

word image object

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Doctoral dissertation based on "Ping" by Samuel Beckett

Translated by Antoni Libera, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 2017

Dzyń by Samuel Beckett is a minimalist short poetic prose work. It is terse, symmetrical, and multi-layered. It is impossible to capture it in one theatre play, imagination, or visual work. At first, one is amazed and thrilled by its form. While reading, the structure of the language and construction of the piece uncovers further aspects and meanings. It means something else and sounds different when read quietly or aloud. Does it become more tangible when read aloud? The voice comes from the body — physicality and ephemerality of the voice. What makes it come out? Why do we keep going back and re-read?

When in contact with this work, we start having questions concerning the meaning, references, external layers — the effect and inner layers of the work — its structure, origins and what it conceals. These questions regard relationality, the nature of the language, the meaning of an image, the meaning of sound, speech, writing, form and expressibility in general.

Is it only surrendering to the impressionistic nature of *Dzyń* that grants one access to what it really touches? Do we understand this prose and fully get to know what it is at the moment of level-headed analysis? Combination of logic and intuition. Where and how do these two forces meet? In the face of limpness and “suspension”, which this work is full of, it is worth not to forget the question of forces that are (not) active here.

Is the image capable of capturing the ethereal nature of this text? What could this image be? And is it about capturing it at all? The word *fixed* appears around 20 times in the text. And yet the movement of thoughts, words, and notions is extremely dynamic and alive. The ascetic form intensifies this whole richness. It is intensified owing to the *residual form of the language*¹, fading speech, which speaks for itself. *Language speaks*² — and in its fragility — one would like to say and believe that — it establishes that it can establish something against this limpness. The reality in *Dzyń* is, however, uncertain, indeterminate, it is a place “in between”.

Although Beckett leads us through the abyss of whiteness, brightness and emptiness, it is not a text and content without tensions. All contrasts in *Dzyń* are balanced and harmonious. The tensions that they generate seem to be necessary for the harmony of opposites. It is possible that we are to melt and dissolve in this whiteness and surrender to it, but it is also possible that we are to remain in opposition, watching as if from a shaded place. From the exterior to the interior. From the interior to the exterior. There seems to be no other way than to accept the vagueness and relative character of this short prose. What is that whiteness? The activity of the white as background energy and radiation — young white Cosmos. The burning power of light, fading, dimming, blending, vanishing. These are longueurs and microsecond flashes, wordless silence and an excess of motion in stillness. There is groundlessness and openness of the horizon. Eyes — gazing into the distance? Walls. We are within this parallelepiped and yet we are not — *light warm, invisible intersections of planes*. Blurriness. Is it mist or illumination? *Gray Traces*. The body is white and fragile — disintegrating, simultaneously caught in the wind and immobilized, fixed. Silence cut by a high-pitched *dzyń* (*ping*) and low *growl* or *mumur*. The entire span of scale and sonority of structures are present here.

In order to speak of this prose, one has to confront and adopt many perspectives, yield to its shimmering form — accept its elusiveness. To the form and content that equally touch upon fading and creation, dying and living — about perishing and bringing to life. On their transience — thus, on movement. *Ping elsewhere*. Circular, uninterrupted, transformative motion.

Transience provokes the question of matter. To what extent does “matter possess the ability to anticipate meanings”? In connection with the literary language, to what degree can it express hidden content contained within it (and at its intersection)? How much can it strive to approach them and open up to dialogue with them? The subject of the relationality of *word image object* in the context of *Dzyń* (contrary to appearances, highly

relational) raises questions about the translatability of this brief poetic prose into the language of visual arts. It offers the opportunity to observe and experience the relationship among these three; it raises questions about the (non-)literalness of translation, the expression of visual matter in relation to the matter of words. It provides a space for contemplation on the transgression and reciprocity of the arts.

The terse form of *Dzyń* focuses on the structures of written language and sonorous speech, the purity of sound, and the nature of the word that eludes, exhausts itself, and loses its meaning despite the persistence of repetitions. It fades like figures that seem to be interconnected only with the background of image and sound, and every slightest movement that happens then — is it just the movement of thought? movement in space? movement in the body? — becomes significant as a life. In the face of this text, we become attentive. We observe this faint action in the smallest detail, and yet it slips away even more.

Dzyń is a moving construction, a musical composition, a score. It is like a piece that constantly begins and never ends, starts from a certain moment and yet never ends. It includes sequentialism. In the face of being fixed, we notice rhythms, intervals, elongations interrupted by a sudden *dzyń* (ping), unruliness of form, continuous motion - micro-motion. A fraction that sets or alters the course. Shade, semitone, flash. The word seems perpetually in motion, changing position, altering sentence structure, perspective.

While reading *Dzyń*, initially, we succumb to the impression, refraining from analysis to avoid disrupting the song of language. The song of language — or rather, the noise that arises from its layers? We seek meaning. It is still a language of consciousness, yet we seek some form of order, something stable, a sense to safeguard this motion — these repetitions from barrenness. On one hand, there is a need for grounding, and on the other, there is a general disagreement about immobility in the perception of this work. If we agree to it, perhaps then we can only hear this song? Perhaps only then do these words resonate, return, involuntarily settling within us, subsiding. Receding. Fading and enduring. Enduring like longing. Fading like the burning ache of absence.

The inner voice that speaks, uttering a string of sentences. They do not contain commas. As they approach the end, they become longer, more complex. They can be dissected into prime factors or grouped into fragments. Read as a whole or sequentially. The adoption of a single rule systematizes almost nothing. Observation of the detailed structure simultaneously brings us closer and distances us from anticipated meanings. It cannot be encompassed in a single gaze or reading. The prose of *Dzyń* is a broad horizon of impressions and hidden content. It is a description of experience and an experience itself to which Beckett enticingly draws the recipient. It opens up to a play of senses and a blending of space. Synesthesia. Asymmetry of meanings.

The reception of the artwork takes place on multiple levels of semantics, form, at points of collision and interplay, interactions, around interpretations and contexts. If we focus solely on analysis, much remains inaccessible. In Beckett's words, *Dance first. Think later. It's the natural order*. When we allow for flow, for ignorance, we are guided by form and matter. They actively participate in shaping thoughts. They give one time for thoughts to unfold. They are akin to silence in this regard. Yet, it allows co-constitution, makes resonance possible.

Dzyń is the sonority of form, which simultaneously fades and expands — it applies to both the sound and meaning of the text. In it, there is both creation and decay. It becomes a starting point for me to search for visual form and matter that could capture this ambiguity. It is more appropriate to say — polysemy. What matter can convey this complexity? What means can we use to express what is in *Dzyń* and what lies at the intersection of this encounter?

In my artistic practice, I reach for the classic workshop of artistic printmaking —

typographic printing and artistic graphics. Working with movable type (mobility, while also *fixed* — an involuntary play on words) allows us to literally touch the form and material of inscription. I explore this inscription — the notation and structure of *Dzyń*. I delineate, emboss, give shape to typography, seek expression through matter and image. Artistic graphics liberate me to do creative explorations, providing a field for experimentation. It is well-acquainted with repetitions, which seems crucial in the context of *Dzyń*. The experiment with the matrix becomes the origin of object creation. These objects are based on contrasts, soft and hard materials.

What I try to express in my artistic work is derived from observations and intuitive reception of *Dzyń*, at the intersection with the literature of the subject. The reflections that accompanied me during the creative process can be summarized as follows: Openness of form to what is fixed. Ephemeral nature versus the material. Repetition and transmutability. The perfection of duplication in the face of uniqueness. Multiplicity and reduction. The purity of form in the presence of imperfections and destruction. The structure of matter and the graphic image. Clarity and fading. Residual form and excessiveness. Sensuality in relation to geometry. Destruction of the matter in relation to the golden ratio. A single mark and the harmony of sounds. Notation and disharmony. Processuality and passivity. Cycle and repetition. Repetition and movement. The barrenness of repetitions and their consolidation, solidification. Rhythm in relation to sequence. Alignment and the interplay of all elements.

The artistic work titled word image object based on *Dzyń* by Samuel Beckett and translated by Antoni Libera is a response to its complexity and open character. *The word* of this poetic prose is elusive and evokes a sense of intensity, even as it fades in both sound and meaning, giving rise to vivid *imagery*. Perhaps it is only a single image, but with variable multiplicity. The artistic project of the doctoral work encompasses a collection of books created using classic typographic printing techniques and artistic graphics, as well as a series of books employing digital printing, graphics, and objects. The multitude and diversity of these elements remain interconnected and interdependent. The project presents visual intuitions where the ensemble of works harmonizes formally, allowing for multi-dimensional reception and the choice of interpretive direction. It captures the essence of Beckett's concise poetic prose at the level of visual structures and materiality. It is an attempt to express the visual form in relation to the language of *Dzyń*.

1 Jakub Momro "Literatura świadomości. Samuel Beckett-Podmiot-Negatywność" / "Literature of Consciousness. Samuel Beckett – Subject – Negativity", PL Academic Research, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, Kraków, 2010, pp. 19-22, residual form of the language — the expression used by Jakub Momro is the result of his reflections after reading and observations made by Jacques Derrida as regards reading and analyzing the language of Samuel Beckett's works. Jakub Momro also mentions Gilles Deleuze who calls Beckett's language "language of exhaustion", "exhausting", "exhaustion of language" (this expression is also evoked by Michał Kisiel in „Na początku było słowo a na końcu ciało: „no właśnie co” Samuela Becketta jako pragnienie uobecnienia” / "In the Beginning There Was the Word and in the End There Was Flesh": Samuel Beckett's "What Is the Word" as the Desire of Re-Presentation. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice, 2014, p. 24).

2 Martin Heidegger "On the Way to Language" / "W drodze do języka", translated by Janusz Mizera, Wydawnictwo Aletheia, Warszawa, 2007, p. 7. Language speaks. (...) Language is the home of being.

The entire doctoral dissertation titled *word image object* is in the form of artistic and written work.

The artistic work includes:

Digitally printed books
Letterpress printed books
Graphics
Objects
Video

The written work contains:

The written work contains reflections on the selected topic word image object in the context of Ping / Dzyń by Samuel Beckett translated by Antoni Libera. It is an attempt to analyze this short poetic prose and a collection of accompanying reflections in the work on the artistic project. It contains self-commentary, lists of works and references.

Documentation:

The documentation of the artistic work is presented in a separate volume. It contains photographs and reproductions of the artistic work. On the digital medium, there are pdf files of books made using digital printing, mp4 presentations of books made using letterpress printing and video.

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7.6.2023