"ZERO, ZERO, AND ZERO"

Beckett's Endgame, *Automation, and Zero-Player Games*
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Everyone knows his part by heart. Words and gestures follow each other in a relaxed, continuous manner, the links as imperceptible as the necessary elements of some properly lubricated machinery. Then there is a gap, a blank space…And then suddenly the action resumes, without warning, and the same scene occurs again.

– Alain Robbe-Grillet

An experiment is a text about a nontextual situation, later tested by others to decide whether or not it is simply a text if the final trial is successful, then it is not just a text, there is indeed a real situation behind it, and both the actor and its authors are endowed with a new competence.

– Bruno Latour

As a reader I find myself locked within an automaton I cannot control, which will never do what I would do (even by chance), and which provides no nourishment.

– Steve Aylett

In his piece "Trying to Understand *Endgame*," Theodor Adorno comments that in the work of Samuel Beckett "poetic procedure surrenders…without intention."[1] This is a remarkable claim, not about Beckett's work, but the effect it has on the way we experience intimacy with narrative and how we can consider how literature thinks.

In Adorno's sense, *Endgame*'s poetic procedure establishes a confined and constitutive dwelling from which the language users cannot escape – this dwelling is expressed through the sparse

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1   Theodor Adorno, "Trying to Understand *Endgame*," trans. Michael T. Jones. *New German Critique*. 26 (1982), 119.

and claustrophobic staging of Beckett's work. The dwelling clears the path for the question of what exactly is "taking its course"[2] – a phrase that is ominously repeated – in *Endgame*. Not only does it open an interrogation of *what* is taking its course, but also *how* the text proceeds according to its own logic, as a kind of automation or zero-player game (a game played without a player). Adorno suggests that with *Endgame* "thought becomes as much a means of producing meaning for the work which cannot be immediately rendered tangible, as it is an expression of meaning's absence."[3] He continues: Beckett's text "can mean nothing other than understanding its incomprehensibility."[4] It is here that one may note the distinction between *poiesis*, thinking, and automated poetic procedure. While the poetic is an intentional act of making something come forth or an act of agential creativity, thinking is an act of submission. A poetic *procedure* (in the sense of a set of logical instructions) as automation or zero-player game, on the other hand, both surrenders and proceeds without intention; in this sense, *Endgame* conflates thinking and *poiesis* by eliminating the possibility of agential creativity and replaces it with an automated logic that unfolds of its own accord.

This is at the heart of Adorno's provocative statement: the poetic should be intentional by definition, thinking should be submissive, but the *procedural* is both without intention and without agency. So, the process that animates *Endgame* is one that ultimately demands of the reader the assumption of an unusual interpretive pose: that of readerly non-involvement, diminution of agency, and ultimately, our exclusion from interpretive agency. Indeed, the text provides certain insight into the present shift from the dominance of language to that of code and automation. *Endgame*, in its forceful expression of the exclusion of the liberal subject within a digitally run apparatus or system, takes its course without recourse to the desire or suffering of the human. As a result, the work encour-

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2   Samuel Beckett, *Endgame, A Play in One Act, Followed by Act Without Words, a Mime for One Player*, trans. Samuel Beckett, (New York, Grove Press, 1958), 13, 32.
3   Adorno, "Trying to Understand *Endgame*," 120.
4   Ibid.

ages speculation on the rapid shift from human involvement with language as alphanumerics to that of code that proceeds according to its own logic indifferent to humanism.

To do so, we must first establish certain premises for this argument:

1. *Endgame* here is an ideal text divorced from materiality or performability (it is, after all, a play); this ideal text is an extended metaphor for code unfolding according to a set of well-formed instructions.

2. The text is a poetic procedure that proceeds without intention.

3. The text continues to take its course without readerly intervention.

4. The reader assumes an imaginary pose: of exclusion and non-agential involvement.

So, what we have here is a thought experiment: a text as extended metaphor that proceeds without intention and without a reader, a kind of textual automaton. What this thought experiment is asking is: what are the effects of this ideal text? What might it say about our relation to narrative; what is the significance of our exclusion in an era of automation? *Endgame* offers itself to us as a means to meditate on the encroaching shift in the predominant narrative code: the increasing dominance of digital code over alphanumeric-linguistic narrative.

Accordingly, *Endgame* demands that the reader identify *as* openness and exclusion toward the end of taking up identification with incomprehensibility and become transposed directly into that which is without semantic value. Here, the reader must submit *as* absence or exclusion from the text at hand. The human condition, Heidegger claims, is to *be there/here*. The concern here is with the strange role Beckett asks the reader of the text to assume. What *being-there* means is more nuanced than simply being-in-the-world. This nuance will help bring our thought experiment a little closer to earth. *The effects* of Beckett's text strive for a kind of paradoxical and imaginative rigor rather than for existential exactness. *End-*

game is experimental, and so its effects are experimental: it employs nothingness as a means of making manifest what we wish to forget: meaningless, nothingness, our exclusion from cultural or political narrative. Heidegger writes that "interrogating the nothing – asking what and how it, the nothing, is – turns what is interrogated into its opposite. The question deprives itself of its own object."[5] What the task here asks is how the textual object may take its course by depriving itself of its questioner; that is, its reader. Our experiment asks of *Endgame* how the determinism of closed systems may be made significant when the text is considered as that which proceeds without intention, takes its course, and is animated without a reader. James Acheson suggests that Beckett's early plays are preoccupied with "the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge."[6] *Endgame* certainly is a demonstration of this: it pushes this concern to the ends of practicable experience. And yet, this procedure demands that narrative disclose itself *as* narrative simply by taking its course. In order to do so, the procedure of *Endgame* is that which inverts Heidegger's troublesome formulation of the interrogator investigating nothingness by allowing nothingness to assume the role of procedure and the reader to assume the pose of nothingness.

Endgame takes place in a room with two small windows, a door, a picture hanging near a door, two garbage bins, and, in the center, an armchair on castors. Beyond this room remains more or less unknown: most probably a wasteland. The title of the play derives from chess. It refers to the moment when a game nears its end and only crucial pieces – the two kings – are left on the board. There are four characters. Three are without mobility. Hamm sits in the chair at center stage; he is unable to stand and unable to see. Nagg and Nell, Hamm's parents, are legless and confined to the garbage bins. Clov, the only character with mobility and whose movements are belabored and painful, cannot sit down. The play is character-

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5   Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?", *Basic Writings*, (London: Harper Perrenial, 2008), 96.
6   James Acheson, *Samuel Beckett's Artistic Theory and Practice: Criticism, Drama, and Early Fiction*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1997), 141.

ized by isolation, claustrophobia, loss, nostalgia, and an extremely tight and structured repetitive form.

Early readings of the text are primarily concerned with its relationship to the intellectual and cultural influence of existentialism and post-war trauma. Alain Robbe-Grillet suggests that the characters/actors are *there* (on stage) in the sense that they must explain themselves. Martin Esslin's 1961 *The Theatre of the Absurd* also provides influential and long lasting existential reading. While compelling, this tradition of reading is reductionist, and consequetlly, by the 1970s and 1980s fell out of favor to nuanced readings focused on language. The title of the play had an influence on critical judgments of the text as "the last part of an on-stage game of chess."[7] The purpose of this chess game is to disrupt a definitive interpretation. Later critics, however, are more concerned with the mechanics of the text that make this destabilization possible. That is, more recently, the discussion regarding Beckett's work is concerned primarily with language and performance. Even more recently, there is a marked increase in textual studies of Beckett's work. The intervention here, however, concerns *Endgame* as an idealized text and the effects it has in excluding the reader as a metaphor for the shift from language to code: the coming of information illiteracy and its effects on agency. *Endgame* posits the reader in a movement of diminution. Text turns the *cogito* inside out demonstrating that something can proceed with no concern of a reader. Our idealized *Endgame* is a procedure, it exists, *non sum*.

Zero-Player Games and Proceduralism: *Endgame* as Automaton

The impulse to understand a narrative system that excludes the participation of a reader has recently been undertaken in the theory of game and play. At the 2012 *Philosophy of Computer Games Conference* in Madrid, Spain, Staffan Björk and Jesper Juul presented an evocative paper titled "Zero-Player Games, Or: What we Talk about When We Talk about Players." Their argument discloses the biases behind the way we think about games

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7   Ibid., 150.

and players. For Björk and Juul, the most frequently cited definitions of games refer to the centrality of players in understanding what games are and what gaming means. Björk and Juul suggest that "many publications from the last few years have tried to argue that it is impossible to discuss games as designed objects, since games only actually exist when played, or *as* played" and that games are objects that "give players the ability to intentionally act towards reaching the goals of a game."[8] In much the same way, we often think of texts as deliberate artifacts that only exist meaningfully when read. Citing the dominant literature on games and players, Björk and Juul find a noticeable bias in the role of player agency, intentionality, and aesthetic engagement.[9] Such features are fundamentally at odds with the procedurality of *Endgame* since the unfolding of the text is and will be, as Clov remarks, "the same as usual."[10] Linda Hughes, Laura Ermi and Frans Mäyrä Mia Consalvo, Gordon Calleja, and Miguel Sicart also privilege the role of the player in understanding games.[11]

While Björk and Juul acknowledge that games are "designed objects"[12] that imply intervention on behalf of a player, they argue "that many common conceptions of players are too vague to be useful"[13] and that any definition of a game overly reliant on the player will prove inadequate. In order to reconceptualize the player, Björk and Juul aim to examine the paradoxical idea of the

8   Staffan Björk & Jesper Juul: "Zero-Player Games Or: What We Talk about When We Talk about Players." Presented at the *Philosophy of Computer Games Conference*, Madrid 2012. http://www.jesperjuul.net/text/zeroplayergames/.
9   My survey of the critical literature is indebted to research compiled by Björk and Juul.
10   Beckett, *Endgame*, 4.
11   See, Linda Hughes, "Children's Games and Gaming" edited by B. Sutton-Smith in *Children's Folklore: A Source Book*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999); Laura Ermi and Frans Mäyrä, "Fundamental Components of the Gameplay Experience: Analysing Immersion" in *Proceedings of DiGRA 2005*, (2005); Mia Consalvo, "There is No Magic Circle" in Games and Culture 4, no. 4, (2009); Gordon Calleja, *In-Game: From Immersion to Incorporation*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011); and Miguel Sicart, "Against Procedurality," in *Game Studies* 11 (2011).
12   Björk and Juul, "Zero Player Games."
13   Ibid.

zero-player game: a game that proceeds without agential inter-vention and thus an appropriate analogue to Beckett's narrative. The critical discussion surrounding the question of what a game is and what a game means is, Björk and Juul suggest, explicitly "player-centric."[14] As a result, the means of extrapolating upon the concept cannot reflexively account for itself as a phenomenon. With the very gesture of the player-centric debate, games are be-ing defined by a sub-component (the player) that is assumed to be constituent and thus cannot disclose themselves to themselves as games. The player-centric bias is one that stems from the bias of the critic; indeed, it is odd to concede that one can consider an object of study without *one considering it*. Yet, what Björk and Juul propose here is not a study that wishes to argue against the signifi-cance of the study of players and their role in games but instead to bring to the discussion that examining games in the absence of the player concept is productive. With this logic of negation, Björk and Juul effectively establish the negative space through which one may consider both games and players *and* games and non-players. Here we note the analogue to our thought experiment on *Endgame*. Acheson suggests that Beckett undermines "whatever illusion the play might fortuitously create by insisting on *Endgame* as theatre."[15] Yet, we recognize the text as a kind of literary zero-player game in that it operates by a similar conceit: that of an excluded reader[16] and a text that proceeds impartially taking its course.

In *Endgame*, the role of player/reader is interrupted. Rather than a text that permits the performative expressive acts of play, *Endgame* is a text that reveals itself in the thought experiment as radically unchangeable: the text is the same as usual. Indeed, rath-

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14   Ibid.

15   Acheson, *Samuel Beckett's Artistic Theory and Practice,* 152.

16   Here the reader could conceivably constitute a traditional reader, a theatre spectator, or stage actor responding to textual prompts. For this discussion, however, we will limit the inquiry to the scope of this project: the reader in the conventional sense, a person who reads text from a printed book. There is much discussion regarding Beckett's intertextuality; that is, the relational role of text-as-text. See Michael Worton. "*Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*: Theatre as Text," *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) for an introduction.

er than what Sicart identifies as creative play and agential flexibility, Hamm concurs that, within the parameters of the *Endgame* environment, "there's no reason for it to change" and Clov, always lacking in his faith for any kind of diegetic intervention, utters the significant remark: "all life long the same questions, the same answers."[17] What we may suggest now is that Beckett's play, as a game, is proceduralist rather than player-centric. As a text, it is proceduralist rather than reader-centric. Its central diegetic conceit is, at its most extreme, that the text is a zero-player game.

Perhaps the most well-known kinds of zero-player games use cellular automata. Cellular automata "lend themselves to a variety of uses. In some cases, they are used to simulate processes for which the equations that do exist are not adequate to describe the phenomena of interest"[18] writes Keller. Conventionally cellular automata are implemented as a means of "producing recognizable patterns of 'interesting' behavior in their macrodynamics rather than in their microdynamics."[19] "Cellular automata models are simulators par excellence," she continues, "they are artificial universes that evolve according to local but uniform rules of interaction that have been pre-specified. Change the initial conditions, and one changes the history; change the rules of interaction, and one changes the dynamics."[20] However, these changes can only be initiated *from without* and not from within. In this sense, cellular automata are apt parallel metaphors to the procedural dwelling established in *Endgame* both on the level of agency and setting. Tommaso Toffoli and Norman Margolus write in *Cellular Automata Machines: A New Environment for Modeling* that,

> cellular automata are stylized, synthetic universes…They have their own kind of matter which whirls around in a space and a

17   Beckett, *Endgame*, 5.
18   Evelyn Fox Keller, "Marrying the Premodern to the Postmodern: Computers and Organisms after World War II," in *Mechanical Bodies, Computational Minds: Artificial Intelligence from Automata to Cyborgs*,
Edited by Stefano Franchi and Güven Güzeldere, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 205.
19   Ibid., 205.
20   Ibid., 207.

time of their own…A cellular automata machine is a universe synthesizer. Like an organ, it has keys and stops by which the resources of the instrument can be called into action, combined, and reconfigured. Its color screen is a window through which one can watch the universe that is being "played."[21]

Keller notes that Christopher Langton, computer scientist and researcher in artificial life systems, understands cellular automata as that which could be used to simulate universes or environments for living beings, "where the ultimate goal would be to create life in a new medium."[22] Langton speculates that the simulation of artificial life:

> is the study of man-made systems that exhibit behaviors characteristic of natural living systems. It complements the traditional biological sciences concerned with the *analysis* of living organisms by attempting to *synthesize* life-like behaviors within computers and other artificial media. By extending the empirical foundation upon which biology is based beyond the carbon-chain life that has evolved on Earth, Artificial Life can contribute to theoretical biology by locating *life-as-we-know-it* within the larger picture of *life-as-it-could-be*.[23]

The means of creating new kinds of life in a process that follows a "bottom-up synthesis,"[24] in which great complexity arises from very simple rules and within determined – limited and local – parameters, has "proved to have immense appeal for people far beyond the world of computer scientists. Perhaps especially, it proved appealing to readers and viewers who have themselves

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21   Tommaso Toffoli and Norman Margolus, *Cellular Automata Machines: A New Environment for Modeling*, (The MIT Press, 1987), 1.
22   Keller, 209.
23   Christopher Langton, "Artificial Life" in *Artificial Life: Proceedings of the Santa Fe Institute Studies in the Sciences of Complexity, Vol 6*, (Redwood City: Addison-Wesley, 1989), 1-2.
24   Keller, 210. The virtual worlds to which Keller refers are extended here to those which range from various forms of social media to our engagement with aesthetic artifice.

spent a significant proportion of their real lives inhabiting virtual worlds."[25] H. Porter Abbott suggests that what this kind of "formal experimentation requires from the critic is to find ways of talking about Beckett's fiction as an imitation of life without producing those often elaborate structures of meaning, knit from a variety of 'clues,' which have marred so many otherwise excellent discussions of Beckett."[26] When considering *Endgame* as zero-player game, as cellular automata, we are confronted with a game of life in which its substance is no longer connected with its semantic value, and in which its subjectivities (both diegetic and commentative) figure as mere operations or subroutines of the game.

There are no overt clues for us here since *Endgame* does not invite the reader to intervene in the procedure. Much in the way Langton imagines the significance of computer models of artificial life as creative mimesis, representation that looks forward and is future-directed, *Endgame* unfolds most intensively in the text, yet its effects are felt most intrusively on the extra-diegetic level. The life as it could be, horrific and sterile as it is on the textual level, is life as it is at the extreme of its future-directedness: absent.

The most famous example of a zero-player game is John Conway's "The Game of Life." The game follows the principles of automation expressed in the work of game theorist and mathematician John von Neumann. "A mathematical simulation of cellular genetics," writes Justin Parsler, the game is more of an "intellectual puzzle" than a traditional game. In this sense, the game follows in the same spirit as that of *Endgame* a text that Acheson identifies as "a puzzle."[27] The Game of Life, like *Endgame*, plays out on a metaphorical checkerboard. The squares on the board are representative of a cell that is either dead or alive. With each turn, "cells either die or come to life, depending on the number of living neighbors they have: a cell with two live neighbors dies, one with more than three dies, one with three stays stable. A dead

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25   Ibid., 210.
26   H. Porter Abbott, *The Fiction of Samuel Beckett: Form and Effect*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 8-9.
27   James Acheson, *Samuel Beckett's Artistic Theory and Practice*, 204.

cell with three live neighbors comes to life."[28] The game is, in essence, a Universal Turing Machine. First conceptualized in 1936 by mathematician and cryptologist Alan Turing, the Turing Machine can simulate the logic of any well-formed instructions. In other words, the Machine can be modified in such a way as to process the logic of any computer algorithm. The game also establishes a logic of complexity from simplicity: "The rules," Gardner suggests, "should be such as to make the behavior of the population unpredictable."[29] And, the rules are quite simple.[30] Once the pieces on the board are set up, there is no direct engagement by the player. "The initial setup of the game board," writes Parsler, "constitutes 'playing' the game, even though there are no set goals, nor any winner."[31] In this sense, the processes that follow from the well-formed instructions unfold as a series of deterministic nodes of mutation and change upon which the instigator may mediate. In other words, like *Endgame*, *The Game of Life* proceeds without intention and can operate as an expression of meaning's absence and its paradoxical dislocation from agential engagement.

Similar to simple systems of chaos and unpredictability, Conway's *The Game of Life* demonstrates that even within the confines of determinism, even simple determinism, the emergent complexity and variability of possible results is staggering. Hayles writes:

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28   Justin Parsler, "Life," *Encyclopedia of Play in Today's Society*, Ed. Rodney P. Carlisle. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2009).

29   Martin Gardner, "The Fantastical Combinations of John Conway's New Solitaire Game 'Life'" in *Scientific American*. 223, (October 1970), 120.

30   In fact, Gardner identifies only three rules: first, "there should be no initial pattern for which there is a simple proof that the population can grow without limit," second, "there should be no initial patterns that apparently do grow without limit," and finally, "there should be simple initial patterns that grow and change for a considerable period of time before coming to end in three possible ways: fading away completely (from overcrowding or becoming too sparse), settling into a stable configuration that remains unchanged thereafter, or entering an oscillating phase in which they repeat an endless cycle of two or more periods." Ibid.,120.

31   Parsler, "'Life'".

Emergence implies properties or programs appear on their own, often developing in ways not anticipated by the person who created the simulation. Structures that lead to emergence typically involve complex feedback loops in which the output of a system is repeatedly fed back in as input. As the recursive looping continues, small deviations can quickly become magnified, leading to the complex interactions and unpredictable evolutions associated with emergence.[32]

Gardner discusses this emergence further: "You will find the population constantly undergoing unusual, sometimes beautiful and always unexpected change." He continues, "most starting patterns either reach stable figures – Conway calls them "still lifes" – that cannot change or patterns that oscillate forever. Patterns with no initial symmetry tend to become symmetrical. Once this happens the symmetry cannot be lost, although it may increase in richness."[33] And here, with the "still life," is where we find *Endgame*. Itself a kind of zero-player game – a loop of diegetic automata, a procedure that cannot change – which skips, endlessly oscillates. Hamm's repeated phrase "don't stay there, you give me the shivers" thus signifies something structurally metonymical: his shivers are the shivers of the simulated, still life universe. [34] He is not commanding Clov to cease standing because of the ominous sense it causes him to experience. Rather, it becomes indicative of the text itself and the recognition of it thereof: Hamm is addressing the simulated universe as much as he is addressing Clov. The shivers are the oscillating vibrations of still life, the characters' recognition of the constitutive procedural apparatus in which they dwell. "Well, you'll lie down then, what the hell!" expresses Hamm, "Or, you'll come to a standstill, simply stop and stand still, the way you are now. One day you'll say, I'm tired, I'll stop. What does the

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32   N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 225.
33   Gardner, 120.
34   Beckett, *Endgame*, 32, 65.

attitude matter?"[35] Well, the attitude does not matter; one may say that they are tired and they will stop, but this termination of forward movement is not an end but an oscillation. The standstill, the simple stop, shivers and oscillates. The text itself takes on "nice dimensions, nice proportions."[36] The text's procedurality, assuming a symmetry that cannot be lost, thus bars the possibilities of agential *poiesis* through language. That is, while Heidegger differentiates *poeisis* from thinking in that the former is creative and the latter is submissive, the procedurality in operation in Beckett's text *constitutes* rather than creates and its requirement of submission is simply axiomatic, not a willed opening to a clearing.

So, when Hamm demands to know "what's happening,"[37] Clov's response that something is taking its course is as indicative of the proceduralist rhetoric as it is an accurate description of the diegetic motion of the text. "Proceduralists claim that players, by reconstructing the meaning embedded in the rules, are *persuaded* by virtue of the game's procedural nature," writes Sicart.[38] In particular, we are concerned with how the narrative-as-game may disclose certain operations of reading *Endgame* on the extra-diegetic level. The work of Ian Bogost in his studies *Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism* (2006) and *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (2007) are major contributions to proceduralist criticism in both academia and industry: "It is the success of Bogost's arguments not only across the academic body," Sicart writes, "but also in the games industry what makes proceduralism a popular way of conducting computer games scholarship."[39] Sicart continues:

> What proceduralism…[argues is] that computer games present a technological and cultural exception that deserves to be analyzed through the ontological particularities that make computer

35   Ibid., 37.
36   Ibid., 2.
37   Ibid., 13.
38   Miguel Sicart, "Against Procedurality," *Game Studies* 11 (2011), game.itu.dk/index.php/Against_Procedurality.
39   Ibid.

games unique, in this case, the fact that they have a "procedural nature." The proceduralists take their starting point in [the][40] statement that digital games are unique, among other things, because of their procedural nature…that is, because they are processes that operate in [a] way that is akin to how computers operate.[41]

With *Endgame*, the conceit of proceduralism is carried to an extreme. The text itself embodies a diegetic value in its design, however, one which proceeds without intention like the cellular automaton. The demonstration at play is a text that proceeds without semantic value. Value here is the status of meanings in relation to one another: value is the intentionally structured hierarchical merit of one term in semantic exchange with others. *Endgame* expresses its value as a procedure by signifying its semantic valuelessness. Hamm asks what is happening, but he must already know (if knowledge is constituted and programmable) since he is moved by unseen forces. We do not "play" the players in the text, rather they are played by the valueless process, the design, of the play itself: "Me − *(he* yawns) − to play," Hamm notes, his yawn expressing inevitable compliance and agential disjunction more than ennui. The disjunction being between "me" and "to play;" that is, rather than indicating that he "plays" and therefore "is," Hamm's yawn signifies a vocalized gap that separates agency from procedure. Hamm, though without diegetic agency, is not without an acute sense of anxiety. There is embedded in *Endgame* the sense that the game itself hesitatingly wishes to transcend its own process. The desire to exceed what Ruby Cohn calls the "claustrophobic boundaries"[42] of the room's walls that both constitute and signify the architecture of procedurality is the straining to escape the valueless processes. This, however, seems impossible.

The limits of proceduralism unsettle not only the status of nar-

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40   See Janet H. Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (1998).

41   Ibid.

42   Ruby Cohn, *Just Play: Beckett's Theatre*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

rative but also the status of language in *Endgame*. In his discussion on *Endgame*, Benjamin H. Ogden suggests that Beckett's language is one that forgoes any attempt at an ideal abstract language of the kind Wittgenstein proposed in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in favor of a language that is understood to be explicitly concerned with, following Stanley Cavell, natural concretisms. Ogden suggests that "in order to speak a language properly, then, one cannot just know the dictionary or formal definitions of words (its 'ideal' generative grammar), but must understand the 'natural environment' in which phrases and words are logical or appropriate."[43] The act of reading literature, Cavell suggests, is a process of "naturalizing ourselves to a new form of life, a new world" and that in doing so it is essential to focus upon the inhabitants of the fictional world.[44] Ogden, however, seems to be gesturing more towards the sort of reading position with which proceduralists would agree. He finds Cavell "too eager to 'hear' things in the text, to discover the cleverest readings rather than to permit the text to yield its unique, multiform logic" and, so, Ogden opts to "allow *Endgame* to speak for itself."[45] The wording of the play must not speak *to* but rather speak *for itself*, to proceed without intention. The wording of Hamm's request for his dog is, then, worth noting for its indeterminacy: "Is my dog ready?"[46] Clov's responses, that the dog "lacks a leg" and that he is "a *kind* of Pomeranian,"[47] are equally telling; the animal is, after all, a "black toy dog" with "three legs."[48] Here we cannot read *Endgame* literally because we assume the pose that the text proceeds on its own; the zero-player games moves itself and speaks itself. So, not only is the dog a simulation, but it is one that reveals itself as an imperfect simulation demonstrative of a debilitating mutation of the appendages of agential mobility. Indeed, the lifeless dog becomes metonymical of both the status of

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43   Benjamin H. Ogden, "What Philosophy Can't Say about Literature: Stanley Cavell and *Endgame*" in *Philosophy and Literature* 33.1 (2009), 127.
44   Ibid, 127.
45   Ibid. 136.
46   Beckett, *Endgame* 39.
47   Ibid., 39, emphasis added.
48   Ibid., 39.

language and the text itself:

> CLOV:
> Your dogs are here.
> *(He hands the dog to Hamm who feels it, fondles it.)*
> HAMM:
> He's white, isn't he?
> CLOV:
> Nearly.
> HAMM:
> What do you mean, nearly? Is he white or isn't he?
> CLOV:
> He isn't.
> *(Pause.)*
> HAMM:
> You've forgotten the sex.
>
> CLOV *(vexed)*:
> But he isn't finished. The sex goes on at the end.
> *(Pause.)*
> HAMM:
> You haven't put on his ribbon.
>
> CLOV *(angrily)*:
> But he isn't finished, I tell you! First you finish your dog and
> then you put on his ribbon!
> *(Pause.)*
> HAMM:
> Can he stand?
> …
> CLOV:
> Wait!
> *(He squats down and tries to get the dog to stand on its three legs, fails,
> lets it go. The dog falls on its side.)*
> HAMM *(impatiently)*:

Well?

CLOV:
He's standing.

HAMM (*groping for the dog*):
Where? Where is he?
(*Clov holds up the dog in a standing position.*)

CLOV:
There.
(*He takes Hamm's hand and guides it towards the dog's head.*)

HAMM (*his hand on the dog's head*):
Is he gazing at me?

CLOV:
Yes.

HAMM (*proudly*):
As if he were asking me to take him for a walk?

CLOV:
If you like.

HAMM (*as before*):
Or as if he were begging me for a bone.
(*He withdraws his hand.*)

Leave him like that, standing there imploring me.
(*Clov straightens up. The dog falls on its side.*)[49]

While Clov is only partly committed to the farce – he refers to the dog in the plural, concedes that the black dog is "nearly" white, only to, upon interrogation, admit that the dog, in fact, "isn't" – he does seem to demonstrate a recognition of the proceduralism of the narrative as metonymically expressed by the dog. His response to Hamm's accusation that the maker has forgotten the dog's reproductive organs is indicative of the diegesis itself as an iterative procedure that is at once static and sterile. The dog "isn't finished" and, until the end, the dog will be without genitalia. However, there is no end to *Endgame*; the procedure forbids it. *Endgame* is,

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49   Ibid., 40-41.

rather, taking its course, and will continually do so *ad infinitum*. The dog cannot stand and therefore cannot – like Hamm, Nagg, Nell, and the narrative itself in our thought experiment – have or be engaged by any agential mobility. The text, like the dog, can only demonstrate the *as if* it were being asked to be taken for a walk; or, *as if* the intervention of agency and intentionally could provide alternatives to the strict design. That the narrative can "go on" differently from the procedural patterns determined by the text's design is impossible: an attempt at intentional intervention will, like the dog, fall flat. Indeed, while both Hamm and Clov indicate awareness of the proceduralism that governs the course of the text, here it is Clov who euphemistically expresses that the text is "not a real dog, he can't go."[50] Indeed, the diegesis of the play, like the dog, is a simulation: it is "not even a real dog!"[51] It is not a real diegetic environment; it is not a game with a player; it "can't go"; it simply takes its course.

Simulation Fever: *Endgame* as Zero-Player Simulation

That *Endgame* is not a real diegetic environment suggests its status not only as a zero-player game but also as a simulation. Keller identifies simulation as follows: "simulo *v*. 1. *To make* a thing *like* another; *to imitate, copy*…2. *To represent* a thing as being which has no existence, *to feign* a thing to be what it is not."[52] So, simulation is simultaneously openly mimetic and artificial. Ian Bogost, in *Unit Operations* (2006), employs the concept of "simulation fever" as a means of discussing the implications of procedurality on the relation between the system and its player. "Working through simulation fever means learning how to express what simulations choose to embed and to exclude," he writes.[53] The player thus becomes integrated in his or her relation to the processes determined by the

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50   Ibid., 56.
51   Ibid., 69.
52   Keller, 203.
53   Ian Bogost, *Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 109.

game. Working through simulation fever involves the recognition of how one is embedded within and how one is excluded from the procedurality of the game. This mode thus permits flexibility in the player's agency in understanding the game while simultaneously remaining implicated in and determined by the game processes. Bogost suggests that certain kinds of interpretation may achieve a point through which one may understand the system from within and without:

> This would encourage player-critics to work through the simulation anxiety a simulation generates. Part of this process takes place within the gameplay, as the player goes through cycles of configuring the game by engaging its unit operations. Another process of configuration has to do with working through the play's subjective response to the game, the internalizations of its cybernetic feedback loops.[54]

What Bogost identifies as the working through of a simulation anxiety is, in fact, a kind of anxiety itself. That is, the anxiety of undergoing an experience with simulation is that which discloses anxiety to itself. The experience cannot be one governed by anxiety, that causing anxiety, but instead anxiety is that disposition which reveals anxiety. Anxiety is that which helps the player both recognize how he or she is embedded within the systemic procedure of *Endgame*. Yet it also forces the indifference of the system to that recognition by unveiling how one's intentionality is ultimately, and paradoxically, excluded from the operation. The concept of simulation fever, then, is a means of making meaningful the constitutive system while at the same time attempting to express how the player or reader experiences the system.

The player is, then, both embedded and excluded. Yet, this balance is, unlike almost every other element in Beckett's text, hardly symmetrical. Hamm and Clov are ultimately forced into this paradoxical stance. They seem largely aware of the procedurality of the text – of the parody that mocks the possibility for them

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54   Ibid., 108-109.

to live authentically or make meaningful and meditative choice – and, yet, are unable to have an effect on the very procedurality that determines the reiterative narrative. So, when Hamm, for example, remarks that "nature has forgotten us,"[55] and Clov responds that "there's no more nature,"[56] the two are simultaneously recognizing the text itself as a kind of simulation as well as that constitutive environment, nature itself, being excluded from the artificial system in which they take their course. "No more nature! You exaggerate,"[57] Hamm repudiates suggesting that there is at least something that resembles nature – the artifact, the text as simulation – but Clov is steadfast: there is no more nature "in the vicinity."[58] That is, simulation is an approximation but not a spatial proximity; Hamm and Clov are, as a result, both embedded and excluded from the system. Again, Hamm and Clov do not fully correspond with Bogost's player; instead, it is the reader of *Endgame* who is most intimately embedded, and yet taking the conceit of the text as a case of radical procedurality – the zero-player game – the reader is, paradoxically, excluded from the text by being embedded in the text. While simulation fever allows, Sicart writes, for games to "convey messages and create aesthetic and cultural experiences by making players think and reflect about the very nature of the rules,"[59] this reflexivity is one that gestures more intensely to that which is excluded rather than that which is embedded. If Hamm and Clov were fully embedded in the text, one could suppose some degree of agency from them. Because they are not, one sees that they often do think and reflect about the nature of the rules, but the nature of the rules is not natural, such rules are artificial, simulated, and programmed. The procedurality here does not establish a delicate balance between agency and absence; rather, the text is one that gestures more towards that which expresses diminution of choice to the point of absence, nothingness, exclusion: zero. "Both mental modeling and cognitive mapping

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55   Beckett, *Endgame*, 11.
56   Ibid.
57   Ibid.
58   Ibid.
59   Sicart,"Against Procedurality."

show how the interpretation of a game relies as much or more on what the simulation excludes or leaves ambiguous than on what it includes" writes Bogost.[60] In a strange turn for this logic, our zero-player game embeds the reader by readerly exclusion. Like Björk's and Juul's examination of what the player means to gaming in zero-player games, *Endgame* raises the question of what a reader means with a text *as* zero-player game. The simulation generated for the reader is that which intensifies self-awareness only towards the recognition of exclusion and conditionality of the reader.

As a demonstration of exclusion, the text's diegesis cannot signify, it calls forth, encourages, and summons the reader to identify with that which minifies beyond the elemental: an identification with the abyss, to encourage a narrative that proceeds on its own. Dramatizing the exclusion of the reader, the text operates in such a way as to make the narrative appear before itself as narrative. It does this by suggesting the absence of the extra-diegetic: an audience or reader. This procedure discloses itself most tellingly in the short episode where Clov turns a telescope, first on a window, and then on the auditorium. This move operates in two ways when considering the text as a kind of zero-player game. First, it reveals its diegetic level as something distinguished from, though somehow connected to and dependent upon, that which is *without* the text. Second, by emphasizing the misplacement of the extra-diegetic, Clov unveils that the link which establishes readerly agency has been severed:

> CLOV:
> *(He gets down, picks up the telescope, turns it on auditorium.)*
> I see... a multitude... in transports... of joy.
> *(Pause. He lowers telescope, looks at it.)*
> That's what I call a magnifier.
> *(He turns toward Hamm.)*
> Well? Don't we laugh?
>
> HAMM *(after reflection)*:
> I don't.

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60   Bogost, *Unit Operations*, 105.

CLOV *(after reflection)*:
Nor I.
(He gets up on ladder, turns the telescope on the without.)
Let's see.
(He looks, moving the telescope.)
Zero...
(he looks)
...zero...
(he looks)
...and zero.

HAMM:
Nothing stirs. All is—

CLOV:
Zer—[61]

The "zero" to which Clov refers is not simply the enigmatic nothingness that lies beyond the room. There is, at once, a reader beyond; however, the conceit demands the reader amounts to zero. The hiddenness of the reader, that is, announces itself via its exclusion from the automaton at hand. The reader is, in a word, zero. And yet, as Heidegger suggests, this kind of formulation deprives itself of its own object. A little later, at what seems to be a moment of intense anxiety in the text, Hamm attempts to initiate an intervention into the unfolding procedure, to bring something unthought, unknown, or unprogrammed into being: "Think of something,"[62] he requests.

Thinking in the Void: *Endgame*, Vilém Flusser, and Information Illiteracy

This formulation, of course, is all very strange for the reader. After all, the reader is to take the pose, or submit to the conceit, of exclusion. How then, if the characters of the play are incapable

61   Beckett, *Endgame*, 29.
62   Ibid., 46.

of action or thinking, is the reader to undergo experience while accepting the position of that which negates experience? This is perhaps our paradoxical intimacy with a text that resists intimacy. If we are to learn, we must dispose of everything we do so that we may be open to the essentials of the text that are given to us at any given moment. We learn to think by giving over our minds to nothingness: to give our minds over to the demonstration of nothingness, that which there is yet to think about and that which there is to think through. Like our idealized text, we must allow something to take its course, to surrender to a poetic (or should we say *programmed*) procedure. "We never come to thoughts," writes Heidegger, "they come to us."[63] Thoughts here, in a traditional sense, however, cannot truly arrive. Events are "the same as usual,"[64] remarks Clov, while Hamm concurs: "there's no reason for it to change"[65] because *telos* in our thought experiment is impossible. There is no end-point, only a suspended endgame, a still life. Hamm wishes for a terminus, "old endgame lost of old," he muses, "play and lose and have done with losing,"[66] but he cannot escape the patterns which oscillate and shiver forever. Clov, perhaps hopefully, remarks that "it may end. *(Pause.)*," yet remains partially practical: "all life long the same questions, the same answers."[67] Yet, each knows that the latter bit of Clov's remark is accurate and his hopefulness is procedural and without opportunity. "That's always the way at the end of the day, isn't it, Clov?," Hamm remarks, and Clov, astutely: "Always."[68] And this is, in itself, the revelation – a re-revelation – of infinite iterations: "it's the end of the day like any other day, isn't it, Clov?"[69] The infinite repetitiveness that constitutes them is not only temporal, it is also potential and conceptual: it is a procedure that proceeds without value. Hamm and Clov ex-

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63   Martin Heidegger, "The Thinker As Poet" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 6.
64   Beckett, *Endgame*, 4.
65   Ibid., 5.
66   Ibid., 82.
67   Ibid., 5.
68   Ibid., 13.
69   Ibid., 13.

perience that which is both strange and intimate to the reader: the disappearing influence of alphanumeric language and narrative replaced by automation, digitization, and proceduralism.

What proves significant with undergoing this paradoxical experience with *Endgame* is the manner through which this under-taking proves remarkable. "To undergo an experience with some-thing means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us." Heidegger continues:

> When we talk of "undergoing" an experience, we mean specifi-cally that the experience is not of our own making; to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. It is this something itself that comes about, comes to pass, happens.[70]

And yet, here, with each pass, something takes its course. *Endgame* does not permit an experience beyond what appears as the text itself. Clov and Hamm experience what comes about, what comes to pass, and what happens: they experience proceduralism. But this, for them, is what must always constitute experience. For the reader, however, *Endgame* establishes a textual conundrum through which he or she succumbs to the twofold nature of undergoing an experience. The narrative delimits experience to something con-fined and defined: that is, the narrative of *Endgame* is a procedural gesture. The experience of the reader, however – as a witness to a zero-player game – thus undergoes an experience that is not his or her own making. One must endure it, suffer it, and receive as it strikes us. *Endgame* is a text to which we must submit if we wish to learn, confront, and think in new ways in an era that increasingly relies on code that proceeds on its own and is indifferent to the liberal subject.

Experience is and has been for the liberal subject textual, linguistic, and agential; however, future experience suggests some-thing governed by the programmatic and procedural. "To un-

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70   Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language" in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz, (New York: Harper One, 1971), 57.

dergo an experience with language…means to let ourselves be properly concerned by the claim of language by entering into and submitting to it,"[71] writes Heidegger. He continues, "man finds the proper abode of his existence in language"[72] and therefore any "experience we undergo with language will touch the innermost nexus of our existence. We who speak language may thereupon become transformed."[73] If language is indeed the "house of be-ing," then the architecture of digital code anticipates very alien dwellings. That Clov is "doing his best to create a little order,"[74] is indicative of his struggle with this procedure. What is more, this struggle against the constitutive process shows that Clov's behavior is futile. He cannot submit and allow the experience to come and pass because he is bound to the procedure by a different, unrelent-ing logic. "A *program* is to be understood as writing directed not toward human beings but toward apparatuses," writes Flusser.[75] "Here no human beings require instruction," he continues, "in-structions can instead be issued to apparatuses. In this way, it be-comes clear that the goal of instruction," that is, proceduralism, causes subjects – or simulations of subjects – to "behave as they should automatically."[76] Heidegger's gesture towards the authen-ticity of an experience with language is indeed that which makes more striking the impossibility for thinking or experience on the level of *Endgame* as conceived in our thought experiment. Indeed, the manner in which we experience alphanumeric language differs radically from the way we experience programs.

"Scientific and philosophical information about language is one thing; and experience we undergo with language is another," Heidegger suggests, "whether the attempt to bring us face to face with the possibility of such an experience will succeed, and if it does, how far that possible success will go for each one of us – that

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71   Ibid.
72   Ibid.
73   Ibid.
74   Beckett, *Endgame*, 57.
75   Vilém Flusser, *Does Writing Have a Future?* trans. Nancy Ann Roth, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2011), 56.
76   Ibid.

is not up to any of us."[77] And while the possibility of any experience is something that proceeds outside agency, the possibility and value of experience in *Endgame*'s proceduralist simulation are strikingly demoted. Indeed, for Heidegger information about language – a text as simulation – thus produces something radically altered from an experience with language.

Does *Endgame* – as a text that simulates the effects of our information illiteracy – become a space or gesture of cruelty? Hamm's constant physical discomfort and his addiction to pain killers suggest a kind of simulation whereby this discomfort proceeds pitilessly as if inflicted by the something that is taking its course, that a constitutive narrative unfolds then repeats relentlessly and indifferently. The demonstration at play is a text that proceeds without intention. What is uncomfortable for the humanities is that we, as readers and theorists of narrative, are left out of the equation. On six occasions Hamm asks for his pain killer.[78] Hamm, with his programmed addiction, expects that there should be relief. "There's no more pain-killer,"[79] Clov finally responds, therefore assuming that, at this final yet endless recursive iteration, there never was and never will be pain-killers for Hamm. Hamm's response, "Good…!,"[80] is not so much one of reserve or coming-to-terms as it is an approval that, as always, something is taking its course as it should. That is, he responds not to the nonexistence of the pain-killer so much as to the functional accuracy of the diegetic actant proceeding recursively and unintentionally as it *must*. Indeed, "in logically constructed computer programs," writes Flusser, "there is no symbol for *should*".[81] The textual simulation, the procedural actant, is another thing entirely from an experience with language. There is no symbol for *should* and, resultantly, to assume *Endgame* as a cruel simulation is to approach the situation before us with misleading criteria. The zero-reader text does not invite intimacy: instead, it excludes. Digital narrative is something very alien,

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77   Heidegger "The Nature of Language," 59.
78   Beckett, *Endgame*, 7, 12, 24, 35, 48, 71.
79   Ibid.,71.
80   Ibid.
81   Flusser, *Does Writing Have a Future?*, 57.

something that proceeds with indifference. We can talk *about* it with critical biases, but we cannot fully engage *with it* in traditional ways because there is a fundamental change in the predominant code underlying knowledge (which is embedded in knowledge production and knowledge mobilization) currently taking place.

On the level of the reader, then, the procedural indifference plays out in a slightly different way: it is not painful as much as anxious and uncomfortable. Though the conceit of our thought experiment is that *Endgame* is a zero-player game, the text is nevertheless expressed through language. Oddly enough, though, for our thought experiment we must imagine that the language negates itself by posing as something like programmed code. "When the issue is to put into language something which has never yet been spoken, then everything depends on whether language gives or withholds the appropriate word" writes Heidegger.[82] That which has never been spoken, in the case of *Endgame*, is the use of language for the conceit of absolute procedural narrative motion: digital code is not fully informed by our thinking yet there is evidence that it may gradually constitute our thinking. So *Endgame*, like the reader, proceeds to put into motion that which is already in motion, to endure the diegesis but also submit to its absence from its very proceduralism. The experience of *Endgame* is, then, where experience breaks off just as, for those of us who are not code literate, our experience with the coming dominant cultural code breaks off. "Where something breaks off, a breach, a diminution has occurred. To diminish means to take away, to cause a lack," Heidegger notes.[83] He goes on: "no thing is where the word is lacking."[84] That is, no thing – simulation – is where code determines. Furthermore, the reader, being where the word is lacking, poses as an absence. This absence, though, is not a renunciation; indeed, it would be absurd to push the conceit so far. Instead, the sense and ability to think about no-sense and unthinking opens the possibility for the simultaneity of experience and non-experience:

82   Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," 59.
83   Ibid., 60.
84   Ibid., 60.

code, simulation, and proxy are the best sites for this procedure. Not only is the text a demonstration of meaninglessness, its effects operate to dramatize the diminution of the self. It provides the analgesia that is forbidden to Hamm; if we submit, it reveals the threshold of experience.

In the years since Beckett's death in 1989, developments in the instruction of digital code have rapidly taken root. Ultimately, the pose the reader must assume when reading *Endgame* interrogates a fundamental conundrum at the centre of reading today, a conundrum that goes beyond Beckett. Jonathan Boulter writes that one of the fundamental themes of Beckett's work is "the agonizing fact of being in a language that endlessly composes and decomposes the subject. Being in Beckett means existing, finally and forever, in a language."[85] For Heidegger, Being is *Dasein*; more specifically, Being is an openness and submission to linguistic and poetic experience. The language of *Endgame* is that which asks the reader to assume the submission to its proceduralism: our thought experiment asks of us how *Endgame* also makes manifest the agonizing fact of being in a world increasingly organized, mobilized, and run by digital code. Ogden suggests that the language of *Endgame* "might justly be considered a dialect, a language that shares an alphabet and lexicon but that differs grammatically and syntactically to such a degree that communication can effectively break down between those speaking the dialect and those speaking the language from which it derives."[86] But Beckett goes even further than this. He establishes a textual logic in which the text *must* speak itself. Flusser suggests that the transition from alphanumerical language to digital code will have a radical impact on the very nature of critique. With this transition, "critique becomes a synthesized practice, based on knowledge that is interdisciplinary and part of a network of knowledges."[87] The transition to learning digital code,

85   Jonathan Boulter, "'Speak no more': The Hermeneutical Function of Narrative in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*," in *Samuel Beckett: A Casebook*, edited by Jennifer M. Jeffers, (New York: Garland Pub, 1998), 133.
86   Ogden, 135.
87   Anke Finger, Rainer Guldin, and Gustavo Bernardo, *Vilém Flusser: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 74.

for Flusser, is a way to relearn thought:

> For us, thinking was, and still is, a process that moves forwards, that frees itself from images, from representations, that criticizes them, thereby becoming increasingly conceptual. We have the alphabet to thank for this understanding of thought and this understanding of thought to thank for the alphabet (feedback). The new digital codes arose from the new understanding of thought, and feedback is making us think in quanta and images more clearly the more we use the new codes.[88]

Assuming a more intense degree of intentionality than Heidegger's openness, Beckett's negation, or Bogost's proceduralism, Flusser does, however, anticipate a kind of productivity to this shift. Perhaps the endgame is alphanumeric language itself. That which will ultimately be lost of old will indeed play and lose and have done with losing. The alternative in this instance is digital code; while it offers alternatives, it nevertheless also attracts the alternatives of the zero-player game, of a different order of proceduralism, a new kind of poetic submission. While Murphy suggests that, in Beckett, "expression necessarily precedes existence,"[89] here we suggest that being submits to procedure and precedes the codification of existence. The engagement with digital code for most readers, however, is of a different order of reader negation: information illiteracy. The reader's proof of existence is made manifest via the pose of absence: the anxiety here is the intense non-self awareness or intense self non-awareness. We are not compelled to repeat so much as we are compelled to recognize that repetition, oscillation, and still life are apt metaphors for how closely we are able to truly identify with the stories – and the technical means upon which they are made possible – that we rely upon. The reader's inability to identify on an intimate level with the text is an expression of

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88   Flusser, *Does Writing have a Future?*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 145.
89   P. J. Murphy, "Beckett and the Philosophers" in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, edited by John Pilling, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 222.

the inability to engage with the zero-player automaton; moreover, though, our exclusion is an experiment for the traditionally literate to experience the coming information illiteracy. Not only does the effect of *Endgame* allow us to imagine a zero-player/reader text in the sense that it calls for the clearing for thinking, it is the zero-player game whose central conceit is bringing to light our absence from the coming thought of a new competence via a new language: the processes of code.

So, it is appropriate to recognize the ontological puzzle that Beckett expresses as one that is in itself linguistic, poetic, and procedural. Yet, *Endgame*, in our thought experiment in particular, expresses most intensely the poetic procedure: that which calls for surrender and proves a demonstration of meaninglessness. Without meaning, the semantic force of language, we experience anxiety. The removal of self in this thought experiment demands of the reader to assume the role of thinker. To think of nothingness is to dedicate a concept or referent to *nothing* thus negating its very status as that which it is, which is the *is not*. We must assume nothingness as a means of being open to its valuelessness, to submit and surrender to its procedure. In this way – though difficult and in many ways at the parameters of articulation – *Endgame* discloses a remarkable opening for thought. By deconstructing the biases of perception, *Endgame* projects, to borrow a phrase from Paul Éluard, a "vision beyond this crass, insensible reality which we are expected to accept with resignation, [and] conducts us into a liberated world where we consent to everything, where nothing is incomprehensible"[90] Our thought experiment demands that we must take seriously the idea that the text takes its course and that our identification with nothingness is the very path to considering how we may go on when we can no longer go on. Topsfield is correct to remark that, despite the relentless logic of diminution and negation in Beckett, "the 'message' of *Endgame* is positive."[91] Our non-engagement is our path to engagement with the procedure

90   Paul Éluard, "Beyond Painting," *Beyond Painting*, (Solar Books, 2008), 158-159.
91   Valerie Topsfield, *The Humour of Samuel Beckett*, (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998), 112.