Chapter III

Simulacrum

Caution: Objects in mirror may be closer than they appear

Baudrillard. (America)

Western philosophy has been preoccupied with an epistemological disquiet that, as we discussed in the introduction, has a lot to do with the uncertainty attached to the origin of representation. Postmodern fiction, upshot of the breakdown of classical and modernist narrative modes, reiterates this apprehension. Postmodernity is caught in a double bind. To represent it has to utilize the strange, yet personal, power of language already forsaken by it because it is incapable of representing reality. Postmodern fiction is born of the awareness that there is an unbridgeable gap between reality and its narrative representation. Reality is an elusive point difficult to encapsulate because its meaning is multiple and incomplete, excessive and lacking. It is thus, as we have seen earlier, inextricable from its point of emergence within language. At the same time, it is always located out of the reach of this language. Hence the existence of a double space that makes the proviso of any legitimate narrative unsustainable. Linguistic activity becomes a game of words, voices and silences.
Samuel Beckett’s novels play out these narrative games to their extremes. In their attempt to make sense of the world they are required to work with the very slender, shifting line that separates and unites reality and language. They stumble upon the strange voices that emerge from the articulations and ruthlessly shred the veracity of the narratives. The result is self-consciousness, which takes the form of self-reflexivity. In Linda Hutcheon’s words this kind of fiction:

not only is self-reflexively metaphysical and parodic [. . .]. It does not so much deny as contest the “truths” of reality and fiction—the human constructs by which we manage to live in our world. Fiction does not mirror reality; nor does it reproduce it. It cannot. There is no pretence of simplistic mimesis [. . .]. Instead, fiction is offered as anchor of the discourse by which we construct our versions of reality, and both the construction and the need for it are what are foregrounded in postmodernist novel. (Poetics of Postmodernism 40)

With every act of representation, the postmodern writer is inevitably forced to question the very organization of reality and risks activating the logic of simulacrum whereby representation eludes the appraisal of a corresponding universal model. Classical and modern representations managed to create such a broad model of correspondence to keep the anxiety attached to the act of
representation in check. They were able, as we saw earlier, to initiate a
discourse that ostensibly reflected and reproduced an infinite but static
order of reality which preceded this discourse. The illusion created by
this representative mode gave reality the manifestation of an eternally
fixed, absolute, and static presence opposite the subject. Western
epistemology anchored itself on the certainty of the subject-object
duality and on the possibility of the formation of an unconditional and
objective perspective that separated the inside from the outside. Any
interrogation of their problematic entanglement was pre-empted.
Representation set up a transcendental space based on the empirical
reality of the all-seeing eye. Linda Hutcheon suggests:

> We have seen that the contradictions that characterize
postmodernism reject any neat binary opposition that
might conceal a secret hierarchy of values. The elements
of these contradictions are usually multiple; the focus is
on differences, not single otherness. (Poetics of
Postmodernism 42-43)

The apprehensions inherent in representation re-emerge in
postmodernity through a probing of the differential materiality of
language. Fear, trembling, and self-consciousness constitute the raison
d’etre of the language of postmodern literature. Gone is the smug
confidence and self-sufficiency of the language engaged in
unproblematic representation. As the acute realization of the inability
of language blends with an awareness of the infinite proliferation of meaning, reason tends to go haywire. Language is forced to recognize the unrecognisable. It is obliged to accept the fact that the system of representation is designed only to fill in an original fracture, to repair a wound that betrays the presence of an internal otherness within its own self-identity, by means of a discourse that claims to christen all reality. Language does perform the inscription of reality but is fated to be disrupted by an overriding presence of chaos and self-alienation that arises within all processes of regulation. Language is faced with the awareness of its failure to express and a predilection for verbal overflow ingrained in its own problematic materiality. In postmodernity, language is respected as having an authority to create discourses and representations but is regarded as constantly being undone by an internal mechanism that turns all such discourses and representations into fictions of uncertain legitimacy. Watt recognizes the fact that his own narrative (of which he is a part) is constantly destabilized by such a mechanism; hence, his incapability to affirm reality and the penchant for the parodic question, what?

The device of simulacrum, a fundamental feature of Beckett’s narrative, bares the illegitimacy of reality. Rather than presenting fiction as dependent on a universal representation of reality to be passively imitated, simulacrum makes the transgressive act of fictionalizing the principle governing the production of all
representations of reality. Beckett’s fictions do not posit an independent reality existing prior to the text—the text being a faithful reflection of it. Rather they verbalize reality as simulacrum acknowledging the fact that reality is originally an invention.

Jean Baudrillard takes the fictional character of reality and the hyper-reality of simulation to radical extremes. For him virtuality has replaced actuality in the endless parade of simulacra. In *Simulations*, he discusses four stages of images connected with the successive distancing of representation from the object of representation. At the fourth level, the image (representation) is so removed from reality that it has nothing to do with the reality it purports to represent. According to Baudrillard “it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum” (*Simulations* 11). Reality becomes its appearance and Baudrillard goes on to illustrate this dramatic postmodern experience by citing the example of Disneyland, which, according to him, is “there to conceal the fact that it is the [. . .] ‘real’ America” (*Simulations* 25). The fantastic world of Disneyland serves to make the rest of America real, providing an illusion that there are still ways of distinguishing between appearance and reality. He explains:

> It is meant to be an infantile world, in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the “real” world, and to conceal the fact that real childishness is
everywhere, particularly amongst those adults who go there to act as the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness. (Simulations 25-26)

Reality (as distinguishable from its representation) has disappeared and in its place, there are only simulacra. Reality is now always already established in advance by its reproducibility as text. In his famous statement, Baudrillard concludes that “the very definition of the real becomes: that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction”(Simulations 146). However, Beckett’s fictions continue to adhere to the general principle of representation to a certain extent, even as they enter the realm of the simulacra to affirm their own fictional nature. They fail to produce a body of universal representation but end up creating a proliferation of singular voices of simulacra parodying reality. It is the literary equivalent of Baudrillard’s hyperrealist state where:

We live everywhere already in an ‘esthetic’ hallucination of reality. The old slogan ‘truth is stranger than fiction’, that still correspond to the surrealist phase of this estheticization of life, is obsolete. There is no more fiction than life could possibly confront, even victoriously—it is reality itself that disappears in the game of reality—radical disenchantment, the cool and cybernetic phase following the hot stage of fantasy. (Simulations 147-148)
This world is horrendous because it is quotidian, as one is told page after page by Beckett. His characters belong to the dregs of society; their life is so colourless and tardy that the word tedium is repeated scores of times throughout the novels as if to punctuate their existence.

The problematization of language and narrative that takes place in *Watt* and the later novels has two main consequences. First, the collapse of representation as a self-confident system unaware of the fictional nature of the reality produced through it and second, the transformation of representation into a language game prompted by simulacra and parody. Beckett’s texts are built on parody and repetition (simulacra) because they are integral to the process of transgression. The parodic transgression at work in Beckett will be exhaustively analysed in the next chapter. In this chapter, the repetitive simulacra in the novel *Watt* will be explained in terms of the logic of the simulacrum, a dynamic function attached to forces of pure difference. The focus of this chapter and the succeeding one, to a great extent, is limited to *Watt* not because it is the only novel in Beckett’s oeuvre that exemplifies the ideas of simulacrum and parody. The attempt is to focus on an individual work to bring out in exhaustive detail the various methods through which these ideas are characterised in a narrative context. Watt, in many respects, is the gateway to the other novels especially in its employment of repetition and parody.
Any fiction based on simulacrum is a creative and self-critical enterprise that never forsakes the language of representation it inherits. It implements, instead, a textual practice that generates an internal distancing. *Watt*, for instance, never discards the logic of representation but only complicates it by questioning the internal principle of identity that regulates the order of representation. The text probes the otherness present within that internality, the simulacrum that threatens to upset the limit and identity forced on reality by representation. In order to be able to grasp the role of the simulacrum in Beckett’s fiction better, we must first turn to Gilles Deleuze’s analysis of simulacrum.

According to Deleuze, a work of literature—as it wrestles with the demand to represent—should revive the Platonic movement situated at the start of representation. It involves the interrogation of Being and Reality through a method of splitting up evocative of the act of differentiation. Being is not presented and then reorganized into reality nor Essence directly transferred into appearance. Reality and appearance are sought after and measured against the pure form of a model which is not regarded as a priori and foundational as in classical representation but needs to be constantly reinstated and is thus, naturally, forever in the limbo. Deleuze suggests in *Difference and Repetition* that
The whole of Platonism [. . .] is dominated by the idea of drawing a distinction between ‘the thing by itself’ and the simulacra [. . .]. Overturning Platonism, then, means denying the primacy of original over copy, of model over image; glorifying the reign of simulacra and reflections.

(66)

The platonic mode of representation depends on the original model or Idea to guarantee the veracity of all the copies or representations that flourish in the world. It is haunted by an obligation to separate the false from the true, the bad copies from the good ones. In order to establish the legitimacy of the copy it should constantly reactivate the transcendental model and make it continue to control the internal structure of the copy. The copy instituted by the original in turn serves as the empirical foundation that will guarantee the apt reproduction of the original. Each copy must be created individually. In turn, the model is submitted to the randomness and singularity of the appearance of each copy. The mimetic moment of pure internal reflection arbitrates the act of representation in the dynamic interaction between the copy and original model. This internal space, however, has to withstand a temptation to pass into the outside and the other where its transcendental, idealistic status could be jeopardised. It is also vulnerable to what Plato calls the simulacrum, a
realm of being where false pretenders can always mimic the truth, simulate the authentic and thus offer false representations as true.

Simulacrum, in simple terms, is a copy of a copy whose relation to the model has become so diluted that it can no longer be said to be a copy. It declares itself as a copy without a model. Frederic Jameson, in “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Capitalism,” alludes to the example of photo-realism (New Left Review 75). The painting is a copy of a photograph, not of reality, which is itself a copy of the original. Copy of the copy without a model of the real to allude to becomes simulacra. Deleuze takes a broader and more profound view in “The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy” (October 47-56). For Deleuze, beyond a certain point the difference fails to be one of degree and becomes an event of a dissimilar nature altogether by destabilizing the distinction between the copy and the model (52-53). The terms copy and model connect us to the world of representation and objective re-production. A copy, even if infinitely removed, is defined by the presence or absence of inner resemblance to a model. On the other hand, simulacrum bears only a marginal and illusory resemblance to a hypothetical model. Its internal vitality is very different from that of its apparent model. It is only a chimera, a surface effect. The production and function of a photograph has no connection to that of the object photographed. The photo-realist painting embraces an essential, but hidden distinction which makes simulacrum weird. The
function of a copy is to stand in for the model. Simulacrum on the other hand declares independence of the model and enters different levels of existence. For Deleuze “the moment of Pop Art” (Ibid. 56) signifies a simulacrum that has run off from the cast of the copy where the multiplied, stylised images have an independent existence of their own. Pop Art tries to challenge the model and its world in order to pave the way for simulacrum’s own crazy abundance. The simulacrum affirms its own difference. It is not an implosion but a differentiation.

The resemblance of the simulacrum is not an end in itself as in the case of a copy, but a means to achieve a singular existence independent of the model. Deleuze and Guattari comment in *Anti-Oedipus* that a thing in order to become apparent, is forced to simulate structural states and slip into states of forces that serve it as masks [. . .] underneath the mask and by means of it, it already invests the terminal forms and the specific higher states whose integrity it will subsequently establish. (91)

Resemblance is actually a start that hides immense possibilities. The logic of the simulacrum does not suggest a gradual abrasion of copies as they fade further away from their original and start resembling it less and less while leaving the model unscathed. What this logic advocates is the presence of an internal equivocation or a natural difference at work in the very space of representation, which
arbitrates the conversion of the model into the copy or of the idea into the image, to form the symbol or representation. As Deleuze states, the simulacrum and the symbol are one; in other words, the simulacrum is the sign in so far as the sign interiorise the conditions of its own repetitions. The simulacrum seizes upon a constituent disparity in the thing from which it strips the rank of model. (*Difference and Repetition* 67)

The simulacrum carries organic representation beyond itself, to turn it into the infinite production of orgic difference independent of the model of identity and legitimacy. In this process, the power equation between the original model and the copy is redrawn. The model is stripped of its legitimacy as the origin as simulacrum continues to move further away from the site of origin, which in itself was a difference. At the core of the model, there resides a difference which is always at work both supporting and exceeding the production of identity.

The self-reflexivity of postmodern fiction is the narrative equivalent of the passage of the model into simulacrum. It is a problematization of the representation of reality and the nature of reality. Fiction is by tradition an act of representation, which, as illusory as it may be, depends on the absolute ability of representation to reproduce faithfully a reality that can be clearly realized in its totality. Fiction was regarded as a repetition of reality based on the
organic taming of difference by representation. But the logic of the simulacrum that occupies the space of postmodern fiction disturbs this simple operation. In order to embody a given reality *Watt*, for example, is forced to deal with the problematic of representation, which is controlled by an economy of difference that evades representation.

The representation of reality in *Watt* is set up on a structure of difference and repetition that problematizes and divides reality. Dialectics is incapable of representing the real. It is for simulacrum to assert the otherness within the representation of reality. *Watt* is deprived of the intervention of organic representation that would secure its own simple ability to represent. It is thus forced to play the game of representation which “operates without mediation, without middle term or reason; it acts in the immediate” (*Difference and Repetition* 59). Reality then presents itself immediately in the form of an unmediated representation whose mediation is not linked to any pre-existing ‘outside’ but rather is performed by the novel’s own internal mechanism (the simulacrum), operating on divergence and singularity rather than convergence and universality. *Watt* combines two narrative activities: the production of its own voice and that of another within itself. It is both what acts (writes) and what reflects on the act hoping to understand this act better. However, reflection does not lead to knowledge but to an intensification of ignorance. Reflection itself
becomes an act of simulacrum and is thus unidentifiable, a mere extension of the fiction that produces an inexplicable reality.

The narrative in *Watt* cannot distinguish itself anymore (as representation) from the problematic reality it attempts to present. In fiction based on the simulacrum instead of stopping with the designation of a singular reality, the narrative selects all the voices aspiring to embody the model that encapsulates the representation of reality. What is selected cannot be separated from the act of selection. At the same time, the entity within the fiction in charge of this selection refuses to be identified as the author and the resultant text refuses to be categorised as novel. Rather, the fiction posits itself as simulacrum, as a textual production incapable of realizing its own process of selection as it engages in the act of representing.

Since the means by which *Watt* selects reality is language, language becomes the very site of reality, but in a manner different from the role of language in traditional representation. As progenitor of simulacrum, it can no longer be regarded as the mirror that reflects the world. In *Watt*, language becomes conscious of itself as it is deprived of a blissful state of ignorance. Here the representation of reality poses itself as a problem, the only solution being active organization and classification. Writing, the point at which reality and language meet, becomes a crucial instant of choice. This writing does not purport to reproduce or reflect an already represented organic
version of reality. Rather, it is a process of division involving an encounter with a level of reality which Deleuze calls "an indifferent material, a mixture, an indefinite representing multiplicity" (Difference and Repetition 60).

The act of the simulacrum introduces a level of meaning which straightaway eliminates the choice of excluding silence from the process of representation. Instead, there will be recognition of the necessity to take word and silence together rather than apart. Writing is no longer regarded as an even operation, enabling the passage of reality into representation, but becomes an engagement with what is immediately ambiguous, multiple, severed from a model or burdened with many. In fact, as a key element of the simulacrum, writing involves the perilous practice of difference.

One can say that Watt inherits the space laid out by classical representation. As a fiction produced within the classical concept of representation, in which reality is assumed to exist out there in a pre-set form that can be instantly translated into discourse, Watt attempts to adhere to it and mediate difference. The narrative preserves the initial difference in order to deliver it as such into the final space of pure difference. In a realist novel reading becomes the realization of the posited initial difference. The status of the conjectured difference is questioned in Watt. The traditional text, in conformity with the principle of representation, erases the choices that will be produced by
the presentation of pure difference. It has to pretend that no processes
of selection or elimination—operations involved in writing or
representation—were involved in the management of the space of the
initial difference. It is advocated that representation, in fact, requires a
prior establishment of difference based on organic taming.

To repeat difference organically representation has to erase itself
and present the represented world as un-represented reality, it has to
erase the fictional nature of representation. Thus, in order to be
present and make present again (re-present) it need to delete it. In this
way, the universal order of reality can promote the order of
representation without appearing to do so. The function of the fiction
in the realistic novel, for instance, would then be to obliterate itself in
the instant of its inscription. Writing as a process that creates
difference, as that which orchestrates the indeterminacy of its
background is ruled out. Its role is limited to carrying the conceptual
difference to the final moment of its actualization in the reader’s mind.
This structure is the foundation for the mimetic model of narrative,
which serves to validate the model-copy configuration supporting
classical/modernist representation. It is forced to substantiate the
theory of representation by unifying its various parts and moments in
order to secure the totalization of its discursive order. Difference is
repressed by keeping it enclosed within the limits of the concept.
Fiction in this context can only reflect what it calls reality, forgetting
that the latter has already been measured and ordered by the same conceptual apparatus that originally repressed difference. It can expand that reality, but has to confine itself to the limits of the concept and has to act according to a mode of fictionality that reconfirms it. Fiction, as representation that tames difference, has to overlook the process of selection involved in the platonic specification of the correct icon so that it can ignore the shadowy presence of other versions or reality.

Watt, on the other hand, is incapable of completing this process successfully because of a disturbance ("a difficulty with words") that obstructs the ability to inscribe an elusive reality. This disturbance affects the actualisation of the story, of its inscription as narration in the space of the text, which amounts to the moment of the passage of the model into the copy in the platonic system of representation.

A whole world of voices, very efficiently erased in classical representation, now seems to emerge from the field of representation, revealing the extent to which that field owes its existence to these, previously repressed, inscriptions. There is a retroactive gesture here. First, reality is presented as dependent on a preceding act of representation that had been erased or repressed. Next, that act itself is shown to hinge on a writing different from the one in conventional narration. It is presented as a product of simulacrum—a writing that exceeds the confines of representation. This necessitates the activation
of a non-conceptual difference. Thus writing becomes an act of
repetition, a game of difference involving the incongruent, which
disturbs the mere organic representation of difference based on
identity. Deleuze notes that

Repetition is the formless being of all differences, the
formless power of the ground, which carries every object
to that extreme ‘form’ in which its representation comes
undone. The ultimate element of repetition is the disparate
[dispars], which stands opposed to the identity of
representation. (Difference and Repetition 57)

In postmodern fiction, the act of representation transformed into
the production of simulacrum does not, however, designate
disintegration. On the contrary, it turns out to be a tactical change into
another order to challenge representation from within. Beckett’s
fictions devote themselves to the expression of the order of difference
though repetition and activation of the process of self-interrogation.

The point of departure in the narrative in Watt occurs in the
passage of the reality into fictionalised representation. Usually that
process is conceived as the passive reception of a pre-existent reality
which has already been represented. It is an activity that begins to
rupture the standardized space of that representation. Instead of
reproducing reality as a focused totality, Watt actively defines this
reality as decentred and fragmented. Instead of just reflecting a
universal model of reality, the text begins to articulate all the possible singular forms of this reality and reinscribes them within the narrative. \textit{Watt} starts a narrative game of alteration—reality into fiction and fiction into reality—in place of the mimetic model. This opens the text up to a general narrative of self-interrogation and the problematization of the traditional form-content duality. \textit{Watt} is not a narrative that solves the question of reality through an investigative act, but rather one that figures reality as a problem very much related to the status of fiction itself. It acknowledges the fact that reality is constantly problematized by the persistent self-questioning of the text and by the disjunctive statements that it produces.

The story of the dog and of the Lynch family illustrates how Beckett performs both the problematic invention and the interrogation of reality in \textit{Watt}. It is also an example of the way in which throughout the novel Watt is forced to confront the unspecified presence-absence of Knott’s house and is obliged to represent (explain, name, designate) the activities occurring there through a method of interrogation. The ambiguity surrounding Knott’s house and the repetitive actions that take place in it force Watt to construct complex scenarios as possible answers. These are organized in parallel series, which branch off each other while circling around the same elusive referent. Representation, based on the exact repetition of the original referent in the copy, is gradually invaded by the logic of the simulacrum. There is a
proliferation of copies triggered by the presence of differential elements within the original. The mystery of the bell sounding in Erskine’s room in the middle of the night followed by Erskine getting up and going downstairs to the summons shows how a simple reality can present itself as a problem. The fact that neither Knott nor Erskine, who are not up when the bell rings but simply responded to it, could have pressed the bell causes a burst of disjunctive hypotheses as to the origin of the ring:

And if he [Erskine] had got up and gone down, to where the bell was, and he did not know where the bell was, and pressed it there, could he have got back into his room, and into his bed, and sometimes even fallen into a light sleep, in time to hear, from where he lay, in his bed, the bell sound? (121)

The series of non-sensical hypotheses which follow reveal the impossibility built into the very structure of narrative representation. The site of the origin is not an identifiable source that can be simply named, but a receding chimera that needs to be made bona fide by means of a process of selection and elimination. The origin, thus, is not the original to be copied but is already a copy caught up originally in a process of repetition that the narrative simply recovers. There is not just one bell prompting representation, but several bells already contained in a process of repetition. There is a multiplication of bells
from the start (excess) and a fundamental absence of bell (lack). The bell as original cannot be separated from the narrative that immediately turns it into a proliferation of copies that simply appear to contradict each other. Representation is invaded here by the logic of the simulacrum. The closure it attempts to perform (as a positive answer to the question of reality) based on a specific identification of difference, is destabilized by the presence of an internal gap (the persistence of questions and of the problem). In fact, in order to solve the problem Watt is led to assume the possibility that Erskine is a “simulator,” somebody intent on “dissembling,” the truth:

For might not Erskine simulate a snore, at the very moment that he reached out with his arm and pressed the bell, or might he not simulate a long series of snores culminating in the snore that he simulated as he pressed the bell, in order to deceive and make him think that it was not he Erskine who pressed the bell, but Mr Knott, in some other part of the house? (122-23)

That the scene takes place in a very personal space, Watt’s bedroom, draws a parallel between Erskine’s mind and Watt’s narrative. Erskine’s bedroom holds in secret all his deceitful actions. It symbolically installs the externality of the logic of the simulacrum at the very heart of representation. In a post-Platonic sense,
representation is then confronted by the possibility that there might be no distinguishing between the authentic and the simulated anymore.

But, as we shall see later, the simulacrum is initiated by difference and repetition, which leaves no room for such a distinction. Difference corresponds with the act of making a difference, which is to say with the narrative itself. However, when the character of that narrative is selective rather than positive or simply negative, the logic of difference lies outside the possibility of identification. The ringing bell as original difference is always transformed into the multiple ringing bells invented and repeated endlessly. The incident of the bell places Watt’s narrative in a double-place that makes representation ambiguous and untenable. Watt starts out with a genuine (and naïve) desire to be a good servant of representation, but almost instantly the text is forced to take on a transgressive force already active within the logic of representation: simulacrum.

Let us now examine the significance of this double-place as it expands itself in Watt. The description of Knott’s meals provides an illustration of the way in which the narrative of the simulacrum develops into the general functional mode of the novel. Here we have a situation where the observer-narrator combine, Watt, the character and the unknown narrator/author to whom he tells his tale, does not directly observe the event that concerns him or understand the very part it is led to play in its emergence as reality. Watt is given bizarre
directives (he is to follow certain steps that are pre-set) without explanation in order to perform a specific task—feed Knott's food to a dog on the days when Knott does not finish his meal.

Here, reality presents itself in the form of a symbolic organization articulated in conjunction with another event (the motivation for this particular organization) which should logically precede it but which is, nonetheless, absent. The access to this event is arbitrated by a space of representation that acts as a sign-system pointing towards an ambiguous referent. The referent refuses to espouse the original even as it remains entangled with it.

The being of this referential reality is not inherently positive but problematic, as it needs to be interrogated. The logic of simulacrum then transgresses representation from the interior by complicating the possibility of a simple and direct solution of the problem of reality or a positive answer to the question of reality. The problematic status of reality refuses to lend itself to a subjective apprehension of itself. Rather, subjectivity is shown to be an equally problematic reality trapped within the apparent objectivity of the narrative. The act of interrogation then becomes a continual problematization and not a simple investigation to discover a hidden truth or meaning within the narrative through a process of elimination.

Reality becomes the referent only in connection with the question of meaning. What is the significance of the insistence on
making sure that Knott’s food, when not eaten, is eaten by a dog?

There cannot be any conclusive answer, either positive or negative, to the question. The original is not there as an absolute cause to be transmitted into the language of the fiction, but is a problematic fiction by itself and is, thus, a language in its own right. Like all things in Knott’s house, the original is also virtual, not real.

For it was not the Tomness of tom, the Dickness of Dick, the Harryness of Harry, however remarkable in themselves, that preoccupied Watt [. . .] but their Tomness, their Dickness, their Harryness then, their then-Tomness, their then-Dickness, their then-Harryness; nor the ordaining of a being to come by a being past, or a being past by a being to come. (136)

The original becomes a palimpsest of possibilities constantly supplemented by innumerable layers of the simulacra that had been created, is being created and will be created.

One of the first questions Watt has to face at the beginning of his stay in Knott’s house was: who developed the organization currently in place regulating Knott’s meals? The answer to this question does not follow a straight line back to a single origin. It is spread out in many directions, hurling at random towards multiple beginnings. The novel becomes one hypothesis among many, a proposition eager to engineer more complicated levels of internal fiction in order to address the
question of reality. The direction taken by this proposition does not point to one single identifiable story line made up of convergent sub-plots but rather to many decentred, divergent sub-tales spewed out indiscriminately.

The fiction at work in Watt starts to tell its own tale and to reveal its own modus operandi as a game to transgress its own goal through the logic of simulacrum. While attempting to reconnect itself with a single universal version of reality it continues to produce an infinite number of simulacra each registering virtual levels of reality. Each of the twelve copies or hypotheses proposed by Watt to solve the matter of the dog, for example, (twelve being only an arbitrary number at which Watt chooses to stop a process that could go on to infinity) can lay an equal claim to “representing” the real version of reality (89-90). Conversely, all the twelve testify to the existence of a reality that accepts no one version as the correct claimant but in fact comprehends and exceeds all of them. All simulacra, like Watt’s twelve premises, are singular parts of a divergent reality, none functioning as the universal principle through which reality can be completely recovered and represented. Watt’s twelve suppositions do not make up twelve different centres (twelve specific differences) around which twelve different versions of equally organized but mutually exclusive realities are articulated. Such a process would convert representation into infinite representation, by just multiplying centres rather than
problematizing the status of the centre. This will in turn make possible a dialectical resolution based on the progressive elimination of some levels of reality and ultimately result in the recuperation of the true authentic centre and the enforcement of one crowning universal reality. Of course, Watt plays with this possibility and pretends that through the process of hypothesizing one can reach the nucleus of reality. But, this is exactly where Watt also acts as a simulator, a pretender. He exaggerates the very logic of representation revealing that this logic is founded on non-sense and simulacrum, one that presents reality as decentred in a manner coinciding with Watt’s narrative.

In order to characterize his narrative as the authentic universal representation of reality, Watt has to choose from among many levels of representation comprising of a multitude of contradictory answers. This will turn the novel itself into a ‘bad’ copy, a simulacrum of itself surpassed by all the other copies it attempts to inscribe and dismiss.

The logic of the simulacrum developed in Watt provokes a process of repetition that produces an internal course of self-differentiation corresponding to the narrative itself and fails to guarantee the external reproduction of reality in its programmed difference. In order to represent a problematic reality, the text as narrative performs the following operation. The text of reality, a writing inscribed on the undifferentiated medium of life has to be repeated (verbalized). The preparation of the food, then the serving of
the food to an absent Knott who sometimes eats all of it, sometimes some of it, and at times none of it, are elements of a ritual that is not amenable to modification. The timing of this daily ritual has been scrupulously worked out in advance and Watt need only to stick to it to reproduce it. The ritual itself involves a process of built-in repetition whose goal is to master difference through an organization of space and a controlling of time. At work here is a careful process of selection, division and integration (just as Watt is instructed to select and mix various elements to make Knott’s soup) that serves to emphasize the importance of this process in the production of reality. The same way he is also instructed to sort out and separate the slops from the various floors of the house (67-68), which symbolizes the importance of the organic taming of difference in the elaboration of any representational system. The house itself is an organism with the various parts functioning together but whose general identity seems to be dispersed in the workings of all the different individual repetitions like the infinite succession of servants and their repetitive displacements within the house (132-135). Watt is asked to perform a task similar to the composition of a traditional fiction where being as difference is organically tamed according to the tenets of representation. Through this taming or framing, orgic difference is repressed, made to fit into a conceptual order that limits and measures being. It is then mechanically repeated and passed on as a genre.
This kind of mechanical repetition is symbolic of the way the language of representation in general works—separating the components, identifying them, repeating them and then adding new elements, which always find their place in accordance with the general order of the system. This organization also resembles the logic of syntax in language where meaning is carefully articulated. One follows the succession of instructions given to Watt and yet fails to understand the motivation. This happens because the production of sense in the organic level is surpassed by non-sense, which is related to orgic difference. At first, Watt appears to be keen to comply with the instructions he is given. But the exaggerated way in which he goes on repeating these tasks generates a split within the operation of compliance and repetition. This rupture, in turn, connects the text with the inner structure of repetition and difference already present from the start. The logic of the simulacrum makes it possible for the text to transgress representation by turning the act of representation into an exaggerated game of language. By attempting to repeat the orders he is given, Watt starts stretching the acquiescence to these orders to the point of absurdity. Watt, the novel, is a testament of repetition that brings out the fictional nature of reality beset by the mechanism of its own repetition, a reality that internalises simulacrum as the script for its own repetition.
Through this kind of repetition, reality is presented as a representation whose tendency is to branch off into many different voices and tendencies and not as a self-contained whole. Consider for example the fact that Knott eats all of his food, some of his food, or none of his food. Three different possibilities emerge here which have to be dealt with separately because they produce three mutually exclusive versions of reality, which in turn will lead to innumerable permutations and combinations (resulting in the dog eating or not eating . . . ad infinitum). We exist, as the narrator never tires of repeating to us, in the realm of the possible and the probable, not of the certain. As a result, reality (or the possible versions of it proposed to us) is shown to perform within itself in advance an act of division and selection that the narrative structure then purports to tame and identify. Acts of representation, the platform of organic difference upon which we build the larger play of orgic difference, are but tentative responses to the question of reality and can never be regarded as affirmations of the existence of one absolute reality which could provide an answer to the questions we ask. We are constantly responding to a reality which persistently refuses to provide finite answers.

*Watt* is thus an act of fiction, a narrative of repetition, which transgresses the order of traditional representation by reconnecting itself with the problematical nature of reality. This preoccupation turns
the course of narrative representation, its tackling of the language of representation, into an infinite production of questions addressed not to reality in its organic form but to the orgic core of existence.

For Beckett, this orgic core located within reality and orchestrated by the differential logic of the simulacrum is frustratingly elusive. He acknowledges that organic narrative representation can only perambulate the periphery of this core forever incapable of completely mastering it or successfully expressing it. Beckett sums up his exasperation in “Three Dialogues” thus: “there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express” (Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays 16).

Organic representation itself is internally ruptured and is incapable of articulating the intangible reality. Attempts to close the gap between representation and reality exacerbate this gap. The repetition of organic representation in the narrative serves only to bring out the lack that destabilizes its foundation. Watt’s narratives resemble the painting of a circle and a centre found in Erskine’s room. Watt ponders over the painting thus:

And he wondered what the artist had intended to represent (Watt knew nothing about painting), a circle and its centre in search of each other, or a circle and its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and its
centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, in boundless space, in endless time.

(129)

The repetition of differing patterns of relationship suggests a passage into ungrounded time and space deliberately avoiding the mistake of making representation and its tenets infinite. Recourse to the concept of infinity would have relegated the narrative to the confines of dialectical methodology. What it suggests is the radical transformation of traditional tenets. The centre is bereft of its authority, its universality and the circle is no longer an organic and harmonious entity. Above all, the spaces of representation and language are no longer regarded as homogeneous. In “Language to Infinity” Foucault points out:

The space of language today is not defined by rhetoric, but by the Library—by the ranging to infinity of fragmentary languages, substituting for the double chain of Rhetoric
the simple, continuous, and monotonous line of language left to its own devices, a language fated to be infinite because it can no longer support itself upon the speech of infinity. But within itself, it finds the possibility of its own division, of its own repetition, the power to create a vertical system of mirrors, self images, analogies. (100)

Watt’s twelve hypotheses do not form a submissive circumference or one static centre, but embody the decentring movement of a circle already decentred in itself, the mutation of the original into the singular and the multiple. In the words of Linda Hutcheon,

What it says is that there are all kinds of orders and systems in our world—and that we create them all. That is their justification and their limitation. They do not exist “out there”, fixed, given, universal, eternal; they are human constructs in history. This does not make them any less necessary or desirable. It does, however, as we have seen, condition their “truth” value. The local, the limited, the temporary, the provisional are what defines postmodern “truth” in novels [. . .]. The point is not exactly that the world is meaningless [. . .] but that any meaning that exists is our own creation. (Poetics of Postmodernism 43)

Like the painting, the novel, as the narrative of the simulacrum, becomes a differential structure which refuses any finite closure. Any
search for a centre or the right representation is doomed to fail. Watt, contemplating the painting, is literally moved by this awareness. “Watt’s eyes filled with tears that he could not stem, and they flowed down his fluted cheeks, unchecked, in a steady flow, refreshing him greatly” (129). Every narrative becomes a circle (form) without a centre (content) or a centre without a circle.

The novel produces its own singular form through the problematic nature of the idea which it attempts to express, the message that here is no such thing as true universal form. But, the repetition of this general theme does not point towards the eventual referent, nor does it cause Watt to attain an alternative form. Instead, the process of repetition produces doubles or false copies further estranging the story from itself, engendering further disintegration.

In Watt, the fiction at work does not operate on the classical essence-appearance structure. It resembles simulacrum with its reverberation of copies upon copies. Watt is forced to elaborate a series of copies and tales in order to break back into the reality surrounding the subject of Knott’s meals. Here, the traditional model of fiction is reversed: fiction no longer mirrors an actual reality that pre-exists it in order to illustrate it or reveal it. Instead, it constructs a set of possible-virtual realities and then performs the gesture of selecting one of those realities as apparently true, rejecting the others as false.
Fiction, for Beckett, involves cataloguing realities and selecting one at random. The particular one is then made to appear to have existed prior to that selection, as if it motivated the fiction in the first place. The fact that reality is really the effect produced by another activity (representation, fiction) and not the cause motivating the activity is precisely what has been forgotten in classical representation. When Watt elaborates on the existence of the Lynch family and of the colony of dogs kept alive for the sole purpose of eating Knott's food whenever any of it is left (98-104) he is expanding on the same theme. Fiction is necessarily an invention because it is a search for what constitutes the basis of reality, its being and meaning. The latter is not simply given but ambiguously presented as a void or an amorphous matter eliciting a host of incompatible narratives. Watt has to grapple with the entire set of hypotheses because he is programmed to do so. His attitude to the incidents in Mr. Knott's house is telling.

And Watt could not accept them for what they perhaps were, the simple games that time plays with space, now with these toys, and now with those, but was obliged, because of his peculiar character, to enquire into what they meant, oh not into what they really meant, his character was not peculiar as all that, but into what they might be
induced to mean, with the help of a little patience, a little ingenuity. (75)

The assertion that all hypotheses and narratives belong to the world of simulacra is amplified by the fact that Watt’s account of his experience in Knott’s house and the characters he came across there have all been reported by him to the narrator who acknowledges that he cannot independently verify their veracity. Watt may have lied, held back details, confused characters and incidents, or may not have been knowledgeable of the happenings in the house and therefore might have invented the whole story. The narrator is very candid.

For all that I know on the subject of Mr. Knott, and of all that touched Mr. Knott, and on the subject of Watt, and all that touched Watt, came from Watt and Watt alone. [...] Not that there is any proof that Watt did indeed tell all he knew, on these subjects, or that he set out to do so, for how could there be, I know nothing of these subjects, except what Watt told me, because someone told him, or he found out for himself [...]. Mention has already been made of the difficulties that Watt encountered in his efforts to distinguish between what happened and what did not happen, between what was and what was not, in Mr. Knott’s house. And Watt made no secret of this, in his conversations with me, that many things described as
happening, in Mr. Knott’s house and of course grounds, perhaps never happened at all, or quite differently, and that many things described as being, or rather as not being, for these were the more important, perhaps were not, or rather were all the time. But apart from this, it is difficult for a man like Watt to tell a long story like Watt’s without leaving out some things, and foisting in others. (125-126)

Even as he casts aspersions on the honesty of Watt’s account of his stay at Mr. Knott’s, the narrator—the surrogate author—acknowledges that his ‘representation’ of them as narratives may have resulted in similar kind of manipulations and changes.

And this does not mean either that I may not have left out some of the things that Watt told me, though I was most careful to note down all at the time, in my little note book. It is difficult, with a long story like the story that Watt told, even when one is most careful to note down all at the time, in one’s little note book, not to leave out some of the things that were told, and not to foist in other things that were never told, never told at all. (126)

The narrator uses the word ‘foist’ to refer to deviations in his own narrative and Watt’s stories thereby equating his own fictions about Watt’s lived out story with Watt’s real experiences.
Watt tells the narrator that Art and Con, members of the Lynch family, baptised the current dog employed by Knott as Cis (113) just as they had christened the earlier one Kate (112) forgetting that Art and Con are characters in the myth he himself may have invented about the Lynch family. Art and Con, fictional products of Watt’s imagination, have now emerged as real people and what was initially a hypothesis (the Lynch family) has become the reality, the cause behind the mystery of the dog.

This gesture is an example of way the text functions in the double-place of representation-simulacrum that we indicated earlier. On the one hand, the text reproduces the conditions that make classical representation possible—the posited existence of an undisputed reality. On the other hand, and almost simultaneously, it revealed that it is untenable. Through the endless replication and constant repudiation of representation, the act of transgression becomes embedded in the narrative. The text reveals that we are always moving between levels of fiction (stories we invent, people we create) reifying one of these levels as reality or referent. The text draws attention to the erasure that needs to be performed in order to represent reality and inscribes that very erasure within representation. This silent, yet insistent, passage brings about an internal distancing that disturbs the reality-representation binary, and confuses and problematizes these two levels.
Knott himself, the supposed unmovable ground anchoring the house and its reality in itself, becomes a kind of amorphous shifting presence. Knott is presented as an absence that gains materiality in the narratives told by the people living in the house. The narrator says he would have to bring in other people’s accounts in order to verify the story of Watt. “Then we would have had Erskine’s Mr. Knott, and Arsene’s Mr. Knott, and Walter’s Mr. Knott, and Vincent’s Mr. Knott to compare with Watt’s Mr. Knott” (126).

Knott’s presence is undermined by the appearance and erasure of all the simulacrum of Knott that could have been generated by the various possible narratives. Watt’s Knott is perceived fleetingly as a capricious individual. There is no regularity in the rhythm of his rising and retiring (86). “Watt never saw Mr. Knott, never, never saw Mr. Knott, at meal time” (88). In fact “Watt saw little of Mr. Knott” (68). The possibility of a direct link between fiction and reality is undermined once again. The relationship between model and copy becomes more transformational than representational. In between Knott’s rising and retiring is an un-chartered space of activity which is unrepresentable

Where does the reality behind the story start? With Watt? This reality was originally a story told to the narrator, a narrator who by his own admission is sometimes led to invent what he does not remember. One can start questioning; by following the text’s own indication about
Art and Con, the existence of Watt himself. He might be an invention of the narrator, a character in his story rather than the source of the story. Watt has a complex set of narratives which, because they function according to the logic of the simulacrum, is refused the luxury of a material reality behind them to fall back on. The narrator himself becomes a narrative.

This bizarre logic of narrative (the logic of simulacrum) is what is behind the seemingly interminable story told by Arthur to Mr. Graves towards the end of the book. Originally announced by Arthur as an illustration of a suggestion he made to Mr. Graves to take a product named “Bando” to cure his ills, the story soon develops into a series of endlessly detailed sub-stories about Mr. Ernest Louis, a scholar and a farmer, and Mr. Thomas Nackybal who, without formal education, is a mathematical genius. Here, words proliferate and repeat themselves differentially, refusing to be anchored by the possibility of absolute meaning even as Arthur is attempting to “better illustrate what I mean” (171). It does not serve a reality located outside of it, but rather shapes this reality according to the logic of difference and simulacrum that also causes the self-differentiation of language. The original motivation for telling the story is quickly lost to Arthur and to the reader and it gives way to another purpose, that of language simply speaking about language. No final resolution is provided to the succession of stories or any absolute meaning established.
Furthermore, the stories flow in such a way that sometimes a certain degree of confusion happens as to which story the reader is reading at a given moment. Arthur interrupts his story about Nackybal to interpolate Mr. Graves by way of another story concerning the matter of the garden and then without warning returns to Nackybal’s story (182). Each story is not organically differentiated and delineated but is part of a general narrative based on an orgic mode of difference that dissolves limits and turns the act of story-telling into an act of transgression. Stories do not function mimetically as closed systems to reflect a previously identified difference or enforce an act of closure. They repeat the differential and ruptured nature of reality by complicating further the disjunctive mode of being.

In the traditional model of fiction based on organic representation, a story within a story stands for a microcosm mirroring the whole. The same model that orders the relationship between fiction and reality continues to operate within the fiction. In Watt, this mode is challenged. The various parts of the story are jumbled in such a way that one does not really know where the story starts or where it ends. Whenever there is a suggestion of possible order, it is always set against the background of general disorder. Within what is presented as the general story there occurs as if by chance another story that apparently sidetracks the narrative but on closer inspection constitutes the same themes. The narrative path taken by the story is thus
reflexive: the story unfolds into itself and mirrors itself rather than pointing towards an exterior point.

*Watt* has a narrative structure that organizes its own reality without discounting the possibility of other levels of reality that are dependent on the narrative. For example, Arsene comes out with a narrative (39-63) upon Watt’s arrival about the incoming/outgoing maids. This story appears to function as an illustration of what goes on in Knott’s house before branching off into other narratives including one on one of the house cleaner’s eating habits. However, that last narrative in turn becomes a reflection on the universal necessity of eating as well as on Knott’s own eating habits depicted within the story. This is a pre-emptive strike to sabotage the central position the story of *Watt* would have occupied later on, to decentre the main story and make it just one among a series of narratives. The logic of the simulacrum indicates that there is no more a self-identical model than there is a central voice controlling the stories dispersed through the text. There is only the succession of stories passed along and circulated ad infinitum. Each story opens up a level of singularity, an exploration of orgic difference, where it encounters the logic of its own becoming simulacrum. The genetic core of the narrative constantly reinvests reality into each instance of singular representation while ceaselessly displacing the narrator purporting to act as the centre of the narrative. We have seen that decentring is the principle by which
the logic of the simulacrum organizes the narratives. The act of representation becomes a constantly mutating voice entering into all the narratives without ever remaining the same. This process creates a general structure of narration that is open, always partial in relation to an elusive whole, and a distribution of the voice, which is decentred and fragmented in relation to an absolute primary speech. Instead of referring us to the transcendental subject or to a previously identified reality, Beckett’s narratives bring out the duplicity of all such references. This is the purest instance of the force of exteriority, of unnamed difference that constitutes the unreachable core of the logic of the simulacrum.