

Introduction

in relation to intelligence, the image is the condition of thought; 'there is no thought without an image,' because the image is the material through which intelligence contemplates the universal.¹

Ever since people have written about Beckett it has been noticed that he is a writer who is, even more than usual, interested in images. A good deal of work has recently been done concerning Beckett's interest in, and use of, images from the visual arts.² Most famously, Beckett told Ruby Cohn that he had remembered a Casper David Friedrich painting, *Two Men Looking at the Moon*, which he had seen during his trip to Germany prior to World War Two and had adapted this image, staging it in *En Attendant Godot*.³ Working from a diary Beckett made while travelling through Germany and visiting art galleries before World War Two, and directed by comments made by Beckett himself, James Knowlson has convincingly displayed how Beckett made use of images from paintings which had had a forceful impression on him and reconfigured them in developing his own striking images in later works. Might the same be claimed for Beckett's use of philosophy? That is, did he borrow images used by philosophers and reuse them in his texts? Furthermore, what, in effect, is an 'image'; what can it do, and what does Beckett make it do?

Certainly, Beckett would not have been the only artist to translate images from other media, or to use them as a point of departure for his own works. In his review of Lewis Lockwood's biography of Beethoven, Owen Jander quotes Beethoven's friend and pupil Carl Czerny, who states:

It is certain that in many of his finest works Beethoven was inspired by visions and images drawn either from reading or created by his own excited imagination, and that we should obtain the real key to his compositions and to their performance only through the thorough knowledge of these circumstances, if this were always practicable.⁴

Jander suggests that for the most part Beethoven hid these images and did not tell others about them, except in one or two cases: as for example,

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String Quartet in F major, Op. 18 No. 1, a movement which Beethoven said was inspired by the tomb scene in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.⁵

The image and the ways in which it might be used are clearly important to Beckett. Yet Beckett is also important to the image and our apprehension of it: aspects of his artistic practice develop an aesthetic logic which extends our understanding of what an image is and can do in literature, drama and audiovisual media.

The work of French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941) is of key importance to Beckett's understanding of the image and its relation to thought. Beckett knew both Bergson's work and the ideas of the early modernist movement, including the 'Imagists'. This group, led by Ezra Pound, and T. E. Hulme, who translated Bergson's essay *Introduction to Metaphysics*⁶ into English, developed theories of the image in broad sympathy with the understandings I will outline in chapter 1 below. Bergson's ideas in turn were adapted, developed and transformed by other modernists, including Marcel Proust, T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, James Joyce, Wallace Stevens, Vladimir Nabokov and literary theorists, including Bakhtin and the Russian Formalists.⁷ Indeed, such a series of creative responses to problems described by Bergson (and his understanding of duration, memory, intuition and the image among other things) inflect so much work of substance that Bergson's philosophical system continues to be of relevance to contemporary practice. This importance has been amplified by the work of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze, who dedicates two important essays to Beckett which discuss Beckett's use of the image,⁸ turns to Bergson, and *Matter and Memory*⁹ in particular, in developing his concept of the image in the *Cinema* books¹⁰ and elsewhere.¹¹

Beckett discusses the 'image' a number of times in *Disjecta*,¹² and in several places within his works Beckett uses the term 'image' in a manner which brings it into line with philosophical definitions of the term. His 'imagination' from *Imagination Dead Imagine*¹³ and *All Strange Away*¹⁴ strongly relates to the use made of the word by Spinoza, Descartes and other seventeenth-century Rationalists who understand it to include all sensations (what we see, hear, touch, smell and taste here and now as much as those images we project from memory or faculties of fancy). Beckett clearly also considers the 'image' to be something which can be projected (through art, memory, fancy or some other cognitive faculty). This is apparent in his use of the term in *The Image*¹⁵ and *How It Is*¹⁶ and in the processes of image production described in works such as *... but the clouds ...*¹⁷ and *Nacht und Träume*.¹⁸ It also becomes apparent that the production of such images might be related to philosophy as much as

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the arts. In a letter to his friend Thomas MacGreevy of 1933, Beckett specifically identifies his own interest in philosophical images, even if these are divorced from the systems in which they are used: 'Leibniz a great cod, but full of splendid little pictures'.¹⁹

So, sights, sounds, smells, tastes and things touched all produce 'images' to the sense organs which are interpreted by the brain in line with processes described by Bergson in *Matter and Memory* (and discussed in detail in chapter 1 below). As images, firstly, they are 'something' which requires interpretation, secondly they are interpreted by the brain as meaningful sensations and brought into contact with sign systems, including language. The image interacts with processes of cognition or thought. Indeed, the image, as what is first sensed and secondly related to sense or made sense of, might be understood to be a key element within the cognitive process. Rather than creating or structuring thought, it induces thought. It also precedes thought and exceeds thought. It can be understood to be a sign but is not always or only a sign (that is, one can fail to understand an image, one can find multiple and shifting sense in an image, and the meaning of an image can exceed the meanings assigned to it by signifying systems).

Further, because the image precedes and exceeds thought, it is something which is of equal importance to (but made different use of by) literature and philosophy. It is one way, then, of understanding how literature and philosophy might interact. Images can pass between literary and philosophical discourse, no doubt being transformed in the process of translation, but also carrying with them something in common, a translatable component which inheres in the image which is put into circulation. This process can be, and is, two-way. That is, a philosopher might borrow an image from a writer of fiction, and vice versa. The consequences of the theories I am developing here, then, while they will be explored via the work of Samuel Beckett, are generally applicable to discussions of philosophy and literature.

The image, of course, is not the only element available to literature: the music of the interplay of the sounds of words and their rhythm, the power of the story and the worlds brought forth by the voices of characters and narrators are equally important elements, yet these fall outside the scope of this study.

This study has two parts. Firstly, I develop a reading of philosophical understandings of the image, drawing out the importance of the concepts of 'presentation' and 'representation', and relate this to Beckett's aesthetic theories of the image, and his artistic practice (chapters 1–3). Secondly, I turn to questions of how images might allow one kind of interaction

between philosophy and literature, and how Beckett makes use of images which are borrowed from or drawn into dialogue with philosophical images (chapters 4–7).

At the outset it is necessary to define exactly what is meant by ‘the image’, the kind of thinking it allegedly induces and how this relates to sensation or affective understandings. Chapter 1 confronts these questions in relation to the philosophy of Bergson and the theory of the image (cinematic and otherwise) developed by Deleuze in dialogue with Bergson and Charles Sanders Peirce. Chapter 2 ties these theories to Beckett’s own aesthetic statements. Chapter 3 considers how Beckett’s artistic practice develops from one concerned with relation and allusion in his early writings to a form which makes use of strategies (including the image) to present an art of ‘nonrelation’.

Chapters 4 and 5 draw upon materials which have only just become available to scholars: Beckett’s detailed notes to Arnold Geulincx,²⁰ and the first English translation of Geulincx’s *Ethics*.²¹ These new materials enable the development of significantly new readings in this study. These sources also serve to illustrate how Beckett makes use of images drawn from philosophy.

Chapter 6 considers the use of Bergson’s notion of intuition, and the image of the philosophical system which he describes in relation to Berkeley, and compares these with Beckett’s adaptation of Berkeley’s ideas in the ideogrammatic work *Film*.²² Chapter 7 turns to Beckett’s late works. I look to the Stoic understanding of the image, link it back to ideas developed in the early chapters of this work and explore how their particular understandings of bodies and incorporeals shed light on the strange late plays of Beckett. I take *What Where*²³ as an example and look at this play in some detail.

I conclude by drawing together the implications of the use of the image in Beckett, both in relation to his own work and as an ongoing provocation to the contemporary theory and practice of literature and art more generally. I then list the kinds of images I have outlined in this study.

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CHAPTER I

*Representation and presentation: Deleuze, Bergson,
 Peirce and 'the image'*

images can never be anything but things, and thought is a movement.¹

'IT'S DONE I'VE DONE THE IMAGE'²

In *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*,³ Michael Hardt describes how Deleuze develops themes which have a long history in the Western philosophical tradition, but which have 'remained suppressed and dormant'. Hardt places Spinoza, Nietzsche and Bergson within a minor tradition which Deleuze develops:

we cannot read Deleuze's work as thought 'outside' or 'beyond' the philosophical tradition, or even as an effective line of flight from that block; rather we must see it as the affirmation of a (discontinuous, but coherent) line of thought that has remained suppressed and dormant, but nonetheless deeply embedded within that same tradition.⁴

One might apply Hardt's idea to an understanding of the image that has emerged at various times within the Western philosophical tradition, and that has been both suggested by and answered by certain kinds of artistic practice within the Western aesthetic tradition. At times this idea has emerged with clarity and force, and at times the insights it claims to reveal have been surrounded, taunted, ridiculed.

This idea considers that the apprehension of the image (which emerges from the real and is impressed upon our senses like a 'signet ring in wax') is fundamental both to our understanding of what the world is and to how we know that world. The idea is apparent in the work of the Ancient Greek Stoics, with their concept of 'phantasia', and with 'the comprehensive image' which grounds truth; in the work of Roman rhetorician Quintillian, who speaks of an image which is so forceful that we immediately apprehend its truth; in Descartes, who, according to Stephen Gaukroger, draws his understanding of the 'clear and distinct' idea from

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Quintillian⁵ (though Descartes moves from here to an intense focus on epistemology which leaves behind and disparages the image once it has been used as a point of departure). It is apparent in Spinoza, who both works with certain Cartesian ideas and returns to ideas drawn from the Ancient Stoics in developing his understanding of the three kinds of knowledge. It is there at the end of the nineteenth century in the work of William James and Charles Sanders Peirce, and in the idea of the image developed by Henri Bergson in *Matter and Memory*. These ideas in turn are developed and transformed by an army of modernist writers and artists who answer Bergson and James.⁶ The idea has recently returned again, in the work of Gilles Deleuze, who develops a theory of the image in art that draws heavily on the work of Peirce and Bergson in particular. It is most fully developed in his *Cinema* books, but is also an important element in his works on Francis Bacon and Samuel Beckett. This idea is also of key importance to our understanding of the image in Samuel Beckett, who knew the work of many of the thinkers mentioned above.

A few works have been dedicated to Deleuze's *Cinema* books, where the relation between Bergson and Deleuze has been discussed.⁷ While there are inevitably points of overlap, this is a complex problem, and my point of focus differs from studies that have appeared so far. That is, nothing has yet been written concerning the pairing of the concepts of 'representation' and 'presentation' in relation to the image in Deleuze, yet this is crucial to an understanding of the nature of the image. The purpose of this chapter is to look at the role of the image, from a cognitive perspective, as an interaction between notions of 'presentation' and 'representation', and to use this distinction in order to begin to develop an understanding of how the image might work in art.

In the *Logic of Affect*, Paul Redding traces points of correspondence between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German idealism and contemporary theories of cognition. Redding underlines how a key distinction, or point of contention, in both nineteenth- and twentieth-century debates about the nature of cognition, concerned the problem of whether sensations should be considered 'presentations' or 'representations'. 'Direct Realists', such as William James, and more recently J. J. Gibson, consider that 'worldly things are directly and primarily *presented to the mind*'.⁸ Such presentations are understood to have being in their own right, and therefore one looks to ontology when considering their nature. Others, including idealists such as Fichte and Schelling, argue that what occurs in our experience of the world is the production of 'representations'. That is, they contend that the immediate process of sensation is always lost and out of

reach and what remains is the interpretation of the sensation. It is these interpretations or *representations* which involve or produce knowledge, and so one looks to epistemology when considering their nature.⁹ The distinction between the representation and the presentation (as understood by William James) is described by Redding as follows:

For James, the notion of a psychic ‘representation’ could apply only *within* experience: one mental content, my thought say, of tigers in India, could only be said to represent some other experiential content such as an immediately perceived tiger encountered when my thought had played the appropriate role in leading me to that latter experience. A truly representational content was thus a ‘substitution’ for a direct perceptual encounter, and its cognitive value was dependent on that of direct perception. This meant that actual perceptual encounter could not itself be thought of as a ‘representation’ of a perceived object as in the traditional representative theory, but more as its direct *presentation*.¹⁰

What is at stake is the understanding of the process of perception: both the manner in which we sense or apprehend the world and the manner in which we interpret what we have sensed or apprehended. The thinkers who work within the minor tradition I have sketched above have in common that, like the Direct Realists, they consider the image itself to have real being, one that directly acts upon us. The word ‘image’ concerns all those materials that are presented to our nervous system via our senses. In being presented to us, these things literally touch us: the sound waves which vibrate the mechanisms of our inner ear; the bodies which touch ours; the molecules of other entities which are captured by our senses of smell and taste; the waves of light which pass into our eyes. In each case, following Bergson, the brain screens these images. Firstly, things project their images through our senses onto our brain. The brain itself (which, for Bergson, forms another image) then acts as a screen in two ways: images are screened upon it in the manner of a cinema screen, and it screens or filters these images in interpreting them. For Bergson, we consciously perceive by subtracting all those things from an image which are not of interest to us and focusing on those things which might either act upon us or upon which we might act.

BERGSON’S IMAGE AND DELEUZE’S IMAGE

While it is not possible to fully understand Deleuze’s concept of the image, or more specifically the image as sign, through a straightforward comparison with Bergson, certain points of convergence and divergence between them are instructive.

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Bergson's influential work of 1896, *Matter and Memory*, draws heavily upon the concept of 'the image', a term which already had a long history in philosophy tying it to inadequate modes of understanding.¹¹ Yet rather than the image being a secondary category, linked to the inferior kinds of understanding derived from the testimony of the senses, the image, in Bergson's system, is given a much more prominent place.

Matter, in our view, is an aggregate of "images." And by "image" we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealists call a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing – an existence placed halfway between the 'thing' and the 'representation'.¹²

What Bergson proposes is not, on the one hand, using the image to displace terms with a more aristocratic genealogy, such as 'the idea' or 'thought' – terms which were often set up against the image as superior mental processes, and both of which are implicit in the term 'representation' – or on the other hand as a means of dissolving the reality of 'things' external to one who perceives. Rather, he is proposing understanding 'the image' as a bridge between those objectively existing things and our thoughts. It is a bridge because the image exists both in the thing, which has or projects an image consistent with the nature of its own being, and in our minds, which receive the projected images in the manner of a screen. 'This is as much to say that there is for images merely a difference of degree, and not of kind, between being and being consciously perceived'.¹³ Though perhaps not immediately clear, the ramifications of this are extraordinary. That is, the image partakes both of being and of knowing: it therefore offers a path through which we might directly know the thing in itself. This no doubt scandalous idea, which is clearly compatible with Bergson's concept of intuition (which, in turn might be compared with Spinoza's third kind of knowledge), is also quite close to the grounding of knowledge through a particular privileged image developed by the Ancient Stoics.

For Bergson, my body too is an image, though different to all others in that it is one that I perceive not only externally through perceptions but internally through my affections.¹⁴ The body is an image that acts like all other images, receiving movement and giving back movement, 'with, perhaps, this difference only, that my body appears to choose, within certain limits, the manner in which it shall restore what it receives'.¹⁵ That is:

if . . . all images are posited at the outset, my body will necessarily end by standing out in the midst of them as a distinct thing, since they change unceasingly, and it does not vary. The distinction between the inside and the outside will then be only

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a distinction between the part and the whole. There is, first of all, the aggregate of images; and, then, in this aggregate, there are ‘centers of action,’ from which the interesting images appear to be reflected: thus perceptions are born and actions made ready.¹⁶

So the brain is more than a screen that passively receives a projection from outside: it is a screen which in turn acts, and acts in two ways. It both analyses the images projected upon it and itself selects the movements it executes within its body: ‘the brain appears to us to be an instrument of analysis in regard to the movement received and an instrument of selection with regard to the movement executed’.¹⁷ The brain does not produce representations in the manner understood by idealism (bringing the world into being);¹⁸ rather, it receives and acts upon images.¹⁹

Representations do occur, but they are not the result of our brain *adding* something to perceptions of images; rather, conscious perception, for Bergson, involves the process of realising representations by *subtracting* what does not interest us from an image (that is, the way in which it is linked to all other images, which comprises its real action) and concentrating on those aspects of it with which we might potentially interact (the virtual action).²⁰ Such a subtraction, focusing only on those elements of the image upon which we might act or which might act upon us, relates (and Deleuze underlines this point) to the motor-sensory circuit of perceiving and acting. That is, there is a stimulus, and then there is an action or reaction. This involves a selective causal chain, one based on a logic through which the effects one perceives are understood to be first causes.²¹ In turn, we isolate these causes in considering what will act upon us and what we might act upon. This process provides the structure on which narrative (which develops through tracing selected causal chains) is built. The brain, then, is a screen in two senses: in one sense it is the repository for the images of things which it reflects in the manner of a cinema screen, in another it filters or sifts, screening out what is not able to be understood in terms of motor-sensory interest.

Our [brains, which are] ‘zones of indetermination’ play in some sort the part of the screen. They add nothing to what is there; they effect merely this: that the real action passes through, the virtual action remains.²²

We begin to see, from what we have selected here, how Bergson’s theories should have an effect on notions of representation, and it is worth attempting to trace these effects in Deleuze’s work in order to better understand the nature of the ‘image’.

CREATING THE WORK

If we assume a critical reading of this we must retrace these steps. If the world projects onto the screen of the brain, does the artist select or screen the real to reproject an already represented world onto the screen of the work? Would the work in turn be reprojected into the brain of the audience, who in turn would screen or filter it further? If so, how would this process not involve a dissolution or degradation of the image, when Bergson tells us the representation already involves the subtraction from the image of what does not interest us?

As Deleuze states in a number of places, art does not involve mimesis, the representation or mimicking of any other thing; rather, it is a form of creation, the creation of something new which affects us directly, rather than indirectly. It is worth emphasising a particular point, which is crucial to my argument. The term 'representation' is understood here in the cognitive sense discussed above. For Bergson, as we have seen, the interpretation or cognitive appraisal involved in developing a representation does not involve adding something, but, rather, examining what is presented and filtering it, concentrating only on those elements of the presentation which interest us. Conscious perception, then, for Bergson, is a process of selection, and this selection is already implicated in processes of interpretation. I see a tiger charging towards me and perceive it by focusing on it, isolating it from the mass of less important information being offered to my senses at that moment. This process is related to the sensory-motor circuit described above: you sense (danger, for example) by quickly recognising what you can act upon or what can act upon you and then you immediately react.

This process in turn can be related to art if the term 'representation' is always understood in this sense and not confused with the many other senses it has developed in being used to describe works of art. I understand representation in art, as in cognition, here, to involve this process of selection or screening (in its dual sense), a selection of what is of interest, which already involves interpretation. With cognition, this interpretation is single, as the perceiving individual creates a representation from a presentation.

In creative forms, when they involve representations, there can be a double process. On the one hand, some works are representations that already carry clear interpretations with them (which can only be accepted or rejected by an audience). Some of these works are representations of representations (drawing their form and content from previous works of representation rather than offering something new). In each of these cases, the interpretations available to an audience will be impoverished.