

Sanja Milutinović Bojanić

...Beyond *Folie à Deux*...

Abstract In this text I attempt to recognize and identify two conditions that make engagement possible. One certainly refers to the word, while the other is inscribed onto the body – every or any body – and it regards affect. I illustrate the first condition by a brief reading of a poem by Samuel Beckett, whose English translation the author dedicated to his friend and long-term collaborator, Joseph Chaikin. The second condition I place into Spinoza's, that is, Deleuze's understanding of affect.

Keywords: word, affect, body, engagement, context, situation

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folly—
folly for to—
for to—
what is the word—
(...) *Samuel Beckett* (1990)

Thanks to Ruby Cohn, theater scholar, friend and intimate acquaintance of Beckett's life and work, the last poem he wrote in French ("comment dire", 1989),¹ Beckett also translated into English. Consisting of fifty-three lines, the poem appeared shortly after the author suffered a stroke. "what is the word" (the lower case writing is in Beckett's manuscript) is nearly always interpreted as part and paradoxical continuity with Beckett's poetics of renouncement and withdrawal, but also his relentless search for grounding. Reading all seven versions of the poem, Cohn recognizes in it a clear link between the stuttering poetic language and aphasia, and thinks of the actor, director Joseph Chaikin, Beckett's friend, who, following open-heart surgery in 1984 also became aphasic. Cohn recalls: "Since Joe knows no French, I asked Beckett to translate the poem, but he could not recall having written it. After I sent him a copy, he dedicated his translation to Joe. It was Beckett's last creation" (Cohn 2001: 382, note).

Simultaneously together aphasic, the two men had previously also spent a lot of time together creating – indeed, were inseparable: what one thought and wrote, the other staged and acted. Together they were *committed to*

1 Folie—
folie que de—
que de—
comment dire—
(...)

Beckett's endeavor. What do I mean by Beckett's endeavor? Why would a text about commitment to joint effort and engagement for the common good even mention poetry and the ever more impotent, all too resigned, end of a life – in this case, the illness and end of two artists – two strong individuals?

I will attempt to bring into focus two conditions that seem to me to make engagement at all possible. One certainly refers to the word, while the other is inscribed onto the body, any body and every, and regards the affect. In so doing, I follow Spinoza's, that is Deleuze (in this paper specifically) and Guattari's understanding of affect in the framework of understanding the theory of affect developed in the last twenty years.

Perhaps it is enough to say that engagement begins with the right word. Agency unfolds when someone at the right moment utters the right word. Beckett's poem precisely searches for the right word, the one that does not stop at naming or referring, nor at indicating injustice, suffering and misery, nor their description, a word that is not satisfied by conceptualizing a problem. The right word is not necessarily the first word or the word that already has a singular meaning. Still, neither is it a word that can somehow stand decontextualized. It is, however, a word that greatly depends on the situation.

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Beckett's poem seeks the formula to open a space of unconditional closeness to another. Therefore, the poet asks: *comment dire?* Actually, *quel est le mot?* was more than a pressing question during Beckett's stay in the *Hôpital Pasteur* and the nursing home *Le Tiers Temps* in July 1988, and searching for the poet's reasons to put *comment dire* into more idiomatic language (which occurred in the second version of the poem) and rendering it afterwards as *what is the word* might divert us into paradoxes and problems of translation studies (another field of study that meticulously pays attention to detail without losing sight of context) – a reading we leave open here. I will give myself up to Beckett's aphasic intuition that respects the moment, with which he is attempting to return into the space of meaning. Which is certainly important, as evidenced by the moment when the right word allows him to establish the conditions for the appearance of closeness. The space of closeness, however, appears only after the uttered or scribbled password (*shibboleth*) because closeness is also a call to action: from proximity and entwinement comes the spark of joint agency. Closeness, on the other hand, can also create friction, resistance, could call to boycott and diversion by its presents. Proximity, then, opens the space for joint agency, although one must keep in mind that closeness could also render passive, stifling action. Closeness ought to be accepted, but not endured. Not all proximities are equal, nor can they last forever. In both the French and English version of Beckett's poem, conjunctions, adverbs, prepositions and here a pronoun in the case of a *que* (*que de / for to*), these little accessories with which we link naming and intention of action, the purposes of use and intentionality – remain

burdened with meaning and sense. Thus in homonymy, the French version of *que de / for to* sounds like *que deux*, that is ‘of two’ as well as ‘only two.’ The English version sounds like ‘for two,’ that is, the English version of *pour deux*. Even with these meanings, the poem is far from exhausted in what it could convey.

438 Are two enough for engagement? Does engagement begin with at least two, or does it require more than that? What binds two? Is a word sufficient or does it require a sort of *folie à deux*? I am not offering an answer to this last question using psychiatric jargon of *shared psychosis*, or the system of famous syndromes conceptualized as far back as the golden age of psychiatry in the 19th century (Lasègue-Falret Syndrome), or as recently as the famous example of the Papin sisters who Jacques Lacan describes in his doctoral thesis: “les sœurs ne pouvaient même pas prendre la distance qu’il faut pour se meurtrir” [“the sisters could not even stay at a sufficient distance to harm each other”] (Lacan 1972: 25). Nor will there be speak of the sword of Damocles of joint belief and agency that so easily turns into mass hysteria, since the field of belief, as well as conviction of joint agency too broad and excessively demanding to be addressed in these brief notes about the conditions of engagement.

Simply, the assumption is that engagement is something more than shared beliefs and illusions. However, insofar as it is different from fanaticism, it is necessary to ask ‘what is the word’, that is, it is necessary in a way to remain within the question of evaluation of the right word, and it is crucially important not to allow belief to predominate. It is necessary to follow everything that rings out in the poem while searching for the right word, following all sighs, hesitations, disjunctions, all the hyphens – or as Beckett called them, combining with the French *traits d’union*, *traits de désunion* (hyphens of division / discord) – after which we expect something, some event or change, the fruit of joint agency. Apart from representing a conjunction and simple pause, punctuation that connect or divide could also easily signify a shift, an incentive, a stirring and awakening. They are a call directed at another. Ever a consideration of the other.

Following Beckett, I am not throwing together these random notes about engagement by lauding action that necessarily turns us towards one another. I am simply setting up signposts on my exploration of the nature and purpose of closeness, forms that lead to encounters of bodies, about words that bind, as well as the aim of studying engagement in the formal framework of engagement studies. Clearly, it is insufficient to simply declaratively seek justice between any two; nor are context and situatedness strong enough motivators of a unitary drive of a joint agency (where this agency might be the study or reflection upon engagement, thus themselves becoming a form of engagement).

Yet it is certain that we are not all equally gifted to seek the right word, or to patiently wait its arrival. We are not even all equally ready to tenaciously seek it. Some among us are active trackers of right words, while there are those (larger in numbers) who, recognizing that the right word has already been spoken, simply accept to follow the one (or the many) who has (have) uttered it. Engagement about a joint cause, ensuing from the right word, the right call, becomes much like tuning a fine instrument. It is even insufficient for each string independently to be well tuned, but rather that they all resonate together for an irrepressible sound. Or, put another way, they offer a sound to which we can yield. Engagement for a joint cause in the struggle for justice and equality, however, regardless of the spoken word, demands delimitation of the field of agency of the individual, as well as a careful sorting of priorities. It is this which, now echoing Sartre, limits the individual: “freedom within the limits of a situation”, when it is easily testable to what extent “the exercise of this freedom [is] considered as authentic or inauthentic according to the choices made in the situation” (Sartre 1995: 90). Sartre claims: “it is almost needless to say, [that authenticity] consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves, in accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate” (*ibid.*). Awareness of a situation (to which I would add awareness of context) requires tuning, in order to be possibly followed by advancement (uttering the right word) or withdrawal at a moment when someone else emerges with the right word. The situation also demands that all, without exception, recognize the right word. As in the case of Beckett’s poem, limited to a scant number of words that also themselves on their own signify nothing in particular, and employing minimal maneuvering skills and inevitable repetition as the basic stylistic means (nothing here guarantees that the author behind these words truly does not have difficulty recalling syllables, stems and lexemes cobbled into real words), engagement itself demands: ‘language in disequilibrium’. We owe the phrase to Deleuze who utilized it to describe Beckett’s “*minor use of the major language*” in the essay “He Stuttered” (Deleuze 1998: 109–111, emphasis in the original). This off-kilter language, unafraid of announcing a new linguistic combination, above all demands an unstable field of agency and uncertainty. It is necessary that the one who seeks the right word constantly refer back to the already said and consistently abjure all that distinguishes from others. It is necessary also to begin to approach that which binds him to another in similarity. Engagement thus equally demands erased meanings when it is not necessary to look for new words and coin new terms, as well as to imbue old words with new purposes. As in the case of ‘inclusive disjunctions’, by breathing new word combinations across its borders, engagement builds new relations. Just like the hyphens, these new word combinations open up spaces of future closeness, linking by disjointing, hewing syllables into

words that construct performatives, even performatives that manifest situatedness (or authenticity) of the individual or group.

After the question “what is the word,” still following Beckett and adding Deleuze, I would like to take a sharp turn away from Sartre, for whom nothing but “true and lucid consciousness of the situation” would ensure authentic engagement. Is really only true and lucid consciousness sufficient for “assuming the responsibilities and risks that [authenticity] involves?” It is entirely unclear how consciousness of a situation becomes true and lucid, as well as how it all leads to authentic agency. But let us leave aside the innumerable studies and books dedicated to criticism of Sartre’s ethical subjectivism, and all other relativisms to boot – my notes veer away from that. (Charles Taylor certainly is among those who provided careful and thorough criticism [see Taylor, 1991].) Contrary to what Sartre wrote, I am interested in the way a given situation manifests its specificity and singularity, even before we reach the stage of rationalization or justification of a gesture. Yet, I am not even interested in his problematization of authenticity itself, which now seems to me to belong to a different historical time. Allowing himself a slight reduction, when upon “true and lucid consciousness of the situation” he opens the Pandora box of psychological states and emotions, Sartre writes that authenticity of engagement ought to be accepted “in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate” (*ibid.*). States of the psyche thus remain decontextualized and hidden behind the signifier of the feelings and descriptions of states of pride, humiliation, horror and loathing. In other words, as Deleuze said in his seminar on Spinoza, speech about states of the psyche should follow a certain alteration in speed of demonstration of what is thought (Deleuze, internet/a).

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Going from chapter to chapter, from inquiry concerning God, nature of mind, origin and nature of the emotions, human bondage or strength of the emotions, to the power of understanding of human freedom in book V of the *Ethics*, Deleuze explains that Spinoza, having arrived at “troisième genre de connaissance” [“third type of consciousness/thinking”], changes the speed of execution and conducts a contraction of thought. The contraction, of course, is not the result of change in speed of thinking, nor is it conditioned by whether we are fast or slow when thinking. Neither is it a condition by a certain relation and comparison of contrasted values. Above all, it is a result of the object of thinking itself, and Spinoza shows this best in the scholia of book V of the *Ethics*. What is this object of our thinking that we ought to analyze and for which we ought to offer explanation of how emerge pride, humiliation, or other various psychological states of horror and hatred? In their immediacy and directness of execution, scholia explain the unpredictability of affect, in contrast to the previous four books of the *Ethics* in which there has been a demonstration of the development of concepts. Deleuze remarks, “the continuity of development of concepts

in scholia becomes the discontinuity of affect” (*ibid.*). In a word, when we get to this point, “we should pay particular attention to getting to know each emotion as far as possible clearly and distinctly, so that the mind may thus be determined from the emotion to think those things that it clearly and distinctly perceives” (*Ethics* V, P4, S),² which then becomes impossible to represent in thought in the way it was represented thus far, that is, it requires a different kind of proof execution. How do we then interpret grimacing, a specific gesticulation or the uncontrollable timber or tone of voice? How explain the moment when word becomes superfluous, when it turns into a cry, and when despite all its rational willful control and suppression, the body performs (rather than utters, for that is its language) the message. In brief, what of the transmission of rationally inexpressible content? Along the way, but not at all by accident, Deleuze speaks of the scream (“*cris de base ... cris de la pensée*” [“deep cries ... cries of thought”]) when interpreting and explaining the way in which Spinoza thematizes the body.

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In the same way that I assume that engagement begins with the right word, in searching for the right words – lest we forget, language should remain “in disequilibrium” – so does the manifestation of unequivocal committed action begin with the body. It appears in the indications we interpret if we are able to comprehend what the body manifests. However, can a single body (self-)engage? Does not engagement require at least two for something to happen, for an exchange, for influence, critique? For some one to utter a word, do they not need another to hear and follow? Let us recall that the Beckettian endeavor also demanded at least two: together, Samuel Beckett, poet, playwright, and Joseph Chaikin, actor, director, left an indelible trace in performing arts not only of an aesthetic, but crucially, of an ethical nature. In Beckett’s poetics this is entirely clear: if two bodies achieve closeness without touching, they need not necessarily connect, nor does the closeness they achieve have to be amorous. Perhaps it is in constantly delaying symbiosis, at the right distance and remaining separate, that the bodies accomplish something more than a *folie à deux* of creation, of joint thinking and engagement. What is it in these bodies that would bring them closer, without connecting them?

Perhaps the answer is precisely in a different understanding of the body, as in a new reading of sustainable distance between at least two bodies? Spinoza writes: “two individuals of the same nature joined with each other constitute an individual which is twice as powerful as either” (E IV, P18, S). This, at first glance paradox, in which these two who are joined become “an individual which is twice as powerful as either,” should not be

2 There is no pagination provided for Spinoza’s *Ethics* but rather notation indicating the Part (I, II, III, IV or V), followed by numbers of Axiom (A) and Proposition (P), scholium (S) or appendix (App.).

read through the lens of contemporary theories (politics) of identity and literal causal narratives of liberalism in which individuality acquires/ed a fastened sovereignty. In his February 1981 seminar (Deleuze, internet/b) dedicated to this very analysis of Spinoza's construction of the individual, Deleuze says: "L'individu est rapport. C'est peut-être une des premières fois, il me semble, dans l'histoire de l'individu, que va se dessiner une tentative pour penser le rapport à l'état pur" ["The individual is relational. It is perhaps one of the first moments, it seems to me, in the history of the individual, that we will be presented with an attempt to think relation in its purest form"]. Further developing reasons that justify the novelty with which he does not think the substantiality of the individual (and thus its limitation), in its further execution, Deleuze refers to the construction: "L'individu n'est pas forme, il est puissance (*potentia*)" ["The individual is not a form, it is potentiality (*potentia*)"]. Individuals are in relation, and it is the necessity of their reference to one another, and their cooperation, that empowers them. The cooperation of one individual with another improves the potentiality of their joint agency. In this way, it is possible to think that their emotional states – to briefly return to Sartre – no longer remain hidden behind particular feelings, occasional and culminating emotions, that is, behind vague and disparate descriptions of pride, humiliation, horror and loathing.

Since "tout individu comme tel est composé d'une infinité de parties" ["all individuals as such are already composed of infinite portions"] (Deleuze, internet/c), it is possible to think the potentiality of their complicated relation, it is possible to think their closeness and distance even independently of their individual, personalized and emotional states. In order to reach this point it is necessary to make the distinction and systematize feelings, emotions and affects, all the while keeping in mind that affect can occur only if an individual has an idea of the object of that affect. It follows, then, that affect is ever double:³ the effect of affect is followed if one considers simultaneously that which acts and which is acted upon. Spinoza points this out in the third axiom of the second book of the *Ethics*: "The modes of thinking, such as love and desire or whatever affects of the mind are designed by name, do not occur except that there occur in the same individual the idea of the thing loved, desired, etc." (E II, A3) And while our most immediate and surface reactions towards others are shown through feelings and emotions, at their core, they are formed by affects. In Brian Massumi's words:

3 AFFECT/AFFECTION. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (*sentiment* in Deleuze and Guattari). *L'affect* (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a pre-personal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. *L'affection* (Spinoza's *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include 'mental' or ideal bodies). (Massumi 1987: xvi)

Reserve the term 'emotion' for the personalized content, and affect for the continuation. Emotion is contextual. Affect is situational: event-fully ingressive to context. Serially so: affect is trans-situational. As processual as it is precessual, affect inhabits the passage. It is pre- and postcontextual, pre- and postpersonal, an excess of continuity invested only in the ongoing: its own. Self-continuity across the gaps. Impersonal affect is the connecting thread of experience. It is the invisible glue that holds the world together. In event. The world-glue of event of an autonomy of event-connection continuing across its own serialized capture in context. (Massumi 2002: 217)

And although it was never easy, in the current circumstances (in theory, in mass media, in the world...) it is more difficult still to differentiate and evaluate feelings and emotions. In a time burdened by various forms of emphasis and singularization, in a language incapable of avoiding hyperbole and shocking statements and images, it is difficult to spring the trap of identification and comparisons that simply and reductively most often result in unjust and exaggerating hierarchies. Even before scanning the elements that formulate a situation, which are supposed to provide insight into a given state, evaluations and descriptions, qualitative estimates are introduced, followed, of course, by quantitative measurements that only ever follow their context. More specifically, in them the context is underscored at the expense of neglecting the (historical, social, economical, ideological, gender, racial, class...) situation. What, after all, does it mean that 'emotion is contextual' and that 'affect is situational'? And what does this have to do with my claim, according to which one of the conditions of engagement, aside from the right word – uttered or written – is precisely affect?

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To understand the agency that exceeds the borders of (the contemporary, sovereign) individual, and of which we learn little by delving into primarily or exclusively his/her own context (since it is always experienced as a spectrum of disparate and contradictory feelings of humiliation, pride, terror, loathing...), it is necessary to recognize the markings of what happens in continuity. This continuity is plausibly analyzable on still obscure parameters (determined not only and exclusively by context, but more broadly, multi-dimensionally by the understanding of the situation), and which cannot be understood rationally or translated immediately into concepts. Following Massumi's words that the "event [is] fully ingressive to context", continuity emerges from a sequence of events that build the situation, since they contain, yet also surpass, the particularity of individual contexts. Only in continuity of what takes place, only at the moment when engagement begins to achieve its constancy in relation to other/s do we as individuals begin to become aware of the situation. Our engagement is recognized at the moment of engagement with other/s. In a way, all our various contents (equally among the many rational ones are those that

bring feelings and emotions) become recognizable and are potentially decodable into the same (or at least similar) language when along with the recognized (heard and accepted) word, we recognize what is common to various contexts. And not only what is common to us all, but what we have in common. Affect is common because it is impersonal, because it is passage and that which is passing. As material proof of togetherness, it is sufficient to sense and be sensitive. Of course, this does not mean that it is evenly distributed or that its distribution is controllable (despite the tendency to attempt to do so). It is very difficult to control or master affect, precisely because it is double, in equal measure “as pro-cessual as it is pre-cessual, affect inhabits the passage”. Feelings and emotions are only a partial expression of affect because they are limited to personal memories, specificities and difficult to describe contents (whether traumatic or pleasurable, joyful), which activate only a limited and narrowed choice of reflexes and tendencies, strivings of reactions. This is simply the result of feelings and emotions by definition introducing a reduction that not only narrows the choice of reaction on the rational plane, but also the impulse with which we have to demonstrate a reaction or answer any stimulus beyond who we are as individuals. No state imbued full of emotion in the individual could encompass the common experience or the shared experience of action without also containing conglomerations of beliefs, propensities, beliefs – simply, the entire background of the idea or metaphor of *folie à deux*, which in the process of contextualization and rationalization can easily aspire to normativization of negative social acts, such as conquests, wars, or even mass murders (or in the case of contemporary terrorist actions, suicides, the counter-reactions, securitizing and hysterical strategies of defense and protection). All of which leads us to the rather dangerous indication of something we must here leave unattended: the difference between mass hysteria and engagement.

(I leave the development of the difference between mass hysteria and engagement entirely open and ending in ellipsis, although it would certainly open new frontiers of thinking joint agency, activity, protest, revolt, revolution, etc. Perhaps to write about jointly with someone.)

I return to Beckett and his last poem as a sign that hints at how joint agency continues to be conducted even when we lose our field of reference, our own context, to aphasia. Despite living a life in decline, becoming inexorably and irreversibly ever more lonely, Beckett leaves space for the joint, the common. Indeed, he does not only accept it passively (accepting that he is translating a poem he no longer remembers writing), but manifests this togetherness on the edges of meaning, through connectors and prepositions, linguistic accessories – yet all deeply affective and tightly bound. Deleuze begins his short text “He Stuttered” with a brief analysis of the “different voice of intonations”, describing the need of writers to vary their

dialogic markers following direct speech. There are those who “either ... *do it*” (such as Balzac) or “else ... *say it without doing it*” (Deleuze 1997: 107, emphasis in the original). But since he was and remained sovereign in his use of language – which Deleuze describes by associating the French translation of Austin’s title “How to Do Things with Words” / “Quand dire c’est faire” – Beckett’s last poem is an example that precisely performs “*saying is doing.*”

afaint afar away over there what—
 folly for to need to seem to glimpse afaint afar away over there what—
 what—
 what is the word—

what is the word⁴

“This is what happens when the stuttering affects preexisting words, but itself introduces the words it affects; these words no longer exist independently of the stutter, which selects and links them together through itself. It is no longer the character who stutters in speech; it is the writer who becomes a *stutterer in language*” (*ibid.*, emphasis in the original).

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4 loin là là-bas à peine quoi—
 folie que d’y vouloir croire entrevoir quoi—
 quoi—
 comment dire—

comment dire

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Sanja Milutinović Bojanić

... Više od *Folie à deux*...

Apstrakt

U tekstu pokušavam da prepoznam i identifikujem dva uslova koji uopšte omogućavaju angažman. Jedan se svakako odnosi na reč, dok se drugi upisuje u telo, u svako ili bilo koje telo i i odnosi se na afekt. Prvi uslov ilustrujem kratkim osvrtom na pesmu Samjuela Beketa, čiji engleski prevod autor posvećuje prijatelju i dugogodišnjem saradniku Džozefu Čajkinu, dok drugi upisujem u okvire Spinozinog, odnosno Delezovog razumevanja afekta.

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Pitam se o svrsi i ulozi reči koja spaja, o načinu na koji se formira blizina, o telima koja se susreću, a onda i o angažmanu u okviru studija angažovanosti.

Ključne reči: reč, afekt, telo, angažman, kontekst, situacija