintegration? For one thing, we can think of how the "immediacy of affective stimulus" (*Death* 74) and the unjust fetishized stability ("Transcendental Migration 118) as produced by imperialism may be interconnected. The affect can best be captured in the confines of an artificial fixity that stamps out its openness, while it simultaneously emphasizes and valorizes the interconnected networks which have produced the artwork. One such network is the Western "morality of the world," whereby, as argued by Colebrook in her essay "A Cut in Relationality," "humanity is, properly, that which can recognise itself in all the rich cultural variants that make up one interconnected and self-aware whole" (189). As this type of ethical framework is still part of the system which produces the conditions for refuge, the affects produced by art make the subject feel at home when out in the world, and within a globalized whole when at home. All the while, the organism is safe within the confines of its self-maintenance. Therefore, it might be that this emotional immediacy, so symptomatic of what Colebrook calls our "hyperhypo-affective disorder" (*Death* 74), might be dependent on reified timelines and potentialities that are far from an opening to the virtual and the inhuman. This is why it might be time to shift the scales towards

the dilution of immediacy and into the reconsideration of “affective refuge.”

III. *Watt*: Refuge from Fear

In this section, I will look at certain passages from Samuel Beckett's *Watt* that can be investigated via Ahmed's theory of affect. Indeed, if fear is intensified by the object which “passes by” (Ahmed 62) the subject, Beckett's Mr. Knott seems to be just such a catalyst for the protagonist of the novel, as the character sees him “passing through the ground floor on his way to the garden from his quarters on the first floor, and on his way back from the gardens to his quarters, and he saw him also in the garden itself” (*Watt* 50). However, Watt's fear is part of an emotional jumble that needs to be untangled in order to really understand how feelings of fright inform the character's abstract and depersonalizing meditations on life. It is a type of fear that is one of many results which spring from the character's dissociation from his environment and its meaning. The narrator's choice of words even lends itself quite fittingly to Ahmed's theory of the affect: “This fragility of the outer meaning had a bad effect on Watt, for it caused him to seek for another, for some meaning of what had passed, in the image of how it had passed” (*Watt* 53). However, in this case, if the subject copes with the *possibility of loss* by creating an object of fear, what would really be the loss in Watt's case? He is one of Beckett's many characters who do not seem to have anything to lose in the first place. Taken as such, Watt's emotional complexity might, surprisingly, get to the heart of what being frightened really means: the fear of losing any and all sense of meaning in one's own experience. However, the anxiety, or existential fear that springs from this realization (of the *loss of meaning*) has a deeply ethical and thoroughly political component. If this is not the case, what are we supposed to make of the fragile “outer meaning” (*Watt* 53) mentioned by the narrator? Is it not similar to Ahmed's conceptualization of the surfaces which arise from affective encounters with outer bodies? The text itself seems to suggest that Watt has an odd understanding of other people's physical surfaces:

Some see the flesh before the bones, and some see the bones before the flesh, and some never see the bones at all, and some never see the flesh at all, never never see the flesh at all. But whatever it was Watt saw, with the first look, that was enough for Watt, that had always been enough for Watt, more than enough for Watt. (*Watt* 53)

In this economy of the gaze, what is of importance for my analysis is the way in which Watt's reaction to other people's bodies, seen as apparitions, continually "re-establishes [the] distance" (Ahmed 63) between himself and society. Given his detachment, it is an epistemologically murky type of fear that seems to be plaguing the character. This phenomenon can be read in the text's following lines: "he had experienced literally nothing, since the age of fourteen, or fifteen, of which in retrospect he was not content to say, That is what happened then" (*Watt* 53). With this sentence in mind, we can start to contextualize Watt's peculiar affectivity as having undergone a key moment in his period of maturation, the startling time of puberty. The foundational memories that are subsequently enumerated also seem to carry varying degrees of fear. However, as we shall see, these recollections are also flattened into a status of "ordinary occasions" (*Watt* 54), since any feeling of fright on the part of the protagonist is also balanced by his fundamental dissociation from life. The first of such instances is Watt's memory of "the time when his dead father appeared to him in a wood, with his trousers rolled up over his knees and his shoes and socks in his hand" (*Watt* 54). The narrator also mentions this event in the following fragment:

But if he could say, when the knock came, the knock become a knock, on the door become a door, in his mind, presumably in his mind, whatever that might mean, Yes, I remember, that is what happened then, if then he could say that, then he thought that then the scene would end, and trouble him no more, as the appearance of his father with his trousers rolled up and his shoes and socks in his hands troubled him no more, because he could say, when it

began, Yes, yes, I remember, that was when my father appeared to me, in the wood, dressed for wading. (*Watt* 56)

This association between moments of fear and other frightening memories, though apparently a coping mechanism, might shed light on how the “sideways momentum” works to “stick objects together” in the novel (Ahmed 66). More precisely, Watt’s ability to “suffer [events]” that he cannot “[saddle] with meaning” (*Watt* 58) might actually function by subsuming all lost objects of fear to the status of things that just “pass by” him, in an instance of emotional coping. As such, the “affective refuge” which surfaces through the novel is precisely its protagonist’s elaboration of complex systems of processing the surfaces of things and bodies around him. These memories are “ordinary occasions” because Watt can see them coming and then pass him by without any meaningful change to his experience or identity. While the dead father’s apparition is frightening in its eeriness and show of vulnerability on the part of the figure (“dressed for wading” (*Watt* 56)), we can also perceive an object of threat in the “voice urging him ... to do away with himself,” from which “he narrowly escaped being knocked down, by a dray” (*Watt* 54). However, a vaguer sense of danger seems to colour the memories of “suddenly [smelling] flowering currant” when Watt was “alone in a rowing-boat, far from land,” or when the “old lady of delicate upbringing ... , whom he had pursued with his assiduities on no fewer than three distinct occasions, unstrapped her wooden leg, and laid aside her crutch” (*Watt* 55). In these latter two events, what can be surmised is the fact that, as we shall see, Watt’s affective establishment of the surfaces of living entities becomes quite enmeshed with those he establishes for the non-living object world. What distinguishes, for example, the memory of his father from his present perplexity regarding the Galls is the fact that “his father’s legs and trousers, as then seen, in the wood, and subsequently brought to mind, remained legs and trousers, and not only legs and trousers, but his father’s legs and trousers, that is to say quite different from any of the legs and trousers that Watt had ever seen”

(Watt 54). As such, certain objects become individualized and imbued with meaning, rising from an undifferentiated “arrangement of appearances, grey, flaccid and probably fistular,” “vanish[ing] in the farce of their properties” (Watt 54). However, I would also suggest that this “vanishing” into semantic enmeshment is precisely an encounter, and a thought of an affect which is not located solely in the “lived,” in the “bounded organism” (Death 94). This is why “the incident of the Galls” “ceased so rapidly,” and passed Watt by, thus appearing to the protagonist like “some story heard long before, an instant in the life of another, ill told, ill heard, and more than half forgotten” (Watt 54). Again, I would suggest the vocabulary and abstract imagery used by the narrator is distantly similar to Ahmed’s conception of fear and conveys an idiosyncratic feeling of fright:

What distressed Watt in this incident of the Galls father and son, and in subsequent similar incidents, was ... that a thing that was nothing had happened, with the utmost formal distinctness, and that it continued to happen, in his mind, he supposed, though he did not know exactly what that meant, and though it seemed to be outside him, before him, about him, and so on, inexorably to unroll its phases, beginning with the first (the knock that was not a knock) and ending with the last (the door closing that was not a door closing), and omitting none, uninvoked, at the most unexpected moments, and the most inopportune. (Watt 56)

In this case, the *object of threat* is *lost* in the sheer semantic indeterminacy and emptiness of the object world (“the knock that was not a knock”; “the door that was not closing”), while the “formal distinctness” (Watt 56) of this event emphasizes the nonhuman, agentic enmeshment that characterizes the world outside of Watt’s mind. As such, Beckett’s work can act as a vessel through which our understanding of human affect is dehumanized, allowing for a (perplexing) thought of affect outside the organism, and in the inorganic. Thus, we can get a better grasp on the textual mechanics around “the constant tension of some of [Watt’s] most noble faculties” which “tired [him] greatly” (Watt 63). At a later

point, the text (by now, narrated through Sam) seems unable to translate the glitches in Watt's emotional responses to Mr. Knott:

Watt did not know whether he was glad or sorry that he did not see Mr Knott more often. In one sense he was sorry, and in another glad. And the sense in which he was sorry was this, that he wished to see Mr Knott face to face, and the sense in which he was glad was this, that he feared to do so. Yes indeed, in so far as he wished, in so far as he feared, to see Mr Knott face to face, his wish made him sorry, his fear glad, that he saw him so seldom, and at such a great distance as a rule, and so fugitively, and so often sideways on, and even from behind. (*Watt* 110)

The paragraph above shows only the text's first instance of animating individual affects which create the surface that Watt knows as Mr. Knott. This tension between fear and desire just goes to support Ahmed's assertion that fear is "intensified" when "the object of threat is lost." In a sense, this is the quintessential scenario of an object of threat which cognitively "fugitively," "sideways on," "from behind" (*Watt* 110) passes by Watt. However, there are more than just surfaces to behold in this case. I would argue that, since Sam the narrator tells us that Watt's confused, but intense emotions "grew duller and duller and gradually ceased to be felt, at all," and the explanations he gives for this spiritual dampening do not seem to hold much water, as he even admits that it was "due to perhaps some quite different reason" (*Watt* 111), it might just be that this "quite different reason" (*Watt* 110) points to a Cartesian affect springing from the distances and surfaces, not only between Watt and the world, but also between the narrator and Watt himself.

IV. *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Ohio Impromptu*: Refuge from Pain

In this section, I would like to analyze several scenes from two plays by Beckett, namely *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Ohio Impromptu*, via certain potential connections that can be drawn between Ahmed's theorization of pain and Colebrook's thought of a

Cartesian affect. The former theorist makes the case that the “intensity of feelings like pain returns us to our body surfaces” (Ahmed 26), while, through “witnessing” the suffering of the other, we can offer this particular affect a “life outside its borders” (Ahmed 30). The latter, following Deleuze, argues that we should strive at “[tearing] affect from its home in the lived” (“Cartesian” 442) and look at how, for example, a chair can affect another chair, since the human itself, with all of the emotions therein, is born out of the forces in the plane of immanence (*Understanding Deleuze* xvi), which Colebrook explains in the following terms:

Life itself is constant change and creation. We tend to think of change as the mobilisation of something immobile. Against this, Deleuze insists that we need to begin from a mobility, flux, becoming or change that has no underlying foundation, which he refers to as the ‘plane of immanence.’ Rather than think a world that has change within it (so that change would be immanent to some unchanging ground), Deleuze puts forward a theory of immanent becoming; becoming is not the becoming of some being. There is becoming, from which we perceive relatively stable points of being. It follows, then, that if there is not some world or being that then becomes, but just a life of complex and dynamic change, we will have to see writing and speaking as events within this plane of change. (*Understanding Deleuze* vi)

Obviously, the pain of others is still part of an animate organism, but I would also argue that there is a certain type of affectivity which we can distinguish in the spatial and dynamic systems that we, humans, have built around both the non-living and the suffering endured by ourselves, our loved ones, and living beings at large. Thus, I will look at how “affective refuge,” never outside the “plane of change,” is created and threatened by an enmeshment of animate and inanimate forces.

One illustrative case in point is *Krapp’s Last Tape*, where the protagonist eventually listens to himself at a younger age recounting the moments leading up to and following the death of his mother after a long struggle with illness. He mentions sitting on

“a bench by the weir from where [he] could see her window” in “the house on the canal where mother lay a-dying” (*Complete* 212). He remembers “wishing she were gone,” as he was surrounded by “just a few regulars, nursemaids, infants, old men, dogs,” whom he “[got to know] quite well – oh by appearance of course ...” (*Complete* 213). This scenario of waiting is one of the most personal in Beckett’s oeuvre. In a letter, he describes his mother’s rapidly deteriorating health in real time, likening it to “one of those decrescendos made by the trains at Ussy which I used to listen to at night, interminable, suddenly resuming just when everything seemed finished and the silence final” (“Letters Reveal”). Here, I would suggest that, in witnessing the suffering of a loved one – a suffering which will most likely end in death – punctures the feeling of emotional pain with fear: one desperately desires for the alterity’s physical anguish to be over, while all the while fearing her imminent death. As such, even if Krapp “[wishes] she were gone” (*Complete* 213), this desire is always marked with the fundamental fear regarding its realization. If Ahmed argues that “anxiety about the possibility of loss [of the object of love] is displaced into objects of threat,” how is the object of threat to be defined in Krapp’s relation to his mother? I think that Beckett’s personal simile comes in handy in here: if the suffering endured by the mother is like the “decrescendos made by the trains at Ussy” (“Letters Reveal”), the object of threat is both the pain and its result, wherein the pain at witnessing the illness is replaced by intense grief, another type of decrescendo.

However, I think that referring to such matters through the lens of the sole subject might do injustice to the text and its real-life source. This is where the notion of “affective refuge” could be of help and might develop upon certain elements in Ahmed’s theory of emotions via Colebrook’s plea for the Cartesian affect. The former author refers to her own experience of having to emotionally support her mother, who had struggled with illness since the theorist was a child. Ahmed describes this dynamic of vulnerability and acknowledgement of recognition, instead of just visibility, in the following words:

Through such witnessing, I would grant her pain the status of an event, a happening in the world, rather than just the ‘something’ she felt, the ‘something’ that would come and go with her coming and going. But her pain, despite being the event that drew us together ... was still shrouded in mystery. I lived with what was, for me, the unliveable. (30)

If the fear regarding the dying event has “re-established” (Ahmed 63) the distance that Krapp, in his emotional struggle with proximity, takes from his mother, as he cannot bear to witness her suffering, does this action not “grant her pain the status of an event” (Ahmed 30)? I would suggest that, in this case, the “affective refuge” that Krapp and his mother maintained through each other, needs to be mobilized and opened out to the “few regulars” near the canal, to the animate and inanimate worlds that are now threatening the concreteness of their filial love. Perplexingly, the immobility of the suffering loved one pushes the witness into a need for mobility. I would suggest that the *mystery* in her illness, the “ungraspability of her pain” (Ahmed 30) hits against an affect that has always been outside the “lived” realm (“Cartesian” 442). My claim might be best corroborated by the text’s depiction of the moment in which Krapp’s mother dies, an event which comes to the son’s attention as he happens to look up at the window:

I sat on for a few moments with the ball in my hand and the dog yelping and pawing at me. [Pause.] Moments. Her moments, my moments. [Pause.] The dog’s moments. [Pause.] In the end I held it out to him and he took it in his mouth, gently, gently. A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. [Pause.] I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day. [Pause.] I might have kept it. [Pause.] But I gave it to the dog. (*Complete* 213)

The affection which arises in Krapp through his contact with the “rubber ball” is certainly not autonomous from the animate realm. However, the mutation which Krapp’s “affective refuge” undergoes in this moment might signal the fact that human affect is triggered

by a subsuming force beyond the lived. As such, a keener attention to the “contingency of pain,” which limits us to simply “[transform] other people’s pain into our sadness” (Ahmed 31), might be of aid in imagining an affect that is separate from the self-maintenance of “the bounded organism” (*Death* 94), while the notion of a mutating “affective refuge” could deterritorialize our notions of emotional support and ethical remembrance.

An even more telling disintegration of “affective refuge” can be observed in *Ohio Impromptu*, where the protagonist struggles with the effects that his grief (whether over a departed alterity, or for a love object who has simply left) have had on his sense of mobility: “In a last attempt to obtain relief he moved from where they had been so long together to a single room on the far bank” (*Complete* 426). Does emotional suffering, especially due to loss, also “return us to our body surfaces” (Ahmed 30)? I would claim that, though the bodily dimension of grief is undeniable, it also brings with it a waywardness, just as the need for mobility that Krapp experiences. Interestingly enough, it is precisely the affective power of “mystery” that *Ohio*’s protagonist seeks: “Relief he had hoped would flow from unfamiliarity. Unfamiliar room. Unfamiliar scene. Out to where nothing ever shared” (Ahmed 426). I argue that this willed deterritorialization of “affective refuge” comes to combat the objects of threat which have already brought the loving relationship to an end, to offer the grieving subject some agency over the fundamental human finitude that has taken away his object of love. However, it can also be argued that the emotional space created by his relationship might not have been a static one in the first place. Or else, it could be a “fixity” that is somehow different from the “artificial,” “confused temporality of sovereignty,” which Colebrook claims to make “refuge” possible in a political sense. On the one hand, we obviously should not yoke a political lens over this particular play. On the other, I would also argue that the stasis created by love through “affective refuge” creates a stability which, although harbouring the potential to be instrumentalized and abused in favor of one’s control over their environment, has an ethical dimension which goes beyond the

“morality of affects” (“Cartesian” 442). In the case of *Ohio Impromptu*, the emotional suffering experienced by the protagonist is exacerbated by a feeling of guilt regarding his grieving practices – a form of remorse which is seemly also experienced by Krapp in relation to his reaction to his mother’s passing.

The protagonist in *Ohio* also looks for agency in mobility, as he is “seen slowly pacing the islet,” stopping “to dwell on the receding stream,” and at “how in joyous eddies its two arms conflowed and flowed united on” (*Complete* 427). At this sight, he “turn[s] and his slow steps retrace[s]” (*Complete* 427). I would say that this instance of an affect achieved in relation to the inanimate being of the “joyous eddies” can be said to interfere with the protagonist’s view on his own future. The sentences quoted previously are followed by an account of how, “in his dreams ... he had been warned against this change. Seen the dear face and heard the unspoken words, Stay where we were so long alone together, my shade will comfort you” (*Complete* 427). The disintegrated “affective refuge” has left the protagonist with no promise to truly make to a loved alterity, surrounded only by the affective potentiality of “unspoken words” and the “shade” to be found in the familiar object world. As Martha Nussbaum asks, referring to Beckett’s work at large, “Could there be a form of love in the silence, in the act of not structuring, not writing? Or perhaps an absence of emotion, of story construction, that is itself more loving still than love has ever been?” (254). Indeed, this approach opens the way towards an understanding of mourning which also finds emotional value in the choice to not externalize one’s grief. However, we must also contextualize this antirepresentational understanding of love within the context of the play: this a story read by the visitor whom the loved alterity has sent to comfort the protagonist. Essentially, it might be that we simply cannot be sure if this entity actually has much to do with the protagonist’s object of love. The text even subtly suggests that the “sad tale a last time told” is that which deterritorializes the protagonist into his “profounds of mind,” which blocks from its frame any “light” or “sound of reawakening,” while both the protagonist and the reader

“[sit] as though turned to stone” (*Complete* 428). Therefore, this particularly ambiguous relationship, in the throes of heartache, might constitute a form of “affective refuge,” though one which is painfully different from one in which the weight of affects is truly “shared,” as the text intensifies its preoccupation with guilt and irreversibility: “Could he not now turn back? Acknowledge his error and return to where they were once so long alone together. Alone together so much shared. Nothing he had ever done alone could ever be undone. By him alone” (*Complete* 426). If love, forgiveness and mercy define the scope of “affective refuge,” they might also stand to be investigated in their causal enmeshment with the affects that humans access in relation to the inanimate. As such, imagining life in the absence of our loved ones might not become a more manageable task, but it might allow for a generosity that does not function according to moralism.

V. Conclusion

To conclude, Beckett’s *Watt*, *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Ohio Impromptu* foreground the formation and disintegration of affective refuge, as the characters’ mobility and their interactions with the surfaces of surrounding objects and bodies reveal the capturability of a Cartesian affect, autonomous from one single human gaze, but encompassing the encumbering world of the nonhuman.

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