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Human Machines Petrified:
Play's Mineral Mechanics and Les Statues meurent aussi

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Play is often regarded as the beginning of Beckett's 'late style' in the theatre (Brater 1987; Gontarski 1997), introducing a radically new approach to the body and language that set the benchmark for later plays such as *Not I*, *That Time* and *Footfalls*. An important element of this new approach to theatre is the process of dehumanization that *Play* underwent during its genesis. In this process, partly due to the audiovisual technologies that he was experimenting with at the time, human characters were increasingly reduced to mechanical devices or mouthpieces for the conveyance of speech, rather than being represented as recognizable and sentient beings of flesh and blood. However, Beckett never dehumanizes them completely, instead suspending them between the human and the nonhuman. This technique corresponds to what Conor Carville describes as Beckett's 'concern with how [an] art object can formally inscribe the limit-point between the human and the non-human' (2018, 106). In this article, we will analyse the visual iconography of *Play* against the background of Beckett's fascination with sculpture in particular, connecting it to his interest in the mineral, the inorganic and the non-anthropomorphic, which always creates a tension with the human in his work. The in-between state of immobilised figures protruding from urns, so typical of *Play*, is similar to the ambiguity that funerary statues emanate, a favourite sculptural genre of Beckett's, as they 'represent the dead [...] "neither dead nor alive"' (Philippe Ariès qtd. in Lozier 2013, 104). Apart from drawing on his substantial knowledge of sculpture as a liminal form of art (anthropomorphic yet inorganic), the visual aesthetics of *Play* are reminiscent of Alain Resnais' and Chris Marker's documentary film *Les Statues meurent aussi* (1953), a possible but hitherto overlooked source. This article explores that connection to argue that *Play* combines art and technology into a mineral mechanics that is the result of an intermedial exchange between sculpture, cinema and theatre.¹

¹ Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit (1993) are some of the few critics who have explored the connection between Beckett and Resnais, but they do not mention *Les Statues meurent aussi*.

The Mineral in Painting and Sculpture

In an original take on Beckett's contribution to modernism, Jean-Michel Rabaté discusses the writer's well-known aversion to an excessive focus on the human in the arts. According to Rabaté, Beckett's 'issue would be to overcome the mixture of basic psychology and naturalism underpinned by age-old humanism that he called "anthropomorphism"' (2018, 23). As early as the 1930s, Beckett ostensibly realized that he 'wanted to craft a different writing, capable of reaching a hard core and whose model was the inorganic essence of the Earth' (24). Praising Jack Yeats' 'inorganism of the organic', Beckett notes that 'all [Yeats'] people are mineral in the end, without possibility of being added to or taken from, pure inorganic juxtapositions' (Beckett 2009c, 535). In another letter, Beckett sees in Yeats' paintings '[a] kind of petrified insight into one's ultimate hard irreducible inorganic singleness' (536). The use of the word 'petrified' – meaning 'changing into stone', among other things – stands out, as it echoes Beckett's fascination with sculpture and later returns in other contexts, as we will illustrate below.

Although Beckett's love of painting and film has received ample scholarly attention, his interest in the sculptural has largely remained under the radar, rarely treated as a subject on its own and usually subsumed with painting under the common demonitator of the 'visual arts'.² Beckett's interest in statues was already piqued – if not before – during a 1927 vacation in Florence, where 'driven by his voracious appetite for architecture, painting and sculpture, he visited most of museums, galleries and churches' to behold, among others, Michelangelo's *David*. At this time, he also bought a copy of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Eminent Italian Architects, Painters, and Sculptors*, a standard work that 'traces the history of Renaissance art from Giotto to Michelangelo' (Knowlson 1996, 75) – but which no longer survives in Beckett's personal library.³

² A rare exception is James Knowlson, who drew attention to the subject at the Beckett at Reading conference in 2013 with a lecture entitled "'As though turned to stone...": Beckett's Theatrical Images and Medieval, Late Gothic and early Renaissance Sculpture'.

³ Other works on art do still survive in Beckett's personal library (Van Hulle and Nixon 2013, 214-20). These are also available in the *Beckett Digital Library* (www.beckettarchive.org) and will soon be expanded with some fifty art books and catalogues that Beckett acquired throughout his life, though mostly in the 1920s and 1930s. He gave the lot to his friend, the artist Avigdor Arikha, whose wife, Anne Atik, recently sold them to Indiana University, where they are currently preserved at the Lilly Library. Among them is a copy of Robert de la Sizeranne's *Les Visages et les masques à Florence et au Louvre: Portraits célèbres de la Renaissance Italienne* (1933) and a *Fürher durch das Tell Halaf-Museum, Berlin* (1934), where Beckett, according to Knowlson, looked at its non-Western 'sculptures and ceramics with a fresh eye, finding a lot to fascinate him in the myths that lay behind the objects as well as in the intricate details of the artefacts themselves' (1996, 245).

Better documented are his encounters with sculpture in Germany from 1936-7, mostly thanks to the diaries that he kept during this period. In particular, Beckett was captivated by the Christian imagery in the statues that he saw at the cathedrals of Naumburg, Bamberg, Nuremberg and Würzburg and he spent considerable time studying them (Nixon 2011, 149). In Naumburg, his attention was drawn to twelve so-called ‘Stifterfiguren’, the statues of the founders or donors of the Naumburger Dom, which he deemed ‘indescribable’ in his diary (Carville 2018, 116-17). In Bamberg, after visiting the cathedral, he noted that some of the statues were ‘naturalized almost to caricature’ (Knowlson 2008, 23), a remark that seems to indicate his disapproval of this approach to sculpture, as he did with painting.⁴ Rather than being impressed by the famous ‘Bamberger Reiter’ (‘somehow disappointing, too much of an idea’), Beckett admired the figures of the Ecclesia and Synagogue, which were ‘still and withdrawn to the point of petrification. (Petrified statue is good.)’ (qtd. in Knowlson 2008, 24-5). It seems that he did not appreciate anthropomorphic tendencies in sculpture – whether idealism or excessive realism – and preferred instead the frozen and apathetic look inherent to the ‘dead’ material such as stone. Beckett was also sensitive to the industrial or mechanical effect that sculpture could exert on its human subject matter, especially in architecture. Of Adam Kraft’s ciborium at Saint Lawrence’s church in Nuremberg he remarked: ‘a frightful machine, more gothic than the gothic, a miracle of laborious statics, a skyscraper [thing] in dingy limestone with the pinnacle bent to follow the curve of the vaulting, showing that he could have gone on had not space forbidden’ (qtd. in Knowlson 1996, 752n149). At the same time, Mark Nixon notes that Beckett ‘invested a psychological interpretation into his reading of [statues]’ and that he ‘continually displays an urge to write narratives into the sculptures that he sees’ (2001, 150-1). In Würzburg, for instance, he admired the funerary statues by the so-called ‘Wolfskehlmeister’, whom he described in his diary as ‘a Master of the senile and [the] collapsed’, admonishing himself to ‘Remember: WOLFSKEHLMEISTER’ (qtd. in Knowlson 2008, 29). This oscillation between the mineral and the human would remain a constant not just in Beckett’s view on sculpture, but also in his own work, as we shall see below.

According to Knowlson, Beckett must have ‘recognized in [Wolfskehlmeister] certain key affinities with his *own* world’ (29), to such an extent that ‘his startling post-Modern images appear to have been influenced by his love of the work of the great masters’ (1996,

⁴According to Carville, ‘it is striking that the expressions that [Beckett] finds and responds to most avidly in Naumburg are almost all indicative of a withdrawn, remote, monadic quality that suspends the binary between empirical realism and an idealising abstraction’ (2018, 117).

xxi). Claire Lozier builds on Knowlson's insights by discussing the properties of (funerary) sculpture in the portrayal of Beckett's prose characters. In particular, she notes that his increasingly handicapped and moribund protagonists 'are locked in an immobility that verges on petrification: they become veritable statues' (2013, 102). Similarly, Nixon recognises an influence of sculpture on Beckett's later drama, in particular the television plays:

When Male Figure in *Ghost Trio* lifts his head to look at the camera, his face evokes a chiselled stone sculpture, which is further stressed by the sculptural elements inherent in the pose of the figure, the structural composition of the scene and the use of the colour grey. (2011, 148)

In addition to Beckett's television drama, his stage and radio plays are full of references to statues. Take, for example, Ada's description of Henry's father in *Embers*, who is 'sitting on a rock looking out to sea [...], as if he had been turned to stone' (Beckett 2009a, 45). The same phrase recurs, slightly modified, decades later in *Ohio Impromptu*, as a metafictional reference to the stage image of Reader and Listener slowly petrifying into stillness before the eyes of the audience: 'they sat on as though turned to stone' (Beckett 2009b, 140). As these examples show, Beckett's statuesque images easily translated across genres and media, even to a purportedly non-visual or 'blind' one such as radio. Being borrowed from sculpture, they are themselves already examples of an intermedial exchange between the visual arts, on the one hand, and literature, on the other, which is a long-standing tradition. In what follows, we aim to explore *Play* as a more complex and modern case in which sculpture's influence on theatre may have been technologically mediated by the medium of cinema, in particular a film about statues, thus merging Beckett's passion for the pictorial arts and sculpture with his love for moving pictures.

Statues in the Films of Alain Resnais

Les Statues meurent aussi (*Statues Also Die*) is a collaboration between French filmmakers Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, commissioned by the journal *Présence Africaine* in 1950, officially released in 1953. It is a crossover between an art documentary and an essay film, treating historical African artefacts and their perception under (post)colonialism. While the subject matter of this short film may not appear to be Beckettian at first sight, its visual style

is. However, before we can enter into an analysis of its resemblance to the stage imagery of *Play*, it is important first to provide some background information on Beckett's appraisal of Resnais' work, which is well attested in his correspondence.

He first mentioned him on 27 April 1958, when writing to American director Alan Schneider regarding a possible screen adaption of his first radio play: 'Talk also of a film (Alain Resnais) of the French *All That Fall*. I have not yet given the green light for this, but so admire Resnais that I probably shall' (Beckett 2000, 45). On the same day, Beckett sent two more – currently unpublished – letters about the matter, in which he named some of the films he liked. To Donald McWhinnie, he recommended *Nuit et Brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1956) in particular, Resnais' controversial docufilm about the Nazi concentration camps, while praising the director's work in general.⁵ In a letter to Mary Hutchinson, Beckett not only reaffirmed his admiration for *Nuit et Brouillard*, but also mentioned some of the *court métrages* or short films that he found excellent, including one on the Bibliothèque National de France.⁶ *Toute la mémoire du monde* (*All the World's Memory*, 1957), as it is called, is a guided visual tour of France's national library in Paris, comparing its maze of holdings and rooms to the workings of the human mind and memory. Judging from his letters, Beckett regarded Resnais as 'the most gifted of the lot' (2014, 246), meaning the French *Nouvelle Vague* or New Wave cineasts, although he clearly preferred the documentary shorts.

He is also known to have seen *Hiroshima mon amour* (*Hiroshima My Love*, 1959), Resnais' first feature-length film, based on a poetic screenplay by Marguerite Duras. It was set against the backdrop of the 1945 atomic bombings on Japan, but Beckett deemed it 'not very satisfactory', as he told John Manning on 15 October 1959 (Beckett 2014, 246). He was also dismissive of *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*, 1961), Resnais' second feature, for which Alain Robbe-Grillet had written the screenplay, as appears from his conversations with Lawrence Harvey in 1961-2:

Beckett feels that Robbe-Grillet has a *doctrine*; i.e. he has a form [so] that his anti-plot, his anti-character and so on quickly becomes a convention. He felt that the love-story in this film was traditional and banal. It was merely expressed differently. He objected especially to actually seeing the two people on the screen. There is being but *individual personality* remains a mystery. (qtd. in Knowlson 2006, 135).

⁵ This letter is preserved in the Donald McWhinnie papers at the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library of Ohio State University (Spec.rare.124).

⁶ This letter is preserved in the Mary Hutchinson papers at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre in Austin, Texas (box 2, folder 4).

Given the closeness of the film's release to the genesis of *Play*, it is no wonder that Anthony Paraskeva has detected some fascinating parallels with Beckett's theatrical piece.

Like *Play*, Resnais' film 'combines a traditional and banal story of a bourgeois love triangle with medium-specific formal innovations' (Paraskeva 2017, 60). *Marienbad*'s tryst consists of two men and one woman, which is precisely the constellation Beckett had in mind in the first draft of *Play* ('Before *Play*'). What is more, 'events are re-staged and modified according to who narrates them' (61) – another stylistic device it shares with *Play* – and the interrupted speeches evoke the film's montage technique, in which a '[r]adically discontinuous editing style allows settings and tenses to shift and start according to the workings of three separate interior monologues' (61). In addition, statues occupy a central role in *Marienbad*. As Steven Jacobs and Lisa Colpaert point out in their book *Screening Statues*, 'sculpture is almost one of the protagonists' (2017, 119). Being filmed regularly in the presence of stone or marble art works, 'the human characters acquire sculptural presence' and 'the actors seem petrified' in some of the shots (126). Statues thus act like 'a token of mortification' in the grand palace at Marienbad, the guests becoming 'living dead', '[a]utomatons with frozen faces' or 'stone-like figures dismounted from their pedestals' (127-8), culminating in an array of tableaux vivants throughout the film. However, despite the central presence of statues in *Marienbad* and some of the conceptual ideas it has in common with *Play*, their visual styles are significantly different. In this respect, *Play* is much closer to *Les Statues meurent aussi*, as we will illustrate in what follows. Given Beckett's fascination with Resnais, it is not unthinkable that multiple of his films resonate in works from the late 1950s and early 1960s, with several of them potentially merging in a single piece of theatre.

Unlike *Brouillard*, *Mémoire*, *Hiroshima* or *Marienbad*, Beckett does not name *Statues* explicitly in correspondence or conversation – as far as we know. Still, his many references to Resnais' work and the phrasing he uses in relation to the documentary shorts allow for the possibility that he may have seen others. The original release date of *Statues*, in 1953, seems too early for the film to have had any direct bearing on the genesis of *Play*, which Beckett did not start working on until 1962, but here it is important to keep in mind the film's history in France. Despite winning the Prix Jean Vigo in 1954, it created so much controversy that the second half of the documentary 'was censored for more than a decade by the Centre National de la Cinématographie because of its condemnation of French colonialism' (Alter 2006, 11). When the Algerian War raged from 1954 to 1962 and France was accused of torture, the film acquired a new political significance. It is not unthinkable that Beckett saw *Statues* amidst all

the upheavals of the period, if he had not done so before, as we know of his role in activities concerning the events in Algeria (Knowlson 1996; Uhlmann 2008; Morin 2017).⁷ Nor would it be unusual for him to strip a work of art he had encountered in an overtly political context of all historical specificity, retaining only its aesthetic qualities, as he had done in the same period for *Pochade radiophonique* (*Rough for Radio II*) and *Fragment de théâtre II* (*Rough for Theatre II*) (Verhulst 2015, 155).

For Resnais and Marker, by contrast, the aesthetic and the political were inseparable in their approach to colonialism. Starting from the premise that statues die when taken out of their natural environment and placed in museums to figure as art, Resnais and Marker apply this notion to African sculptures in particular. They denounce the fact that African art is put on display in Western museums to aesthetically please us, whereas the context behind it – the person who crafted it, the society in which it functioned, the people who gazed upon or used it – is excluded and thus ignored, which is not the case for, say, Sumerian, Egyptian, Persian, Greek or Roman artefacts. Due to this absence of historical embeddedness, what to Africans signified an expression of culture is merely picturesque for the Western gaze, which in turn illustrates our detached and unworldly attitude towards colonialism. Resnais and Marker set out to remedy this blind spot by situating African artworks in the environment from which they emerged. In order to do so, they combine archival footage from African villages with shots of African art works in Western museums, through the use of montage and voice-over narration, turning *Statues* into a powerful historical as well as aesthetic document.

Aesthetically speaking, *Statues* figures in a long tradition of sculptural depictions in cinema, spanning the medium's entire history from the late nineteenth-century and the early filmic experiments of Georges Méliès until the present day and contemporary blockbusters. Especially challenging were films in which statues are the main topic, without human agents to supply the action. Etymologically derived from the Greek words *kinēma* ('movement') and *kinein* ('to move'), cinema is a dynamic artform, while sculpture is essentially static or dead, also known as 'the funerary art *par excellence*' (Jacobs et al 2017, 6). This stillness prompted directors and cinematographers to experiment with a range of approaches to create a kind of 'Pygmalion effect' that showed 'statues coming to life' on the screen (14). Some, including Carl Theodor Dreyer in *Thorvaldsen* (1949) and Henri Alekan in *L'Enfer de Rodin* (1958), move the statues themselves by rotating them on axles or suspending them from pulleys (70).

⁷ Also, Beckett was still in contact with Nancy Cunard at this time, before her untimely death in 1965. She had a passion for African culture and art, publishing *Henry Music* (1930), a poetry collection dedicated to the African-American jazz musician Henry Crowder, to which Beckett contributed a poem, and the *Negro Anthology* (1934), for which he translated articles from French into English.

Resnais and Marker belong to a more conservative kind of filmmakers who let the camera do all the moving, yet always retaining the two-dimensional flatness of the picture, like that of a photograph, and never exploring the sculptures in the round. Their variations of tracking and panning shots, always in close-up with stark chiaroscuro light effects, result in a visual style that is strikingly similar to the iconography of *Play*, with its spotlight faces emerging from the dark.

© Alain Resnais, Chris Marker and Ghislain Cloquet (digital stills from DVD)

As Jean Négroni, the narrating voice of *Statues*, summarizes the idea behind Ghislain Cloquet's stunning cinematography: 'Un objet est mort quand le regard vivant qui s'est posé sur lui a disparu' ['An object is dead when the living gaze fixed upon it disappears']. This statement, which could just as well be the leitmotif of *Play*, is borne out by the first half of the docufilm, which frames the sculptures as lifeless objects – almost like death masks. They are brought to life in the second part, where the 'regard vivant' becomes that of the spectator watching stock footage of the African villages, rituals and festivities in which these objects originally figured. As a result, we are able to look at the statues with a renewed perspective. When the camera returns to the museum, the artefacts are no longer positioned against a dark

backdrop and exposed to harsh lighting, as if dissociated from all context, but instead shown in the company of other objects in a softer and more natural light, suggesting a rehistoricized ‘regard’. Whereas Resnais and Marker thus humanize African culture by recontextualizing its artefacts, Beckett could be said to dehumanize and dehistoricize his cast of characters, a man and two women tangled up in the banal plot of a love triangle, by severing them from their realistic or everyday background stories and turning them into statues. In this sense, *Play* is similar to *Marienbad*. However, the ‘regard vivant’ of *Statues* resonates in the light beam of *Play*, a seemingly nonhuman entity bringing the human subjects it picks out to life, yet only to subsequently objectify them, prompting speech at very high speeds, which makes the result look mechanical in addition to sculptural. In Resnais’ films, either statues are made to look human or actors to look statuesque, but we can always tell them apart. In *Play*, Beckett blurs the distinction to such an extent that we end up having liminal human sculptures, bearing the mark of both yet irreducible to neither, so that his statues never quite die. As the genesis of *Play* – and its French translation *Comédie* – reveals, Beckett took great care to craft its visual style, frequently evoking the sculptural throughout his drafts.

The Statuesque in the Genesis of *Play* / *Comédie*

The road to the iconic stage image that Beckett achieved in *Play* was long and winding.⁸ The genesis took a long time (from March 1962 to past the first edition in March 1964) and much effort. It is marked by a move away from ‘anthropomorphism’ grounded in ‘basic psychology and naturalism’ that Beckett ostensibly aspired to avoid in his work, (see above). Apart from a clear shift of emphasis from story to image, the genesis of *Play* exhibits a progressive dehumanization of the characters and at the same time an increasing humanization of the nonhuman light beam, with the germ of these processes already being present in the play’s opening tableau.

The original setting – three white boxes rather than the three grey urns used in the final version – is much more evocative of museum pieces, which are usually exhibited on white marble or stone pedestals and lit by spots. The earliest record of *Play*’s genesis, the typescript that came to be known as ‘Before *Play*’, already contains the kernel of the play’s setup, as its stage head note attests:

⁸ For a more detailed study of the genesis of *Play* / *Comédie*, see Beloborodova 2019.

Whole stage in shadow.

Extreme front, centre, touching one another, just visible, *three white boxes*, one yard high, from which *three heads protrude* through holes close fitting to the necks. They are those, from left to right, as seen from auditorium, of SYKE, NICKIE and CONK, and *face undeviatingly front throughout act.*

Ten seconds.

Strong spot (*all spots on faces alone*) on SYKE.

(BDMP8, ET1, 01r; emphasis added)⁹

At the same time, the change of colour from white to grey (in ET15) lends the containers on stage a more stone-like, mineral quality, and their shape – the urns – more readily invoke the motif of death, echoing both Würzburg's Wolfskehlmeister statues and the title of Resnais's film. Besides, the fact that the characters 'face undeviatingly front throughout the act' only reinforces the 'statuesque' impression they make on the audience. At the same time, the first version of *Play* still deploys distinct and very human characterisation: the boxed figures have proper names and possess distinct physical characteristics. The two men, Syke and Conk, are deliberately made to differ from each other as much as possible in terms of their appearance as well as speech, and Nickie's look is decidedly sensual ('red hair, milky complexion, full red lips, green earrings') (BDMP8, ET1, 01r). Of course, the story itself – that of a love triangle – is as human as it is banal.

An important change towards dehumanization occurs in ET2. Instead of the proper names, the characters (from now on two women and one man) are labelled S1, S2 and H, which is clearly a reference to the personal pronouns 'He' and 'She'. The numbering of the women further strips them of individuality by serializing them. From the third typescript onwards, the labels change from pronouns to initials designating the characters' sex (W1, W2, M). Whereas personal pronouns entail a degree of familiarity with their referent, Woman 1, Woman 2 and Man are completely anonymous and de-individualized. The same de-individualization takes place in the revised stage head note, where the detailed description of the characters' faces in 'Before *Play*' is changed to 'Age: in their thirties. Appearances: *indifferent*' (BDMP8, ET2, 01r; emphasis added).

In the subsequent revision process, Beckett continues to depersonalize his 'statues'. In

⁹ The notation 'ET1' refers to the first English typescript, available online in the digital genetic edition of *Play / Comédie*, as part of the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project (www.beckettarchive.org), edited by Vincent Neyt and Olga Beloborodova.

ET6, faces become ‘~~expressionless~~ ^{impassive}’ (foregrounding passivity) and voices ‘toneless’. In ET11, both age and appearance become ‘indifferent’, and the tempo is indicated as ‘rapid throughout’. Despite these emendations, the actors of the German premiere in Ulm (14 June 1963) were still too individualised, as Siegfried Unseld (from Surhkamp Verlag) duly informed Beckett. In his reply, Beckett said the following:

You are right to say that the faces must not be characterized, but *the text in this connection was not clear enough*, and I think I have improved on it by outing, instead of ‘age and appearance indifferent’, ‘faces so lost to age and aspect as to appear almost part of urns. But masks forbidden (!)’ (Beckett 2014, 560; emphasis added)

Beckett’s comment is fascinating in that it highlights his interest to explore the liminal space between the human and the nonhuman, rather than effectuate the full dehumanization of his characters that the masks would more forcibly bring about. It would have reduced them to the deathlike, stony faces of Resnais’ docufilm, whereas the effect so carefully crafted in *Play* is that of statues coming alive on the stage. Beckett did not arrive at this revision immediately, and the idea of masks was still present in the tryouts on the first French typescript, revised – together with its English counterpart – around the time of the Ulm premiere. As Maurice Blackman (1985) and Olga Beloborodova (2019) have shown, Beckett sometimes used the French translation to refine the English original at the time of *Play*’s Ulm premiere. In this case, the first French typescript served as a testing ground for the elusive formulation of the characterization:

~~Age et aspects indifférents.~~ Sans âge et pour ainsi dire sans aspect. *Trois masques parlants presque aussi semblable* à peine + différenciés que les urnes.

[~~Age and appearance indifferent.~~ Without age and so to speak without appearance. *Three talking masques also almost similar* barely distinguishable from the urns.]

~~Age et aspect d'éternité? | On entrevoit la blancheur des 3 urnes | Voix sourdes (faibles) | Inintelligibles pour la plupart.~~

[~~Age and appearance of eternity? | One perceives the whiteness of 3 urns | Voices dull (weak) | Unintelligible for the most part.~~]

(BDMP8, FT1, 03r; emphasis added)

Clearly, the statuesque nature of the figures on stage ('three talking masques'; 'the whiteness of 3 urns') was much more present in the French translation, which in turn influenced the wording of the English text. The tryouts continued afterwards on the title page of ET11, the typescript that served as the base text for the French translation. One of the cancelled words is 'petrified', the word used by Beckett in his German diaries to describe the facial expression of the 'still and withdrawn' figures of Ecclesia and Synagogue at the Bamberger cathedral (see above).

~~xxx age & appearance so abstracted~~

~~Faces so petrified beyond age and expression so lost to age and~~

~~aspect as to be scarcely more~~

~~differentiated than the urns~~

as to seem almost part of

urns. *But masks forbidden.*

(BDMP8, ET11, 01r; emphasis added; also noted in Pountney 1988, 264)

It turns out that in the end Beckett opted for banning the masks in no uncertain terms ('masks forbidden'). By doing so, he partially reversed the dehumanization process that seemed to be taking the upper hand in the genesis, despite the earlier addition of some distinctly human traits, such as W2's 'wild laughter' (ET3) and M's 'hiccup' (ET6). Nonetheless, the physical appearance of the characters had to be reduced to the mineral quality of the urns. In his letter to Schneider of 26 November 1963, Beckett shared his wife's impressions of the Berlin production earlier that month, finding the faces 'excessively made up and characterized', preferring them to appear 'as little differentiated as possible', like 'three grey disks' (Beckett 2009c, 145). For the British premiere of *Play*, stage designer Jocelyn Herbert plastered the actors' heads with a sticky mixture of 'oatmeal, surgical glue and jelly' creating a weathered statuesque look. Billie Whitelaw describes the result as 'a pancake of white, sludgy brown and slimy green', through which the eyes – as a token of residual humanity – always had to be clearly visible, Beckett insisted (1995, 80). As an added bonus, Whitelaw remembers: 'bits of this makeup started to flake off our faces. *It looked as though we were disintegrating in front of the audience* – a quite starting effect in the theatre' (80).

As the characters became less and less human, the spot was more and more infused with life, turning into an ostensibly intelligent if mysterious entity that the characters address and plead with in the second part of the play, as if it were a human agent. The humanization

of the light beam unfolded gradually in the play's genesis: already in the first typescript, Nickie addresses the spot and begs it for mercy (*BDMP8*, ET1, 01r). In the second typescript, the Meditation part is clearly demarcated by a typed broken horizontal line, and S1 screams 'Get off me!' twice at the light as if it were physically assaulting her (*BDMP8*, ET2, 03r). All three ask questions of the spot ('H: Why go down? Why go out? Why not keep on glaring at me without ceasing?'; *BDMP8*, ET2, 04r) and ascribe motives and reasons to the light's erratic behaviour. The role of the spot is explicitly thematized in the sixth typescript, the most heavily revised draft version of the play. At this point in the genesis of *Play*, three longer speeches were inserted, one for each character, all dealing with the spotlight. This time, however, the spot's 'human' property of possessing some form of intelligence is being questioned, most overtly by M:

M [addressing the spot]: Are you a ^{deaf?} A mere eye? ~~As deaf as an eye?~~ Lip reading? Or not interested? Not interested in words. Just looking at my face. Looking for something in my face. In my eyes. Or not even that. *A mere eye. Quite unintelligent. Opening and closing* on me. (–) Am I as much as *being seen*? (*BDMP 8*, ET6, 11r; emphasis added)

M's speech, added in red ballpoint in the bottom margin, explores the possibility that the spotlight is not the conscious being that the urned figure thought it to be. Even though the use of the word 'eye' points to a living being, the process of endowing the light beam with 'human' qualities seems to be largely reversed here by reframing the spot as what it actually is: an unseeing, unthinking mechanical 'thing', incapable of granting redemption or release. In that sense, the light beam is not dissimilar to the camera eye in Resnais' *Statues*, where it often coincides with the frontal spotlight.

The next major intervention into the function of the light – its consolidation of what used to be three spots into 'one single spot' in ET11 – seems to indicate a move towards humanization again. In his after-text 'Note on Light' (first appearing in ET15, right after the Berlin reprise of *Spiel*), Beckett explains that the use of 'a single mobile spot' will create the effect of 'a *unique inquisitor*' that interrogates his 'victims' (13r; emphasis added). In his letter to Christian Ludvigsen (Beckett's Danish translator) of 22 September 1963, he further elucidates the role of light: the beam should be treated 'as an *animal being*' in the Meditation and evoke 'an *inquisitorial intelligence* [and] have a probing quality, like an accusing *finger* levelled at them one after another. This is obtained by a single pivoting spot and not, as in

Ulm, by three fixed independent spots, one for each face, switching on and off as required' (Beckett 2014, 574; emphasis added). To attain the right effect, 'it is not enough merely to illuminate the faces, they must be "*fusillés*" by a visible swivelling beam' (574; emphasis added). The metaphors Beckett uses in his letter once again waver between anthropomorphic agency and mechanical execution, so that the light beam, just like the characters in the urns, cannot be fully captured in either human or nonhuman terms. Apparently, the spot's gaze itself is no longer sufficient to confirm them in their existence, as M queries: 'Am I as much as ... being seen' (Beckett 2009b, 64). Rather than signifying the 'regard vivant', this function seems to be relegated, as it is in the second part of Resnais' and Markers's *Statues*, to the audience or the spectator.

Even though *Play* draws heavily on the sculptural as well as the technological for its dehumanizing effect, it always retains something of the human, however slight that may be. By thus combining filmic techniques with a statuesque aesthetics in the theatre, Beckett manages to stage a kind of 'mineral mechanics' that verges closely on the nonhuman, but is never dehumanized completely, as characters continue to laugh and to hiccup, just barely retaining a trace of their humanity. This oscillation from the human to the nonhuman is clearly traceable in *the* genesis of the text and the result – *Play*'s iconic stage image – is marked by the familiar Beckettian trope of in-betweenness: between life and death, between the human and the nonhuman, between the organic and the mineral, between the natural and the technological.

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