
FILM-PHILOSOPHY

To be or not to be is not the question:
On Beckett's *Film*
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We never know self-realization.
We are two abysses – a well staring at the sky.

(Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*)

I

Samuel Beckett wrote just once for the cinema. *Film* was written in 1963 and first shown publicly in 1965, forty years ago (Beckett 1986, 321–334). *Film* was shot in New York in 1964, with the opening external shots in Lower Manhattan close to Brooklyn Bridge and the rest in Greenwich Village, and it was the occasion of Beckett's one and only trip to the United States. The movie was the idea of Barney Rosset, Beckett's New York publisher and legendary editor of the Grove Press in its long heyday from the 1950s to the 1970s. *Film* was the movie debut of Alan Schneider, Beckett's most trusted, long-serving and long-suffering theatre director in the United States. It stars Buster Keaton in one of his last movie appearances – he made several B-movie beach movies before his death in February 1966. Beckett said of Keaton that 'he had a poker mind as well as a poker face' and their relationship did not get off to a good start. Schneider tells a story of their first meeting in Keaton's hotel room, where Beckett awkwardly tried to engage in conversation with Keaton while the latter replied in monosyllables, drank a beer and watched the baseball game on TV. Beckett was a huge sports fan and considerable sportsman himself – the only winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature to be mentioned in Wisden's Cricketers' Almanack, playing first-class cricket for Trinity College Dublin – and went to see the New York Mets at Shea Stadium during his trip to New York and apparently thoroughly enjoyed the game. A little sadly perhaps, Keaton was the fourth

choice for the role, behind Charlie Chaplin, Jack MacGowran and Zero Mostel. That said, Keaton is excellently cast and his entire physical presence, in particular the extraordinary face with which the movie finishes, seems to carry the entire tragi-comedy of *Film*. Ask yourself: what is sadder than the face of an aging comedian? We somehow expect a comic's face to be eternally frozen in their glory days; think of the late movies of Laurel and Hardy or The Marx Brothers, where youthful elasticity and energy has given way to wrinkles and clichéd, plodding self-parody.

There is something oddly and deliberately anachronistic about the period in which *Film* is set. Beckett laconically and typically remarks, 'Period: about 1929. Early summer morning' (Beckett 1986, 324). What exactly does 'about 1929' mean? This is a typical Beckettian elision. Let's not forget that 1929 was quite a year, with the first presentation of the Academy Awards (Keaton's 1929 movie, which didn't win any prizes, was *Spite Marriage*), and in October there was a little something down the road from the setting of *Film* called the Wall Street Crash. Yet, as readers of Beckett will know, many of his novels and plays are set in a comically unreal period between the wars, a world full of bicycles, bowler hats, dark suits, and whimsically anachronistic technology. The other salient feature about the period in which *Film* is set is that it is silent; well, almost silent apart from a 'sssh' in the opening scene. In the original project for *Film*, Beckett notes, 'Climate of *Film* comic and unreal'; and he adds that the Keaton character, 'should invite laughter throughout by his way of moving' (Beckett 1986, 323). Is *Film* funny? It is certainly not *very* funny and one does not exactly fall about laughing watching it. As one of Beckett's characters in the *Endgame* remarks, 'Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I'll grant you that' (Beckett 1986, 20). We would do well to keep those words in mind as we watch *Film*.

The dramatic *agon* of *Film* is about 'the agony of perceivedness' (Beckett 1986, 324). There are a few minor characters in *Film*: an oddly antique couple with a man wearing a pince-nez and a woman carrying a lorgnon or eye-glass in the opening scene (the woman was originally meant to be carrying a monkey, but I guess no monkeys were available in Greenwich Village in 1964); there is also an old woman carrying flowers in the staircase scene, and some wonderful domestic animals in the scene in the room: a cat and dog, a parrot and a particularly handsome goldfish.

But the two main characters are E and O: Eye and Object. The Eye is the camera, so that throughout *Film* we are looking at the Object, or the Keaton character, through the eye of the Eye, as it were. The camera has subjectivity, indeed one might go

further – and I will come back to this later – and add that the camera *is* subjectivity, or is one side of an essentially divided subjectivity. The drama of *Film* consists in E's pursuit of O, who is in flight from E. E perceives O and therefore what O is in flight from is being perceived as such, where perceivedness is experienced as an agony. In other words, visuality is agony, and what is in play in *Film* is the dramatic or cinematic *agon* of vision.

Although the main line of cinematic perception is E's view of O, the camera's perception of Keaton, there are also crucial moments in *Film* where O himself perceives others and, in the final scene, perceives E itself. More exactly, O perceives E and sees that O is E itself. Eye and Object, or perceiver and perceived, are the same, or two sides of the same split subjectivity. I will come back to this. The two lines of perception are technically distinguished with a filter, which gives a slightly blurry effect, like a muslin cloth.

II

What is *Film* about? Well, firstly, obviously and stupidly it is about *Film*. That is, it is concerned with the genre of *Film* itself, the nature of the cinematic medium. To this extent, there is not just a laconic economy or simplicity to Beckett's title, but also an arrogance, even a hybris: his one experiment with *Film* is a definition of the nature of the cinematic medium itself. Otherwise said, as Alain Badiou would put it, Beckett is concerned with the *generic* character of *Film*, or *Film* as a way of giving character to the generic. This concern with the generic is not unique to *Film*, and one might say that Beckett's work attempts definitions of each of the aesthetic genres with which it engages: the short story, the novel, radio, television and, of course, the play. Indeed, the piece of writing that precedes *Film* from 1963 is a play called *Play*, which has many similarities with *Film*, particularly on the theme of perceivedness. It ends with the line, 'Am I as much as...being seen'.

This concern with the generic character of *Film* as such, that is, with the nature of moving images, is something that Gilles Deleuze brings out in his writings on Beckett's *Film*. As far as I know, Deleuze discusses *Film* in two places: in a short and brilliant text from 1986, 'Le plus grand film Irlandais ("*Film*" de Beckett)' and a discussion in the first volume of his work on cinema, *L'Image-mouvement*, where it occupies an important transitional moment in the argument of the book (Deleuze 1998, 23–26; Deleuze 1986, 66–70). Without going into too much detail, Deleuze sees *Film* as exploring the three sorts of images that make up the movement-image and which define what he calls the

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'general tendency of experimental cinema' (Deleuze 1986, 68). These are the action-image, the perception-image and the affection-image and they can be seen sequentially in each of the three scenes of Beckett's *Film*. With the action-image, Deleuze refers to the figure of O running along a wall, an image which is, Deleuze writes, '...the first cinematographic act' (Deleuze 1986, 67). With the perception-image we see the character in the interior of the room being perceived from the back on both sides but never face-to-face; and finally, with the affection-image the camera turns around the room to face O (Deleuze was very interested in long full-face close-ups) and we witness the perception of the self by the self, pure affection or cinematic auto-affection, which culminates in the seeming death and immobility that we see at the end of *Film*. However, as every reader of Beckett knows, his protagonists rarely die, and it is in this inability to die, this endless living on, that Beckett's entire comedy consists, witness Vladimir and Estragon trying, but failing, to hang themselves in *Waiting for Godot*. In tragedy, people die; in comedy people live; in Beckett's tragic-comedy people who want to die are condemned to live on. Funny isn't it?

Deleuze sees Beckett's work, both in *Film* and in the television pieces like *Quad* as culminating in 'the luminous plane of immanence, the plane of matter and its cosmic eddying of movement-images'. For Deleuze, what is glimpsed in *Film* and, for him, this defines the essential trajectory of Beckett's work from the early novels to the late drama and prose pieces and which culminates in a cultivation of the soundless, voiceless image, is 'the world before man, before our own dawn...' (Deleuze 1986, 70). It is here that I would like to mark a disagreement with Deleuze and in what follows I will offer a strongly divergent interpretation influenced by Levinas (Levinas 2003).

Far from seeing Beckett's work as announcing 'the world before man', I see Beckett as constantly struggling with the irreducibility of the human world. There is no reduction of experience to a time before our dawn, but rather a deathless groping in our all-too-human twilight. I've always found this deathless groping as the source of Beckett's *humour noir*, yet Deleuze seems peculiarly deaf to both Beckett's sense of humour, his sense of the human, and his sense of humanity's humorousness. Let me explain myself by going back to the beginning and back to the original project for *Film*, the text that Beckett wrote in 1963.

III

Beckett's *Film* – and let us say *Film* as such in its generic character – is concerned with a clearly stated and compelling philosophical problem that derives from Berkeley's famous proposition *esse est percipi*, to be is to be perceived (see Berkeley 1975, 77–78). One might ruminate much on the relation of Beckett to his seventeenth-century idealist compatriot. But in my view one can easily go awry by reading too much into the apparent philosophical sources of Beckett's work, many of which have their source in the seventeenth century, in particular the occasionalism of Geulincx and Malebranche, which exerted a powerful influence over the young Beckett and whom he studied carefully. There is a common fallacy that is oddly and sadly even more widespread amongst non-philosophers than philosophers, that art is somehow *explained* by philosophy. It is not. To be clear, I am not suggesting the cultivation of philosophical ignorance, as I might be seen as arguing myself out of a job. Yet, to interpret an artwork in terms of a pre-existing philosophical or conceptual grid is not to encounter an artwork, it is simply to confirm that pre-existing grid. It is to see through the artwork and not to see it. This problem is particularly acute in the case of Beckett, where his text is nicely littered, cluttered even, with philosophical allusions and passing references. In my view, one should treat these philosophical allusions as red herrings and one must tread carefully to avoid slipping on them. In a particularly irritable and slightly insouciant exchange in a 1961 interview with Gabriel D'Aubarède, Beckett notes:

— Have contemporary philosophers had any influence in your thought?
 I never read philosophers.
 — Why not?
 I never understand anything they write.
 — All the same, people have wondered if the existentialists' problem of being may afford a key to your works.
 There's no key or problem. I wouldn't have had any reason to write my novels if I could have expressed their subject in philosophic terms (Knowlson 1996, 476).

With those cautionary words ringing in our ears, I would like to stay with Beckett's words and images as much as I can. If the meaning of Beckett's work were somehow translatable into philosophical terms, then there would be no reason to write a play, a novel or a screenplay. Beckett begins the original project or shooting notes for *Film* (to call the text a screenplay is an exaggeration) with some general remarks, which are extremely intriguing and very gnomic. He writes:

Esse est percipi

All extraneous perception suppressed, animal, human, divine, self-perception maintains in being. Search of non-being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down in inescapability of self-perception (Beckett 1986, 323).

This is Beckett's cinematic variation on the Berkeleyan thesis: if to be is to be perceived, then both the things perceived and the perceiver are maintained in being through perception. Such is the philosophical position that is normally called empirical idealism, which Samuel Johnson famously sought to refute by kicking a stone. We are aware of things, of things perceived, and we are also aware of ourselves, we have self-awareness through self-perception. Now, what Beckett adds to this thesis is revealed in the second sentence of the above quotation: if self-perception is inescapable, then what we are searching for is an escape from self-perception. Beckett's thesis, if we may call it that, knowing that it is not the right word, is that human existence is defined by a search for non-being. Let's note in passing the curious inversion of Spinoza at work here: the human being is not defined by a *conatus essendi*, by a persistence or striving to maintain itself in being, but rather by a desire for non-being. This desire is displayed in a movement of flight or evasion from extraneous perception and from self-perception, a flight from both perceived objects and the self-perceived subject.

Yet, and this is the crucial complement to Beckett's thesis, this search for non-being, this movement of what Levinas would call evasion, breaks down in the inescapability of self-perception. Despite Beckett's protestations, this amounts to a clear, indeed startling, ontological claim, a claim about what there is: self-perception is what maintains us in being, but what we desire, what we crave, what we yearn for, is non-being, that is to say, the escape from being. Human existence, we might say, is defined by a movement of flight against that existence. That is, the movement or very *kinesis* of human existence is defined by a desire to escape the condition that defines our existence. Otherwise said, we are divided against ourselves by a desire that attempts to deny that which makes ourselves the selves that they are. Simply stated, we are a paradox.

Let us go back to Beckett's words: if existence is defined by a search for non-being and a movement of flight from extraneous perception, then this is impossible and the search breaks down in the inescapability of self-perception. Existence is irremissible and irresistible. Although we are defined by a flight against the agony of perceivedness,

the melancholy conclusion is that we are stuck ineluctably with ourselves, that is, with self-perception. We are riveted to the fact of a subjectivity that is divided between Eye and Object, a division at the heart of the self that makes the self what it is and which maintains it in being for as long as self-perception persists. For Beckett, unlike Hamlet, to be or not to be is not the question. It is rather to be while wanting not to be, and this constitutes a *fact* to which we are answerable prior to any questioning.¹ It is this dimension of facticity in the experience of film and of *Film* that interests me, what I call 'originary inauthenticity'.

It is this entire existential drama that is being filmed as *Film* itself. We might say that this is the ontological condition of cinema, of moving images that we perceive and of self-perception. We watch the Object, Keaton, who only *is* insofar as he is perceived by the Eye or the camera, and we watch him try to escape perceivedness. Each scene shows him being drawn tighter and tighter into the net of perceivedness, from the street, to the staircase, to the room, to the rocking chair with its gentle to and fro. If there were world enough and time, then it would be interesting to talk about Beckett's spiritual furniture and his obsession with rocking chairs, which is something that can be seen from an early novel like *Murphy*, where Murphy chains himself to a chair listening to a 'matrix of surds', to a wonderful late dramaticule called *Rockaby*, where the action – if that is not an exaggeration – consists in a woman rocking in a chair listening to her recorded voice:

till in the end
the day came
in the end came
close of a long day
when she said
to herself
whom else

¹ Permit me another note of caution about philosophical interpretations of Beckett. Beckett was invited to Frankfurt by Siegfried Unseld, head of Suhrkamp publishers, in 1961. He was obliged to listen to Adorno's interpretation of *Endgame*, during which the philosopher insisted that the character Hamm was derived from Hamlet. Things did not go well and Unseld describes the exchange:

'Beckett said, "Sorry, Professor, but I never thought of Hamlet when I invented this name". But Adorno insisted. And Beckett became a little angry...In the evening Adorno started his speech and, of course, pointed out the derivation of "Hamm" from "Hamlet"...Beckett listened very impatiently. But then he whispered in my ear – he said this in German but I will translate it into English – "This is the progress of science that professors can proceed with their errors"' (Knowlson 1996, 526).

time she stopped
time she stopped

going to and fro (Beckett 1986, 435).

The piece ends with the following words:

so in the end
close of a long day
went down
let down the blind and down
right down
into the old rocker
and rocked
rocked
saying to herself
no
done with that
the rocker
those arms at last
saying to the rocker
rock her off
stop her eyes
fuck life
stop her eyes
rock her off
rock her off (Beckett 1986, 442).

There is much in Beckett about the movement to and fro, between being and non-being, of being as being rocked, being lolled back and forth or up and down. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, the wizened, older character listens, as in *Rockaby*, to the recorded voice of a younger version of himself, who is both more hopeful and more idiotic. The portion of tape to which he listens repeatedly is an epiphanal moment with a lover while punting on a lake:

I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side (Beckett 1986, 221).

At the core of Beckett's work is this movement to and fro, of a gentle rocking up and down; or, in the words of a slightly later dramaticule, of coming and going.

But I digress. In *Film* existence is stripped down to its minimum condition, its basic elements: me myself perceiving myself in a rocking chair. Here, when all the
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animals in the room have stopped perceiving the Object, when they have been covered up, when the picture of God the father has been ripped to pieces (the image is actually a reproduction of the Sumerian god Abu from the Museum of Baghdad – perhaps it was also ripped to pieces during the invasion of Iraq and the ransacking of the museum in 2003 – and was suggested to Beckett by his friend the artist Arikha), along with the photographs of the Object's life, when all that remains is the gentle to and fro of the rocking chair, here at the end of *Film* we are confronted with the inescapability of self-perception. The self confronts itself: E perceives O with an expression that Beckett nicely describes as 'impossible to describe, neither severity nor benignity, but rather acute *intentness*' (Beckett 1986, 329). Intentness is an interesting word, which connotes attentiveness, heedfulness, or even care, but without intimacy. At the other end of the line of perception, O becomes aware of E perceiving it and freezes, semi-stands up, appears to scream silently, sits down, covers its face, uncovers its face, covers its face again, and then rocks more slowly until the rocking dies down, to and fro, to and fro, 'rock her off, rock her off'.

Is the Keaton character dead at the end of *Film*? *Au contraire*, as Beckett once said when he was asked by an American journalist in Paris, '*Est-ce que vous êtes anglais?*' If O were dead, then there would be an escape from perceivedness and self-perception, which there is not. Life goes on, not on a plane of pure immanence, as Deleuze claims, but on a plane of paradox, movement to and fro, and self-division; the physical human plane rather than some metaphysical airplane. The essential thing is that we go on. As Beckett famously writes at the end of the *Trilogy*, 'you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on'; or again, at the beginning of *Worstwood Ho!*, 'Try again, fail again, fail better' (Beckett 1992, 101). One goes on in failure. It's not much, but it's human, 'a lobster couldn't do it', as Beckett quips. One goes on and that's how it is, *Comment c'est*, in the title of Beckett's extraordinary 1961 novel. Existence is shaped by a movement of flight or evasion that tries to escape that existence, a movement that fails and one begins again, *on commence, on recommence*. How is it? *Comment c'est?* It is to begin, *commencer*. For me, this is the core of the ethic of courage that defines Beckett's work.

IV

What I have said so far amounts to no more than an attempted commentary on two sentences at the beginning of the original project for *Film*, listed as 'General'. Arguably, Critchley, Simon (2007) 'To be or not to be is not the question – On Beckett's *Film*', *Film-Philosophy*, vol. 11, no. 2: 116 pp. 108–121. <<http://www.film-philosophy.com/2007v11n2/Critchley.pdf>>
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this is not stunning progress. But there is a third sentence, which appears to be rather bad news for my interpretation. It reads: 'No truth value attaches to the above, regarded as of merely structural and dramatic significance' (Beckett 1986, 323). So, after having laid out his ontological thesis, Beckett very casually withdraws it. Now, there is much to be said about Beckett's withdrawals and qualifications. Indeed, I think one can see an entire logic of denial in Beckett. He will say something and then immediately unsay it, letting the affirmation and denial spin together in an antithesis that it would be philosophical bad manners to name dialectics (it is close to what Levinas says about skepticism and its refutation or the oscillation of the Saying and the Said). This is what Beckett calls, and I call in following him, 'the syntax of weakness'. For example, from the *Trilogy*: 'Live and invent. I have tried. Invent is not the word. Neither is live. No matter. I have tried.' And again: 'I resume, so long as, so long as, let me see, so long as one, so long as he, ah fuck all that, so long as this, then that, agreed, that's good enough, I nearly got stuck.' And again: 'There I am back at my old aporetics. Is that the word? I don't know' (Beckett 1979, 166). Throughout Beckett's work, one is presented with a series of self-undoing, self-denying sentences, where the affirmation and its negation unharmoniously chime together to produce the effect of aporia. An aporia is a perplexity, a path that appears to be blocked or criss-crosses into a cul-de-sac, in which we run back and forth like the cat and dog in *Film*. I have tried to show elsewhere that this syntax of weakness is a comic syntax or the syntax of Beckett's dark humour, his *humour noir* (Critchley 2002). For example, Clov to Hamm in *Endgame*: 'Do you believe in the life to come?' Hamm to Clov, 'Mine was always that'. And again, Mahood to himself: 'The tumefaction of the penis! The penis, well now that's a nice surprise, I'd forgotten I had one. What a pity I have no arms' (Beckett 1979, 305).

So, it is perfectly characteristic and inconsistently consistent of Beckett to take back in the third sentence what he appeared to advance in the first two sentences. Both the proposition and its negation are to be taken seriously, in a seriously comic sense.

Indeed, one might go a little further here and say that the essence of humour (if, indeed, it has *an* essence, or is not itself a sort of curse on all essences and essentialisation) consists in this movement of assertion and negation, this syntax of weakness that *enacts* the self-dividedness of the subject: for example, Groucho to Chico with his hand on his pulse, 'Either this man is dead or my watch has stopped'; Chico to Groucho, 'What'll I tell them?'; Groucho to Chico, 'Tell them you're not here'; Chico to

Groucho, 'They won't believe me'; Groucho to Chico, 'They'll believe you when you start talking'.

Humour can only occur in a personality more or less consistently split into two parts, '*scindé en deux*' (Noguez 2000, 20) as Dominique Noguez claims – think of Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*. In true humour, one looks at oneself as another, as what Hegel calls 'self-alienated spirit'. *Film* is not funny, but its drama of divided subjectivity might begin to tell us what humour is.

V

At a particularly troubled moment in Beckett's life after the death of his real father and separation from his symbolic father, Joyce, Beckett went into psychoanalysis in London with Wilfrid Bion. The analysis lasted for nearly two years, throughout 1934-35, when Beckett was in his late twenties and Bion was a training analyst at the Tavistock Clinic. Not much is known of the detail of the analysis, although James Knowlson produces some extraordinary testimony from Beckett, where he confesses that he found his analysis with Bion utterly engrossing and helped him with the chronic range of psychosomatic symptoms with which Beckett was suffering: panic attacks, cardiac arrhythmia, night sweats and general feelings of morbidity (you know, the usual sort of thing) (Knowlson 1996, 171–182). There is also no doubt that analysis with Bion helped Beckett to overcome his pathological self-immersion and isolation and begin to connect with other people.

However, let me tell an anecdote in this connection. After giving a talk in London to a group of psychoanalysts many years ago, an elderly psychoanalyst said to me afterwards in the pub that Bion once said of Beckett, 'There was nothing I could do with the boy. He was too happy'. Although this is almost certainly apocryphal, it is one of the deepest remarks anyone has ever made about Beckett. Beckett's work is an anti-depressant that works by returning us to what Freud called 'normal human misery' and giving us the courage to endure, to go on, and to go on with a wry and deeply human humour. It is the very antidote to nihilism. But Bion's alleged remark also opens up a can of psychoanalytic red herrings to accompany our aforementioned philosophical ruddy fish. Indeed, one may well want to interpret Beckett's syntax of weakness in psychoanalytic terms, as the pattern of affirmation and negation that is at the core of analytic experience, or rather the pattern of negation that the analyst seeks to interpret.

However, I want to look at another wonderful denial slightly later in the original project for *Film* under the illuminating heading 'suggestion for room'. It reads:

Suggestion for room.

This obviously cannot be O's room. It may be supposed it is his mother's room, which he has not visited for many years and is now to occupy momentarily, to look after the pets, until she comes out of hospital. This has no bearing on the film and need not be elucidated (Beckett 1986, 332).

This is a very peculiar speech act, wonderful for its banal detail and characteristic because of the denial with which it ends. If the nature of the room has no bearing on *Film* and need not be elucidated, then why elucidate it, particularly when it bears so directly and obviously in the drama of *Film* itself and indeed more widely on Beckett's life and work. Recall the aporetic opening words of Beckett's *Molloy* and indeed the entire *Trilogy*: 'I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there. Perhaps in an ambulance, certainly a vehicle of some kind' (Beckett 1979, 9). It was Beckett's mother who paid for his psychoanalysis in London (psychoanalysis was illegal at the time in Ireland) and whose 'savage loving', as Beckett called it, was arguably at the core of his troubles. It is often only when one's father has died that the full extent of the chronic relationship of dependence on one's mother is revealed. I speak hypothetically, of course.

Mention of mother opens up another dimension of perceivedness: perceivedness by the past. This takes place through the use of the photographs in the closing scene of *Film*, those anachronistically comic and unreal images that O scans in careful succession. Let me recall the dramatic action here: O is going to his mother's room in order to avoid being perceived.

(Question: why would you go to your mother's room if you don't want to be perceived? There would seem to be an abundance of perception and self-perception in one's mother's room.

Answer: in order to look after the pets as Beckett suggests in the above note?

Question: so, why does he kick out or cover up all the animals?

Answer: to avoid the agony of perception by animals.

Question: so, why is O going to his mother's room?

Answer: perhaps O lives there now.

Question: is this of merely structural and dramatic convenience that has no bearing on the *Film* and need not be elucidated?

Answer: doubtless).

O then examines and destroys the photographs of his life, photographs that he has brought with him in a folder that also begins to perceive him with its two eyelets, which echo the two eye-like holes in the back of the rocking chair. O seeks to eliminate the past and escape into non-being. But, as we have already seen, this is impossible and we are glued ineluctably to ourselves in a way that we can seek to evade, but we cannot escape. To be riveted to the fact of a divided subjectivity is also to be riveted to the past. The inescapability of self-perception is also that of a past that cannot be excised or extirpated.

Note the nature of the photographs in the closing scene of *Film: 6 months, 4 years, 5 years, 20 years, 21 years, 25 years* and then the aged monster of the antique face of Keaton. In the original project for *Film*, Beckett suggests 30 years old for this last image, whereas Keaton was more than twice that age at the time of the filming of *Film*. With the sixth photograph, O pauses and touches his daughter's face with his forefinger. It is hardly a huge movement, just a slight caress of the hand, yet it communicates both tenderness and transience in a way that is more powerful than any grand pathetic gesture. It also reminds us of a crucial aspect of Beckett's work with which I would like to close, namely what Badiou calls its nostalgia for the past, a feeling of tender loss, of lost intimacy and lost time. Far from being some sort of abstract and cold modernist, Beckett's work is marked by an intensity of feeling, at times a sentimentality, for a past whose presence is gone, but which flickers and burns in a way that cannot be torn up in little pieces and thrown on the floor. What might one call this? In a word, *saudade*, which is a fascinating Portuguese word meaning longing, melancholy and nostalgia. At its core is the experience of an indolent, dreaming wistfulness, an existential lassitude or langour. One can experience *saudade* for someone, for something, or for somewhere that is dear to one. As such, *saudade* is a yearning for an impossible object, usually an object from the past, as in the above-quoted passage from *Krapp's Last Tape*. But Fernando Pessoa, whom Beckett read approvingly in 1969 while convalescing on the Canary Islands, fascinatingly speaks of *saudade* for the future, which has both an existential and a political significance in his writings. My point is that there is something of this *saudade* in Beckett's writing, turned towards past and future, a yearning for a lost past and a courageous hope for the future. The core of Beckett's work is not nihilism or dark despair, but an ethic of courage and continuation. One goes on. At that point, I will stop.

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