

Flush With Meaning: Philosophical Hermeneutics in Samuel Beckett's *Watt* and William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*.

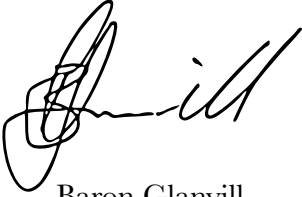
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Declaration

I declare this dissertation my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Baron Glanvill', written in a cursive style.

Baron Glanvill

30 August 2017

Abstract:

Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics has been ascribed a conservative position in relation to textual interpretation. I wish to explore what effect radical texts (texts which challenge Gadamer's definitions of textuality) have upon philosophical hermeneutics. I chose to work with *Watt* by Samuel Beckett and *Naked Lunch* by William S. Burroughs because both texts challenge assumptions surrounding meaning and understanding, two key facets of philosophical hermeneutics. Both novels illustrate the effect of fragmented historical horizons upon the interpretative process. This observation is accessible through Gadamer's descriptive theory and allows the interpretation of both *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* to engage with the meta-hermeneutic concerns in both avant-garde texts. The close-reading of both novels will illustrate how they challenge Gadamer's notion of play between horizons, and I will show this to be productive for both interpretative understanding as well as responding to Gadamer's critics. It is my contention that Gadamer's theoretical description offers a unique way to read *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* but crucially, philosophical hermeneutics is indelibly changed by an interaction with these two novels.

Keywords:

Philosophical hermeneutics, interpretation, effect, historical horizon.

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Introduction

Hermeneutics can be defined as the study of interpretation and understanding. The word is etymologically linked to the Greek god Hermes who, in Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* served as a messenger both amongst the gods—ferrying messages between Zeus and the rest of the pantheon—and between the gods and humans (Palmer 2). As a distinct scholarly discipline, hermeneutics has its origins in nineteenth-century theology which sought to formulate a unified theory of interpretation (Warnke 1). Biblical scholarship, particularly during the Reformation, relied on hermeneutics as a tool to respond to enquiries revolving around the “correct” interpretation of holy texts. But it was in the nineteenth-century that hermeneutics shifted gears, and became focused around ideas of “objectivity” and complete-ness. The question of hermeneutics moved from ways of understanding and interpreting texts towards the construction of methodologies involved in comprehending any utterances at all. F.D.E Schleiermacher pioneered this field by suggesting that the gap created by time forced hermeneutics to acknowledge that it always began from a position of *misunderstanding*. As such, hermeneutics needed to account for this temporal gulf and strive after an objective historicism. Schleiermacher's student, Wilhelm Dilthey, began the process of interrogating the different methodologies of the *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences) and the *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences). In Dilthey's formulation the knowledges of each methodological impulse were drastically different and he sought to build a methodology that would offer the humanities the same “objective” knowledge science laid claim to (Warnke 2). This early theoretical exploration of the methodology of hermeneutics was found to be wholly unsatisfactory by Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Hans-Georg Gadamer published his magnum opus *Truth and Method* in 1960. In this tome Gadamer outlined his description of interpretation. Building on Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Gadamer saw interpretation as the quintessential philosophical act. Gadamer was Heidegger's student in the 1920s, during the time that Heidegger was working on *Being and Time* (1927). Heidegger's early

thought influences much of *Truth and Method* but, as Heidegger remarked: “‘Hermeneutic philosophy’, that is Gadamer’s business” (Heidegger 395). The “hermeneutic philosophy” that Gadamer espoused in his 1960 publication sought to present a unified description of “what always occurs in understanding” (Gadamer 235). The description of understanding as a universal enterprise broadened the scope of hermeneutics. For Gadamer the “method” of hermeneutics was not as important as the hubristic “truth” that interpretation and understanding were anti-teleological concepts. This meant that the interpretative action of hermeneutics was always-already in process and that the claims to “objectivity” and complete understanding were wholly false. For Gadamer the focus of hermeneutics became an investigation into the second order processes of understanding, rather than methodological guidelines.

Despite Gadamer’s radical re-conception of hermeneutics as a process without *telos*, philosophical hermeneutics was derided for its failure to acknowledge the embedded ideologies at play during the interpretative process. Jürgen Habermas claimed that Gadamer’s description of understanding presented Tradition as hypostatized. For Habermas this designation of an all pervasive, monolithic Tradition obscures the power relationships embedded in understanding (Donghyun 104). In Habermas’s reading of philosophical hermeneutics, the unquestionable universality of Tradition necessarily imposes a series of “systematic distortions” embedded in the reader’s attempts to understand. Habermas locates his definition of Tradition in a potentially false dichotomy he establishes between Reason and authority. It is from this polarising dichotomy that Habermas found Gadamer’s description of understanding incapable of accounting for the interpellation of the reader and the text within their respective historical situations. As such both historically effected parties could not engage in any meaningful dialogue. In Habermas’s view “objective criticism” of certain Traditions is not a possibility for philosophical hermeneutics.

This dissertation seeks to address this criticism and explore its veracity in relation to two avant-garde, proto-Post-Modern novels published during the 1950s. By working closely with Samuel Beckett's *Watt* and William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* I will illustrate how the novels's preoccupation with interpretation and engagement with a reader present challenges to philosophical hermeneutics's description of understanding. These challenges I will argue, allow the meta-hermeneutic aspects of both texts to assume a central role in the interpretative discussion. I argue that these texts are *about* interpretation. The meaning of *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* is found in the ways this meta-hermeneutic content influences the reader's interpretative praxis. It is in the relation of the texts to themselves that a potential response to Jürgen Habermas's ideological critique of philosophical hermeneutics can be formulated.

i.

Samuel Beckett's *Watt* was published in 1953. The bulk of the text had been composed while Beckett was on the run from the Gestapo between 1943-1945 (Ackerley viii). The text was only published in 1953, by a subdivision of Olympia Press (Campbell 61). The type-script was sent to different publishing houses and some early reader's reports found the text "too wild and unintelligible" to be published—especially given the postwar limitations on the supply of paper (Ackerley xi). The novel is divided into five parts including an Addenda which "Only fatigue and disgust prevented" from being incorporated into the main body of the text (Beckett 215). The parts are not sequentially linear—"As Watt told the beginning of the story, not first, but second, so not fourth, but third" (Beckett 186). Part three is largely centred around the relationship between Watt and the fictional narrator Sam; offering the reader a bizarre representation of the construction of the novel itself. Part two takes place in Knott's establishment and captures Watt's ever increasing befuddlement with the quotidian events whilst he is in Knott's employment. Parts one and four are centred around a train station—a central symbol for Beckett's preoccupation with "waiting". But none of the above crude summary is what the novel is *about*. Instead, as I will argue, the novel is about interpretation and understanding.

Watt was the last long novel Beckett wrote in English. After *Watt* Beckett turned to composing in French. Much has been made of this turn away from English in the critical literature that surrounds *Watt*.¹ Most often the criticism focuses on the strange, unsettled language of *Watt* as a textual embodiment of Beckett's growing dissatisfaction with English. I believe this argument to be dangerously anachronistic. By ignoring *Watt*'s compilation dates, the argument seeks to explain away the "estranged kind of English" of *Watt* by reading it through the French novels which followed during the 1950s (Byron 497). This ultimately unsettles the contextually derived argument that this position relies on to explicate the multiple narrative disruptions of *Watt*. These responses rely on Beckett's context to explain *Watt*'s estranged language (a novel capturing the interstitial position of Beckett as outlaw during a time of chaos). However, by reading the French novels *into Watt* these arguments undercut their initial reliance on contextual location.

Beckett described the novel as an "unsatisfactory book" to George Reavey in 1947 while he sought a publisher for *Watt*. Beckett found the text to be "unsatisfactory" because it was written in "dribs and drabs" (Ackerley vii). The text could also be thought of as "unsatisfactory" in that it offers no interpretative resolution for the enigmatic eponymous character and his subject matter Mr Knott. Chris Ackerley has this to say about *Watt*:

The text assumes a fundamental condition of human fallibility and error, and it therefore includes intentional mistakes, with which to probe the soft centres of the rationalist enterprise. Further, it embodies Beckett's aesthetic of failure: Watt's endeavour to bear witness, to comprehend the essence of his master, Mr Knott, by means of his accidentals (a parody of both Scholasticism and the Cartesian *méthode*), leads not to a knowing but to a philosophical impasse, a consequent breakdown and finally to madness. (vii)

¹See Garin Dowd "Watt's Ways: Addenda, Borders and Courses". *Samuel Beckett Today*, Vol. 19 *Borderless Beckett: Tokyo 2006* (2008). Pp, 75-85 and Onno Koster's "Watt as Beckett's Parting With Joyce". *Samuel Beckett Today*, Vol. 21. *Where Never Before: Beckett's Poetics of Elsewhere* (2009). Pp, 193-207. Daniel Katz alludes to this argument briefly by suggesting that the stilted English and unconventional grammar serve to reinforce this position in *Saying I No More: Subjectivity and Consciousness in the Prose of Samuel Beckett*. [Northwestern University Press: Illinois, 1999].

Ackerley's description of the novel as embodying "Beckett's aesthetic of failure" is a popular critical rendering of *Watt*.² These readings of *Watt* revolve around the "unsatisfactory" nature of the interpretative resolution offered by the novel. These readings consider the criticisms of Western rational thought as well as criticisms of methodological approaches to understanding. Considering the "twelve possibilities" of Mr Knott's dinner arrangements that are worked through methodically by Watt, the absurd representation of methodological thought (Cartesian *méthode*) certainly lends itself to these "failurist" interpretations. Beckett's aesthetics of failure is possibly best encapsulated by a statement he made to George Duthuit in a series of interviews about art called *Three Dialogues*. Duthuit and Beckett discuss the "plane of the feasible", with Duthuit asking Beckett if this "plane" is so unsatisfactorily incomplete, what other "plane can there be for the maker?":

B. —Logically, none. Yet I speak of an art turning away from it in disgust, weary of puny exploits, weary of pretending to being able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road.

D. —And preferring what?

B. —The expression that 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. (Duthuit 103)

The preference Beckett describes regarding art is the closest approximation of his aesthetics of failure I can comfortably represent, before its representation becomes a self-effacing paradox. In *Watt* the failure to understand has most often been attributed to the titular character, who, in an ironic act of nominative determinism, never uncovers "what" Knott *is*. However, as I will argue the "failure" lies with the fictional representation of interpretation as capable of understanding completely. *Watt* seems to anticipate Gadamer's hubristic anti-teleological philosophical hermeneutics in that "understanding" completely is a misguided and impossible task. Instead, the text presents a series of interpretations offered by Watt's interlocutors and the fictional narrator, Sam, as examples of this failed faith in complete understanding. This is most overtly captured in Sam's relationship with Watt. Sam

²See Richard Coe *Beckett* (1964), John Fletcher *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* (1964), Raymond Federman *Journey To Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction* (1965), Jacqueline Hofer *Watt in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays* edited by Martin Esslin (1965), Lawrence Harvey *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (1970), David Hesla *The Shape of Chaos: An Interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett* (1970), Ruby Cohn *Back to Beckett* (1973), J.E. Dearlove *Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Nonrelational Art* (1983), Michael Mooney "Watt: Samuel Beckett's Sceptical Fiction," in *Rethinking Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Lance St. John Butler and Robin Davis (1990), John Pilling "Beckett's English Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, edited by John Pilling, 17-42 (1993)

casts Watt as object for interpretation, denying him a historicity. For Gadamer's system this transcendent location means that Watt is incapable of understanding. Sam's failure to *allow* Watt to understand, to "hear the questions" Watt asks of him, is a faulty hermeneutic practice that leads to Watt's failed interpretations (Gadamer 280). The focus for my engagement with *Watt* lies not in the ways Watt fails to understand Knott, but in the ways Sam fails to understand Watt.

Sam fails to understand the character of his narrative and, as such the text is a representation of Sam's failed interpretative gestures rather than Watt's. In this vein the text becomes self-interpreting; the multi-layered narrative captures Sam's engagement with Watt, Watt's engagement with the world of Sam's narrative, and these hermeneutic gestures influence the reader's interpretation. The text, in Marc Byron's formulation is "ecstatic" because it is never "simply there" offering itself up as a willing, and available, interpretative partner for the reader to engage with (495). Jonathan Stuart Boulter describes this process as a hermeneutics of relation because Watt can never speak of the "object" itself because he is the "object", and to talk of himself as an "object" would be to deny his own subjectivity thus denying him the possibility of thinking about himself (152).

I will suggest that it is this tension between interpreter and interpretable object that creates the ecstatic self-relation of *Watt* to itself. I will use philosophical hermeneutics to discuss the dramatised aspects of interpretation that *Watt* represents. This will allow me to interrogate the relation of the reader to the text. If *Watt* is a self-interpreting novel, what is the role of the reader and what does this self-interpretation do to the reader's hermeneutic praxis as defined by philosophical hermeneutics? These will be my guiding questions in this chapter on *Watt*.

ii.

In 1959 William Seward Burroughs published *Naked Lunch* with French "purveyors of pornography", Olympia Press (Ackerley x). Maurice Girodias, Olympia Press's owner, specialised in

the distribution of “dirty books (d.bs)” with green covers to returning soldiers who passed through Paris in the 1950s (Campbell 70). *Naked Lunch* was a collection of notes that Burroughs had been collecting and writing for the entire decade. The bulk of these notes emerged during his time in Tangiers. When Girodias first saw the rat eaten, mouldy manuscript of *Naked Lunch* in 1958, he found it too distasteful for publication. However an excerpt from the text appeared in a literary journal called *Big Table* in America and caused such uproar with the contemporary literary world that Girodias decided to capitalise on the publicity by publishing the book in 1959 (Morgan 332). Despite this early publication, the text was only published in the US and the UK in 1964, after a landmark censorship trial which “in effect marked the end of literary censorship in the United States” (Morgan 370). Burroughs was very concerned with what he termed “control”; a blanket term encapsulating a diverse and far reaching range of limitations placed on individuals: from bureaucratic agencies (including censorship boards), to narcotics law enforcement, the temporal structuring of time in the form of the clock and, most importantly, language as a form of thought control. *Naked Lunch* captures this anxiety with control, especially in the form of language and understanding.

Burroughs elaborated his theory of language fairly often in interviews and published a “manifesto” of sorts in *The Electronic Revolution*. He believed language to be part of the “Word Virus” which forced humanity into a representational impasse. Burroughs believed that words were only effective if they could capture the instantaneity of representation afforded by a picture: in which our desire to constantly capture life in words alienated us from life. In *Naked Lunch* Burroughs claims to be offering a “blue-print, a How-To Book...To extend levels of experience by opening the door at the end of a long hall way...Doors that open in *Silence*...*Naked Lunch* demands Silence from the Reader...Otherwise he is taking his own pulse.” (187). This didactic claim of the text seems to create an impasse for Burroughs: if words are the enemy of freedom, how can this *novel* teach the “Reader”

“How-To” get “there”?³ Burroughs’s text seems to establish itself as an authority on the dangers of authority. For the reader who wishes to take Burroughs seriously and treat his text as Gadamer would have it—in possession of whole, unified and coherent meanings (Linge xx)—the challenge is to remain aware of this impasse created by Burroughs’s reliance and absolute distrust of language as a medium of expression. I will argue that there is a potentially productive anxiety effected through the acknowledgement of this impasse. It becomes apparent that *Naked Lunch* is not only a “blue-print” but also an affecting model; influencing the reader through language and establishing him/her as a “mark” to be “conned” by the “Word Virus”.

The novel itself has been subjected to multiple readings since its publication in 1959. Critical responses have ranged from the morally outraged to the theoretically intrigued. *Naked Lunch* occupies a unique space in Burroughs’s oeuvre, as it represents a turn away from the naive reportage style of his two earlier works *Junkie* and *Queer*.⁴ Initial reviews of *Naked Lunch* saw it as a morally abhorrent, destructive novel—one famous review titled “Ugh...” contributed largely to this sentiment. Later scholarship however, began to see in Burroughs’s experimental form a ready ally for the emerging post-structuralist schools of literary engagement.⁵ The other mode of critical response generated by *Naked Lunch* took the form of literary biography, intertwined with *ad hominem* historicism. Much of this criticism is waylaid by the public persona that William S. Burroughs became as a figure of the

³ Just to be absolutely clear: I am not interested in where “there” is. I am interested in the effect this claim has on hermeneutic practice for the reader.

⁴ *Queer* was written in 1947 but would only be published in 1987. The text remains incomplete, as Burroughs turned his back on the burgeoning novel, choosing instead to focus on the emerging collection of notes which would become *Naked Lunch*.

⁵ See Mary McCarthy “Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch*” (1963), Tony Tanner “Rub out the Word” (1971), Antony Hilfer “Mariner and Wedding Guest in William S. Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch*” (1980), Robin Lydenberg *Word Cultures: Radical theory and Practice in William S. Burroughs’s Fiction* (1987), Wayne Pounds “The Postmodern Anus: Parody and Utopia in Two Recent Novels by William S. Burroughs.” (1987), David Ingram “William Burroughs and Language” (1996), Timothy Murphy *Wising up the Marks: The Amodern William Burroughs* (1997), Ron Loewinsohn “‘Gentle Reader, I fain would spare you this, but my pen hath its will like the Ancient Mariner’: Narrator(s) and Audience in William S. Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch*” (1998) Kathryn Hume “William S. Burroughs’s Phantasmic Geography” (1999), Pollina Mackay “The Naked Apocalypse of William S. Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch*” (2003). Christopher Land “Apomorphine Silence: Cutting-Up Burroughs’s Theory of Language and Control” (2005).

“underground”.⁶ This criticism is incredibly valuable but I find aspects of this literary biographical response contentious. Firstly, much of this work centres around responding to the incorrect perception that Burroughs exists on the margins of the academy. Judging by the wealth of critical responses generated by his fiction, his polemical theorising, and his experimentation in multi-modal art, Burroughs is firmly entrenched within the oeuvre of American Literature (much to his own disgruntlement I’m sure). Secondly, the vast majority of this criticism seeks to understand Burroughs’s experiments in fiction as a consequence of his biographical details—drug addiction, experimenting with his personal perspective through various pseudo-scientific spiritual adaptations. Yet these articles very often stress the inherent random-ness of Burroughs’s texts. This is a contradiction: Burroughs cannot be consciously seeking the means to creating random disorder. This is something I address directly in my chapter on *Naked Lunch*.

Naked Lunch is best described as a mosaic novel: fragmented in form, it unites a series of characters rather than a central plot or story arc by placing them in the same horrific phantasmagoria. Ted Morgan describes the novel as such: “In form, *Naked Lunch* was startling, bearing as much resemblance to the conventional novel as a videotape to the Bayeux Tapestry, or a strobe light to a candle” (372). The text is comprised of what Burroughs’s termed “routines”: “Short, phantasmagorical prose pieces, usually involving mutations of people and events. . .”(Campbell 259). These routines create a patchwork of a paranoid world, filled with vying factions, double-agents, mind control, corrupt politicians and experimental doctors. The text is obsessed with representing manipulation and connivance. Burroughs expressly desires to move away from an allegorical understanding of language, desiring something more direct. Yet, in a move that can (and has) been likened to what

⁶ Jennie Skerl *William S. Burroughs* (1985), Barry Miles *William Burroughs: El Hombre Invisible* (1992) and *William S. Burroughs: A Life* (2014), Oliver Harris “Can You See A Virus? The Queer Cold War of William Burroughs” (1999), “Cold War Correspondents: Ginsberg, Kerouac, Cassady and the Political Economy of Beat Letters” (2000), “Beating the Academy” (2000) and *William Burroughs and the Secret of Fascination* (2003), Allen Johnson “Consumption, Addiction, Vision, Energy: Political Economies and Utopian Visions in the Writings of the Beat Generation” (2005), Alex Werener-Colan “Implicating the Confessor: The Autobiographical Ploy in William S. Burroughs’s Early Fiction” (2010), Fiona Paton “Monstrous Rhetoric: *Naked Lunch*, National Security and the Gothic Fifties” (2010), Ted Morgan *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs* (2012).

Wittgenstein described as “throwing away the ladder”, he uses language to create suspicion around meaning.⁷ I wish to explore the effect of this suspicion on philosophical hermeneutics by proffering a reading of *Naked Lunch* via Gadamer’s descriptive theory of understanding. In so doing I will show the productive sense of anxiety that *Naked Lunch* encourages and suggests a response to the potential impasse created by Burroughs’s authoritative language.

iii.

Neither *Watt* nor *Naked Lunch* are simple, linear texts. Neither novel could be considered to be whole, unified, nor coherent in their form. However, I will argue that while this might not be true for the whole of both texts, they do contain Gadamer’s notion of coherency, unity and wholeness in meaning in their parts. These parts in turn present fractured and multiple horizons of meaning. These horizons are central to Gadamer’s description of understanding and, the representation of their fragmentation in these two novels, I will argue, allows for the dissolution of the monolithic notion of Tradition Habermas employs when critiquing philosophical hermeneutics. I will show how the novels seem to pre-empt some of Gadamer’s claims about meaning through a dramatisation of an often frustrated interpretative dialogue. This is not to say that *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* are solely philosophical hermeneutic novels. Instead I wish to show how the representation of meaning both texts are interested in anticipates much of what Gadamer will suggest “always occurs” in understanding (Gadamer 235). *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* share a historical epoch with Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, and Gadamer’s failure to engage with these contemporary texts for his theoretical description alludes to the belatedness of theoretical description. Both novels betray an awareness of a reader which is manifest in the textual manipulation that the texts bring to bear on the reader’s attempt to understand through interpretative dialogue. Burroughs’s and Beckett’s novels similarly encourage

⁷ Peterson, R.G. “A Picture is a Fact: Wittgenstein and *The Naked Lunch*.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Jul., 1966) connects Burroughs’s text to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in which Wittgenstein creates a philosophical system designed to equip language with the tools to talk *about* language (amongst many other topics).

the reader to confront the impossibility of presenting a unified, coherent understanding of what they may mean, yet simultaneously require the reader to bear these conceptions of unified coherence in mind when confronting the radical doubt of interpretation.

It is in this challenge to unified coherent meaning that this dissertation wishes to propose an intervention. Both Burroughs's and Beckett's fascicular texts about and around their novels, suggest a conception of representation that is similar in cadence to John Keats's negative capability, "I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (1817, 40-41). For Keats this negative capability was a hallmark of a "great man in literature". Yet it has strong connections and disruptions for the hermeneutic enterprise described by Gadamer. In Keats's usage "negative capability" does not do much critical work. However, in these two novels the unyielding doubt, and insecurity created during the interpretative process, take on a far more radical hue than Keats's original description of negative capability. Both novels seek to show the impossibility and the dangers of having "complete" understanding. This is manifested in their mutual dissatisfaction with the medium they worked in: the word.

The seemingly shared dissatisfaction of Burroughs and Beckett with the word as a medium of expression takes on different guises in both author's works. In Burroughs's case this manifests itself much more stridently than in Beckett's novel. But this unyielding conception of language as unsatisfying is carried through to the reader during the interpretative dialogue which takes place when reading *Watt* and *Naked Lunch*. This creates a lot of the radical doubt that the reader is confronted with in both texts and establishes the meta-hermeneutic concerns of *Watt* and *Naked Lunch*. Both novels are self-consciously aware of the reader and employ this awareness in different ways. For Beckett the reader is relegated to a spectatorial position, witnessing the interpretative failures of Watt and by extension Sam. These failures to understand become parodic representations of the

interpretative manoeuvres the reader tries to make in relation to the text. For the Gadamerian reader the horizontal interplay between Watt in Sam's narrative, Watt telling Sam the story of his time at Knott's house, and Sam's narrative intrusions, work to create a multiplicity of horizons which complicate both the notion of unified coherency in meaning and the interpellation of reader and text within a certain ideological framework. *Naked Lunch* extends this horizontal interplay through the patchwork form of the novel itself. The text encourages the reader to keep in mind the interstitial spaces between the routines as well as the routines themselves. The text draws the reader in, at times creating an ally out of the intimacy in the narrative and in other instances, reminding the reader of the authority the text carries. This shared concern with the authority vested in a narrative voice (or voices in Burroughs's case) and the coincidental publication history of both novels, encouraged me to explore these novels in relation to one another. Both texts also represent a paradigm shift in both author's oeuvres. *Watt* bears many more of the Beckettian hallmarks that would become predominant tropes in his trilogy and famously in *Waiting for Godot*. The failed or constantly halted quest of Watt as he seeks to understand a world beyond the pages in which he is inscribed recur in Beckett's trilogy in the forms of Molloy and especially Malone. The mock Realism and linearity of *Murphy*, Beckett's first English novel, have been replaced with a philosophical frantiness which in his later works would take on the guise of the absurd. Burroughs's first novel *Junkie* is a reportage, linear narrative exploring Bill Lee's descent into the world of the heroin addict. Many of the scenes in *Junkie* are appropriated for *Naked Lunch*, but transform to meet the requirements of the violently disruptive and hyperbolic mosaic novel. *Naked Lunch* marks a shift in Burroughs's writing as he began to experiment with more radical forms of narrative after its publication. His cut-up trilogy, although more chaotic than *Naked Lunch*, bears the tonal intrusion of his 1959 watershed novel. Both authors moved away from a linearity in narrative in order to pursue a radical representation of the interpretative relationship established between text and reader. Both novels are somewhat pessimistic in their relationship to meaning as a form of control (for Burroughs) and as an impossible ideal, which one is "obligated" to pursue (for Beckett). By challenging the authority of the word, and meaning as a to-

talising term, the novels establish a space for the contemporary reader to experience the effect of the interpretative dialogue.

In both texts there is a desire to find meaning in the anti-teleological hermeneutic dialogue. There is a negative capability which the reader must balance in relation to his/her desire to understand. It is in this sense that I argue the texts are “flush with meaning”. Through their engagement with the reader, this negative capability is manifested in the interpretative dialogue. It becomes a key aspect of the interpretation of both *Watt* and *Naked Lunch*. If the reader remains aware of this process then Gadamer’s hermeneutics becomes a valuable description for the process of understanding. By remaining cognisant and hubristic in interpretation, the reader potentially avoids the embedded ideologies of his/her historical situation. This is directly in line with Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. I will discuss his theory and the criticisms thereof in full in the first chapter of this dissertation before moving on to grapple with *Watt* and *Naked Lunch*. This chapter will in many ways equip the dissertation with the critical vocabulary necessary for a meta-hermeneutic discussion of this ilk.

Chapter 1

Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Problem of Critique.

“It is important to note that all interpretation points in a direction rather than to some final end-point, in the sense that it points toward an open realm...” (Gadamer 68)

Hans-Georg Gadamer's opus *Truth and Method* was published in 1960 and presents his theory of philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer's analysis of hermeneutic activity takes on the moniker “philosophical” because he aimed to describe the conditions under which “understanding in general” takes place (Warnke 3). Gadamer explicitly states in the foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method* that his theory is not a prescriptive “system of rules” designed to “direct the methodological procedures of the human sciences” (xxv) but stands as a *description* of “what always occurs” in understanding (Gadamer 235). Philosophical hermeneutics is an attempt to describe, rather than explain, the phenomenon of understanding universally and responds to false claims of objectivity, and the potential nihilistic relativism of subjectivity in interpretation (Linge xi). Gadamer's main contribution to the field of hermeneutics is a rehabilitation of prejudgement. In *Truth and Method* he explores the failings of nineteenth century hermeneutics's attempts to overcome historical locations and avoid the interpellated prejudgements of contemporary engagement. I wish to show that the influence of the text on the reader's experience of the work of art finds expression in Gadamer's descriptive theory. Through the interaction of historically produced and producing prejudgements, the affect of the text on the reader's interpretative manoeuvres can be described. For *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* this pronounceability is crucial when trying to understand the novels. As such, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics offers a unique way to think through the interpretative problems presented by both texts.

Truth and Method argues that there is no truth in methodological approaches because the appeals to “objective” standpoints are fraught with an unacknowledged debt to the historical location from and within which they emerge (Linge xi). This unacknowledged historicity hampers interpretation because the potential for the text⁸ to challenge the interpreter’s understanding of the novel becomes subsumed and ultimately lost under the rubric of the methodology itself. Gadamer calls this challenge a claim made by the text on the interpreter. It is the interpreter’s responsibility to hear this claim because it is through this claim made by the text on the interpreter that the influence of the prejudgements imbedded in the texts themselves become pronounceable in the interpretative exchange. For Gadamer this is the site in which meaning and understanding manifest themselves. It is only during the interaction of the text’s prejudgements with the reader’s historical locale that meaning and understanding become part of the dialogic exchange. It is in this interaction that the effect of the text upon the reader’s historical locale becomes pronounceable. For Beckett’s and Burroughs’s texts this effect is crucial because it *is* the claim made on the reader during the interpretative act. However before I get to the relation between the texts and philosophical hermeneutics an exegesis of Gadamer’s theoretical framework is necessary.

1.1

Truth and Method critiques the hermeneutic frameworks of Wilhelm Dilthey and Friedrich Schleiermacher while developing Martin Heidegger’s theory of understanding as a key component of Being. Gadamer does this in order to describe an ontological hermeneutics rather than an epistemological hermeneutics. Philosophical hermeneutics was largely responding to hermeneutic practices that relied on a methodologically rigorous process to deny the influence of either the interpreter’s or the text’s historicity. Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is ontological because its “basic concern was not to defend a particular methodology of social science but to describe ‘what always oc-

⁸Gadamer does not limit his theory to the interpretation of literary texts but for the purposes of this dissertation I will be talking strictly about philosophical hermeneutics’s involvement with literary texts.

curs' (Gadamer 235) in understanding." (Mendelson 53) Gadamer contends that no adequate description of understanding for the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) has been proffered by hermeneuticians and he argues that this is a consequence of the Enlightenment's devotion to rational thought, the isolated subject, and the subsequent valorisation of scientific methodologies. Philosophical hermeneutics intends to reassert the finitude of rationality while venerating the anti-teleological interaction of texts with interpreters.

Hermeneutics can be divided into two main schools of thought: the subjectivist position and the objectivist position. The latter suggests that there is one correct meaning for the text and it is the reader's job to uncover what this meaning is. The subjectivist position situates itself in direct contrast to the objectivist, arguing that there are as many interpretations for a textual document as there are readers (Maclean 123). These two broad descriptions of the field of hermeneutics are important to bear in mind because of the oppositional nature of both positions. The objectivist space denies any subjectivity on the part of the reader and replaces interpretation on an individual scale with a devotion to methodological praxis intended to eradicate the reader's biases. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics suggests that all this process can ostensibly achieve is an interpretation of the methodology itself, rather than an understanding of the so-called "object of study".

The subjectivist position elevates the subject to a transcendental, or ahistorical, space in which his/her interpretation is valid purely because it has been initiated. The overriding concern with this position is that the text loses any claims to meaning it may have. However a more relevant problem—in this dissertation at least—for the subjectivist is that this position does not engage with the text's active role in influencing and, potentially, complicating the reader's interpretative assumptions. Gadamer's descriptive hermeneutics seeks to ally these two spaces of theoretical thought. It is his intention to cultivate the tension created between a contemporaneous reader and a text from a separate historical position by acknowledging the potential for these different temporal locations to elicit

an effect from both text and reader. A contemporary reader experiences the claims made by the text as an effect of the work on their historical locale.

These hermeneutic positions can be traced back to Cartesian philosophy. Descartes's methodology of doubt positions the subject as the foundational belief upon which all other knowledge is based. Responding to the seventeenth century's dominant philosophical trend of scepticism, Descartes attempted to find knowledge that was beyond doubt. Descartes wished to show a distinction between beliefs about the world and the existence of the world. This distinction would allow him to separate indubitable, foundational beliefs from the superstructural knowledge inferred from those foundational beliefs. The only belief that met the foundational condition Descartes found was the first part of the now famous maxim "I think..." (Sober 156). It is from this foundational belief that he inferred the second part of the maxim "... I am." For Descartes, the subject's existence was predicated on the fact that this "thinking thing" could think away from the influence of the external world. The fact that the subject could think away from everything, meant that thinking was indubitable. It is this isolation, containment, and distinctiveness which creates the binary thinking in the field of hermeneutics during the nineteenth century.

This very brief discussion about Descartes must take place because, as has been stated above, Gadamer's hermeneutics responds to the notion of methodology in interpretative practice. For Gadamer this commitment to methodology came about because of the express desire to know and understand objects in the world on their own terms, as things in themselves. This claim on knowledge is linked to concepts of objectivity and verifiable information. Methodologies are described as a means to circumnavigate the subject's position in relation to the objects under interrogation. Gadamer shows in *Truth and Method* how this understanding is false. The invocation of Descartes is necessary to gain an understanding of the distinction between subject and object. The distinction

between “subjects” and “objects” creates a contested hierarchical space in which both positions are vying for the potentially powerful position of interpreter.

1.2

Prior to Schleiermacher’s theory of interpretation, hermeneutics entailed the study of objects that were resistant to interpretation and attempted to understand the intended meaning of the object of interpretation (Linge xiii). Schleiermacher introduced the notion of an “*allgemeine Hermeneutik*, a ‘general hermeneutics’, which dealt with the ‘art of understanding’ as such, which pertained to the structure and function of understanding wherever it occurs” (Palmer 3). Schleiermacher argued that hermeneutics was not built around an attempt to understand but rather began from a position of *misunderstanding*. He posited that because the meanings of words changed throughout time and varied according to spatial locations as well, hermeneutics always began with misunderstanding (Linge xiii). This is a central intervention for Gadamer’s hermeneutics because it takes as its starting point Hegel’s understanding of art as “something past” (Hegel 11). The text has finished and the interpreter must make sense of it. This is something that Gadamer challenges by exploring the relationship between the interpretative moment and the experience of a work of art. For Schleiermacher, however, this “sense” always begins from a position of misunderstanding because the text “finished” in a different historicity.

Schleiermacher’s solution to the problem of misunderstanding was to recreate the historical context out of which the text emerged and remove the temporal biases of the interpreter. The text ceased to mean anything contemporaneously and the interpretation was focused on understanding what it had meant to the “original” reader (Gadamer 197). It is crucial to note that Schleiermacher does not argue that the contemporary reader should become the “original” reader. Instead he argues that in order for understanding to take place, and misunderstanding avoided, the reader must be on equal footing with the author; “the aim is to understand the writer better than he understood himself...” (Gadamer 198). For Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic endeavour,

speech and writing of whatever type become the spontaneous overflow of genius...Schleiermacher sees them [texts] only as 'artistic thoughts'; they are understood when methods are found that bring back to life the creative processes and intentions that engendered them. (Warnke 14)

Schleiermacher also conceived of the hermeneutic circle; a process of relation between the whole of the text and its component parts. Engagement with the hermeneutic circle constructed by the text required the reader to oscillate between the sentences, words, letters and punctuation of the text, and the apparent overall intention of the work (Maclean 124). The intended meaning of the work was under constant revision as the interpreter engaged with the parts and related them to the whole. However, because of the rigorous historical re-situating of the interpreter this process was deemed finite, and the analysis of the hermeneutic circle could be completed. Despite the acknowledgement of the cyclical nature of revision involved in interpretation, Schleiermacher saw this process as teleological because the historical moment had ended and the reader could understand the text entirely if s/he successfully recreated the historical moment from which the text emerged.

While the hermeneutic circle in Schleiermacher's conception renewed the focus on the relationship between form and content, it did not extend to the levels propounded by Heidegger and Gadamer. Both the latter theorists saw the hermeneutic circle as including the text, its context, its form, the thought process it expressed, and the position from which the contemporary reader approached the document. Crucially for Gadamer this process was finite as well, but in the sense that the current reader would die and his/her historical location would thus cease to be the contemporary locale. It is this more fluid conception of historicity that encouraged Gadamer to discuss the effect a work of art has on the contemporaneous experience of an interpreter. Schleiermacher, despite arguing that, "[t]he author can only really be understood by going back to the origin of the thought" never related the hermeneutic circle to these much larger dynamic forces (Gadamer 197).

The hermeneutical commitment of Schleiermacher saw an important shift away from the proposed notion of objective language towards an acknowledgement of the fluidity of meaning, in the concept of the hermeneutical circle the text's meaning was under revision during the interpretative

process. However, this fluidity forced the construction of a methodology in an attempt to regain the supposed sure footing of objective knowledge. Schleiermacher's theory aligns itself with the objectivist position: the temporary position of the reader is a problem to be overcome through a rigorous adherence to historical reconstruction. Through this reconstruction the "original" meaning of certain words and phrases could be gleaned. Schleiermacher's conception of hermeneutic endeavour sought to reinstate the "original" intended meaning, erasing the misunderstanding that contemporary engagement necessarily brought to bear upon the text. Perhaps the biggest contention with this view is that it removes any *experience* of the text the reader may have. Instead of being open to the claims made by the text on the reader's contemporary location, the text becomes a coded document with a historical key. Of course this was intended to remove the affect the reader's contemporary location may have on his/her interpretative endeavour but it has the unfortunate fallout of reducing the text to coded document rather than allowing the work of art to transform the reader's understanding of his/her position in history (Bernasconi xiv).

Schleiermacher's biographer, Wilhelm Dilthey, argued that this process could be taken one step further. Dilthey distinguished between understanding and explanation as two separate and distinct forms of knowledge. Dilthey proposed that explanations for why various objects behaved the way they did was to be strictly confined to the realm of science. While understanding, which required a more empathetic level of "knowing" was the domain of the human sciences, "understanding has to do with the experiencing of other subjects and minds than our own; it relies on the meaningfulness of all forms of expression in which experience is couched...meaningfulness bestowed upon expression by interpretation." (Maclean 124-125) For the interpreter to enter the world of the author whose text is under interrogation, the interpreting subject would have to negate his/her own temporal location. The onus is thus thrust upon the subject to position him/herself in the "life-world" of the author at the moment of conception for the text.

For Dilthey the reader's task was “to recover the original life-world they [textual documents] betoken and to understand the other person (the author or historical agent) as he understood himself” (Linge xiv). Gadamer describes Dilthey’s hermeneutic practice as a process of continued “othering”, as interpretation for Dilthey is always the judging of an “alien individuality” which must be understood “according to its own concepts and criteria of value” (Gadamer 204). Gadamer’s response to Dilthey’s perceived epistemic colonialism is to re-situate the text as an effective “object”. By allowing the text to be an active influence in the interpretative process, rather than a static interpretable “object”, the dialogic aspect of philosophical hermeneutics takes on a more equitable hue denying the domination of the interpretative conversation by either text or interpreter.

Both Schleiermacher and Dilthey explore the negative aspects of the interpreter’s historical position in relation to a text, positioning the interpreting subject in contrast to the “truths” offered by the interpretable object. However, by exploring these negative aspects the assumption is that historical knowledge is finite in nature and that the reader can extricate him/herself from a contemporary historical location. The contemporary interpreter can look back and extract information from an epoch because that epoch has come to an end and can thus be considered an annal to be employed when necessary. This fails to take heed of the continuum of historical Tradition, and positions historical knowledge as a stagnant force which has no bearing on contemporary life.

Schleiermacher and Dilthey’s positions describe the text as a silent partner in the interpretative exchange, disavowing any effect it may have upon the reader’s understanding of it. This comes about as a consequence of both theorists desire to deride any effect the contemporary reader may have on the interpretation of the text. For Schleiermacher this process overcame *misunderstanding* and for Dilthey this explored the distance between scientific knowledge and more empathetic (divinatory) knowledges attributed to the human sciences. Gadamer poses the disingenuous question of whether it is indeed possible to deny a present location by simply adopting an attitude or by applying a method (Linge xiv). For Gadamer’s hermeneutics,

It is only by way of the past that we have access to the present, and yet it is in the present and by way of what is most new and unforeseeable in it that we discover the resources of the past.
(Bernasconi xviii)

Methodologies betray the implicit assumptions of the methodology rather than revealing anything about the objects they are applied to. Gadamer's simple response to Schleiermacher and Dilthey's desire to remove the subject via methodology is to show how the subject is always caught up in the methodology itself. It is impossible to extricate the subject from their present location. Gadamer shows this to be the case through a process which involves a rejuvenation of the concepts of pre-judgement, Tradition and authority. In order for this to be properly expounded upon, I will move on to a brief discussion of Heidegger's conception of historical Being and the fore-structures of knowledge.

1.3

Cristina Lafont, in her essay "Hermeneutics", claims that Heidegger's boldest move in his opus *Being and Time* is his conception that philosophy is hermeneutic (Lafont 265. My emphasis).⁹ This conception is brought about because Heidegger extends the notion of interpretation to include interpretation of human being: "to be human is not primarily to be a rational animal, but first and foremost to be a self-interpreting animal" (Lafont 265). For Heidegger,

[u]nderstanding was no longer seen as a method of the cultural sciences to be counterposed to natural scientific explanation, but as a fundamental structure of human existence, a mode of being more basic than scientific activity (Mendelson 52).

Thus hermeneutics and interpretation were no longer isolated to an engagement with texts whose meaning was not immediately apparent, or correcting misunderstandings that arise through the course of time. Instead interpretation became an active part of bringing the individual's Being into

⁹ Heidegger's thought continued to develop after *Being and Time* but Gadamer did not incorporate Heidegger's later works into his hermeneutical endeavours. As such, this section will focus on Gadamer's employment of Heidegger's "hermeneutic" turn.

the world. This notable shift away from a hermeneutics of utility towards a hermeneutics of ontology is Heidegger's greatest influence on the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer because philosophical hermeneutic fashions itself as an ontological pursuit, rather than an epistemological study or formula.

Heidegger's *Being and Time* is an extended investigation into the meaning of Being (Dreyfus & Wrathall 3). He designates the term Dasein to encapsulate the "entity" that interrogates what it means to be. Dasein becomes Heidegger's "way of referring both to the human being and the type of Being that humans have" (Inwood 22). This concept is crucial for the notion of historicity which engages with the subjectivist/objectivist positions in hermeneutical theory.

For Heidegger, the greatest challenge facing philosophy is that the world exists. In his formulation Descartes' cogito is reversed. Thus for Heidegger, the process becomes "I am, therefore I think." The challenge for thinking is bringing Dasein into contact with the being-ness of the world. Perhaps the best way to speak of Dasein is to describe it as "not a definite actual thing, but the *possibility* of various ways of being" (Inwood 23 My emphasis). The word "possibility" is what makes me think this formulation of Dasein is a productive one. Effectively, Dasein is constantly being reviewed and performing the review. It is always-already interpreting being, and it brings certain fore-structures into play: fore-conceptions, fore-sights and fore-havings to bear upon the world (Inwood 46). However Dasein, and its progenitive understanding of being, exists in a constant state of flux because these fore-conceptions, fore-sights and fore-havings are constantly being revised in relation to the ontic objects that allow Dasein to "be there" and be described (Inwood 21).

Heidegger distinguishes between two questions, the question of ontics (the description of beings) and the question of ontology ("ways or modes of Being"). This distinction in the line of philosophical interrogation becomes a distinction between so called objects-in-the-world and the being-ness of these objects (Dreyfus & Wrathall 3). Entities which possess an ontical existence, objects which show themselves to be-in-the-world can be distinguished from those that possess an ontological Being (Da-

sein), a phenomenological existence situating them in time, space and in relation to the experience of them (Bleicher 99). This distinction is Heidegger's critique of the philosophical tradition which sought to explain phenomenological Being through descriptions of ontic properties. For Heidegger, the question should be aimed at understanding what structures make it possible for human Being (Dreyfus & Wrathall 3). This distinction is not exclusive. Instead, in Heidegger we find the introduction of a bleeding between "objects" and "subjects". Objects are influenced by the subjects which interpret them and, simultaneously, subjects are influenced by the objects. This crucially introduces a renewed focus on the experience of the objects in the world. Again this observation rather than distinction, reinforces the fluidity of the concept of Dasein. Heidegger claimed that this process of interaction was kept fluid by the processional movement of time itself. The location of Dasein within a temporal framework is the concept of historicity. Dasein comes to be aware of its continued engagement with itself through an ecstatic self-relation. In which Being is simultaneously present, actively interrogating the past and projecting into the future. The concept of historicity gestures towards a simultaneity of being within a historical framework and understanding the historiological significance of this framework which comes about through the act of interpretation.

1.4

Historicity allows Gadamer to acknowledge the temporal location of both the reader and the text. The separate locales occupied by both parties are known by Gadamer as the hermeneutical situation. These hermeneutical situations possess their own historically imbued fore-sights, fore-conceptions and fore-havings which must be negotiated. Thus, unlike the somewhat divinatory process of accessing the life-world of the author and denying the present situation of a reader, the interaction of these hermeneutical situations fully acknowledges the temporal differences and suggests that it is

these differences which become productive spaces in which the claims made on the reader by the text can be heard and interrogated.

Gadamer's theory of philosophical hermeneutics is a study of interpretations without a telos, removed from a nihilistic sense of relativism. This shift is crucial when considering the interaction of text and reader. Gadamer's rejuvenation of the notion of prejudgement, brought about by Heidegger's reconfiguration of historicity, allows the text to influence the reader and vice-a-versa. For Gadamer the effects of the text upon the prejudgements of the reader, effects which are made pronounceable when the reader is actively influencing the text through his/her interpretation, is the space in which a dialogic mediation of meaning takes place—"understanding is not a reconstruction but a mediation" (Linge xvi). The fluidity of historicity allows the integrity of both the text and the reader to be maintained whilst under interrogation.

In Gadamer's hermeneutical description what I have called the integrity of the text (essentially the meaning that the text brings to bear in the interpretative dialogue with the reader), is an essential component to the exchange of prejudgements in the dialogic exchange. Gadamer argues that in order for understanding to take place the reader must consider the text a coherent and unified object: in possession of completeness (305). He considers this initial projection to be a "formal condition of all understanding" through interpretation (305). This means that the text must initially be thought to have a meaning to convey. This process in turn allows for a more equitable dialogic exchange between the reader and the text. In order for the interpretative dialogue to begin, both parties must acknowledge that the dialogue will be "about something" (Linge xxi). The text guides the dialogue, however it does not confine the dialogue to the text.

The concept of completion is a point of intervention for this dissertation. This is because both *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* challenge this conception of an earnest interpretative dialogue which grants each interlocutor a position of unity, coherency, and in possession of something to say. Both texts chal-

lenge the reader's location in relation to the text. *Watt* positions the reader as a spectator—relegated to engaging with the interpretative efforts of Watt who lacks a historicity. Instead of the reader engaging with the meaning of the text in the interpretative exchange, the reader engages with the deferred interpretations of the world of the novel provided by Watt. Of course Watt's interpretations are provided by Sam so the deferral slips further away from the reader. Watt's lack of historicity dramatises a failed hermeneutic directly linked to Sam's failure to understand Watt. On the other hand *Naked Lunch* drags the reader into the bowels of the text, manipulating him/her into a position of anxiety—unsure of what to believe in a text that seems self-destructively critical of language. The texts each represent possible reactions and challenges to Gadamer's notion of completeness. *Watt* alienates the reader and *Naked Lunch* relies on the reader to bring its treatment of control and language into the interpretative dialogue through the anxious effects of the text. This will be a key tension in the engagement with Beckett's early hermeneutic novel and Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. In order to explore this tension, more needs to be said in relation to Gadamer's conception of effective history and crucially his proposition that "Being that can be understood is language" (Gadamer xxxi).

1.5

The Enlightenment's greatest effect on the contemporary field of hermeneutics was to foster the suspicion of "prejudice". Gadamer suggests that the Enlightenment was "prejudiced against the notion of prejudice" (Gadamer 283). The Enlightenment's veneration of rationality, an unbounded, immutable rationality, allowed history to influence and effect interpretation behind the back of the interpreter (Gadamer 38). The hermeneutical situation of the interpreter and the text respectively, deny any false claims to objectivity made on behalf of an immutable Reason. The hermeneutic situation is described by Gadamer as involving Tradition which operates through a conception of

“effective history”. Tradition is understood through language and, for Gadamer, exists as a central component to understanding gleaned through interpretation.

Tradition is an all encompassing, pervasive force for Gadamer’s hermeneutics: “[w]e are always situated within Traditions, and this is no objectifying process ...” (Gadamer 294). Tradition, in this formulation, is not a static exemplar handed down through the eons. Instead when Gadamer speaks of Tradition he means the historically inherited situation of the reader and the text. These historical situations are questioned and negotiated as history moves on. Tradition must be questioned in order for it to be rationally sublimated, or else it operates “behind [the reader’s] back” (Gadamer 38). By becoming aware of prejudgement the reader becomes aware of Tradition. The reader comes to know his/her and the text’s prejudgements through language. As such, Tradition manifests itself in language via the prejudgements exposed during interpretative dialogic exchange.

If Tradition permeates all aspects of Being and can only come into pronounceability through the interaction of prejudgements, then responding to the claims made on the reader and the text by Tradition becomes a key tenet of interpretative praxis. In Gadamer’s formulation the “very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it.” (Gadamer 312) The fact that the reader cannot extricate themselves from the hegemony of Tradition suggests that the interpellation of critical engagement with texts is more complicated than he may suggest. This is the criticism that Habermas offers of philosophical hermeneutics. Habermas argues that Tradition, in Gadamer’s formulation, cannot account for rational reflection because reflection allows for critical engagement with distorting ideologies in the interpretative process. However, Habermas’s criticism rests on a conception of a totalising Tradition. As such to respond critically to Tradition, from within the Tradition itself, speaks to the embedded-ness of language in the Traditional procession. In order to interrogate this process, the reader must be aware of the interpellation of Tradition through language in the interpretative dialogue; a process available to the Gadamerian reader who remains alert to the claims made on him/her by the text in the interpretative dialogue.

Tradition is an essential component of philosophical hermeneutics encouraging the interpreter to oscillate in dialogue with his/her present location and the Traditional aspects of history: “[u]nderstanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of Tradition” (Gadamer 302). This process of Tradition requires an interrogative awareness on the part of the reader to any aspects of the dialogic exchange that may appear habitual. In the case of *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* the disruption of interpretative praxis encourages this interrogation. The disruptions cause the interpretative discussion to focus on the effects of the novel, rather than solely on their content. In turn I will argue that the effect that the novels have on the expanded hermeneutic circle is intimately bound up with understanding the subject-matter of the novels. The novels fracture the monolithic notion of Tradition that is captured by philosophical hermeneutics, showing that a multiplicity of Traditions create a hermeneutical situation. Tradition becomes a key component in the expanded hermeneutic circle in which Gadamer and the early Heidegger work:

Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves in as much as we understand, participate in the evolution of Tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves. Thus the circle of understanding is not a “methodological” circle, but describes an element of the ontological structure of understanding. (Gadamer 305)

The constant renewal and revision of Tradition necessitates that the reader notice its effects in the interpretative dialogue. Gadamer uses the term “effective history” to explain this aspect of Tradition. Tradition is simultaneously delimiting and liberating for the interpretative process. The demarcated spaces in which interpretation can take place are an integral part of the interpretation itself—they simultaneously define the scope and create the possibility of interpretation. Gadamer says, “understanding will always retain the consciousness that we too belong to that world, and correlatively, that the work belongs to our world.” (301). But this “consciousness” of belonging is necessarily tethered to a historical locale and therefore cannot be considered to be free of the influence of history. Effective history is a description of the reader’s interaction with their historicity and the effect the historical location exerts over the interpretative dialogue. The influence Tradition exerts on the reader’s interpretative praxis is the effect of history. This effect is manifested in the disruption

tions to understanding that the reader encounters in the texts because it these instances of being “pulled up short” in interpretation which encourage interpretative engagement (Gadamer 280).

Once more Gadamer’s theoretical assumption in these instances of “being pulled up short” is that the text *has something to say*. This assumption exists because otherwise the text would not be able to encourage interpretation. Where this assumption becomes dangerous, and potentially exclusionary, is for texts that could be considered avant-garde; texts like *Watt* and *Naked Lunch*.

These texts explicitly respond to a literary tradition in which the verisimilitude of art, and expression more broadly, was never debatable. I will argue that *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* pull the reader up short by not only encouraging interpretative engagement but by constructing interpretative engagement as their subject-matter. Thus it is not dangerous or prescriptively delimiting to suggest the texts have something to say: the danger lies in assuming that they are whole, unified and coherent in the representation of this *something*. I would amend Gadamer’s conception of completion to allow for interpretative interjection when the text challenges the notion of completion. To acknowledge this disruption and interrogate its influence in the interpretative exchange allows for a meta-hermeneutic discussion. In *Naked Lunch* the anxious interpretative effects of the text on the reader speak to the manifestation of its hermeneutic subject matter during the interpretative exchange. Without this exchange the text does not have these effects and the explicit subject-matter of *Naked Lunch* (control) is lost. The awareness of the reader when reading *Naked Lunch* that the text is trying to manipulate or “con” him/her into a complicit relationship with the authority of the text is an integral component in understanding Burroughs’s novel. Burroughs’s concerns with language as a medium of control have a lot to say in relation to Tradition’s relationship to language. By exploring Burroughs’s negative relationship with “The Word” I will be able to explore the implications of this for Tradition in its interpellated manifestation through language. But these interpretations are necessarily linked to the interpretative relationship between text and reader. Without allowing the pre-judgements of both parties to challenge one another in interpretation, the effects of the novels on the reader’s engagement cannot be adequately disclosed. The implication of this unacknowledged

effect is that the texts remain, in part, misunderstood. As such Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, through its explicit desire to encourage the reader to remain alert to the claims of the text, becomes an illuminating interpretative ally when confronting the embedded-ness of language in Tradition. Burroughs's novel anticipates Gadamer's observations by *performing* this conception of Tradition during the interpretative procedure. The reader's awareness that the text is trying to "con" him/her becomes a central feature of the meaning of *Naked Lunch*, a meaning that is available through Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

Gadamer argues that objectivist interpretative practice constructs the reader as a conduit for the text's ideas and this attempt to elevate textual integrity ultimately costs the text something: the possibility of exercising an influence upon the reader. By denying historically effected consciousness the text can no longer interact with the reader's hermeneutical situation and cannot pose its questions. It is through Tradition that the prejudgements of the reader, and of the text for that matter, are venerated, rather than repressed. If the text is denied this influence, the meaning of the novels is partially elided.

The historical location of the reader and the text are understood to be historical horizons within the Gadamerian schema. These horizons are the hermeneutical situations of both interlocutors as well as the renewed hermeneutical situation borne out of the exchange. The horizons are constructed by the prejudgements of the reader and the text. These prejudgements interact in the interpretative moment. It is in this moment that the horizons of both text and reader are "fused" to create a new interpretative horizon. This process is non-teleological because it is understood that the fusion of horizons will continue in perpetuity with every reader's interaction with the text (Linge xix).

The fusion of horizons is an engagement with the prejudgements of the text and those of the reader. These prejudgements are negotiated through a somewhat conservative relation to the authority of the text (Warnke 78). This deference to the authority of the text is predicated upon the initial dialogic assumption that the text has something to say (Warnke 87). This is an arguably earnest under-

standing of dialogic interaction and one that becomes complicated in texts which appear to be explicitly aware of an engagement with a reader. It is also this appeal to authority which creates consternation around the possibility of critique within the interpellated realm of Tradition. However, in both *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* the reader is presented with a multiplicity of horizons. These horizons constantly fracture and fragment the texts, and present a potentially productive, rather than deferential, relationship with Gadamer's monolithic conception of Tradition.

Both novels present multiple historical locations, and fragmented versions of Gadamer's description of horizons. *Naked Lunch* achieves this most overtly in its formal construction: a mosaic interplay between routines that present recurring characters and events in differing locations through the text. *Watt* sees a fictionalised narrative voice presenting Watt's story of how he came to Knott's employment and ultimately met up with said fictional narrator, Sam. The text is present in multiple temporalities as it relates itself to Watt's retelling as well as the construction of the narrative of hindsight. Thus it is not one horizon in either text which the reader must interact with. Instead it is within the interplay amongst these horizons and the reader's historical location, that the prejudgements of both interlocutors come to bear upon the interpretative moment.

In Gadamer's use of the word "prejudgement" he means something akin to Heidegger's notion of "fore-structure"; when interacting with anything, anyone or themselves, the interpreter brings a certain level of pre-judgement to bear. When Dilthey and Schleiermacher propose that the interpreter recreate the life-world of the author in an attempt to negate the interpreter's historically imbued prejudgements they are ultimately constructing the "tyranny of hidden prejudice", disallowing a conscious examination of the prejudgements informed by the movement of Tradition (Gadamer 282). Again, this limits the effect a text can produce during the interpretative exchange and sacrifices aspects of the text's meaning. It is important to note that this effect of the text is one that is manifested in the interpretative dialogue. The reader makes certain assumptions regarding the interpretation of the text. The texts (*Naked Lunch* and *Watt*) challenge these assumptions and influence the hermeneutic exchange by representing an awareness that they are being read. By eliminating

the chance for prejudgements to enter into the dialogue and therefore come to light, the Romantic hermeneuticians were relying on the authority of the text's prejudgements to be benevolent, and more worryingly, in possession of the truth content of the work. It is through an active, considered dialogic exchange that prejudgement comes to light, is challenged, and further embroiled in the process of horizational fusion. This is a hermeneutic aspect of the text itself and whilst it is an effect of the hermeneutic engagement, it does contribute to the interpretation and subsequent understanding of the text. As such, by denying the text this level of involvement, Romantic hermeneuticians failed to understand aspects of the text.

The multiplicity of horizons presented by *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* respond to the description of authority Gadamer provides in *Truth and Method*. When Gadamer talks of prejudgement he distinguishes between over hastiness and prejudgement that is handed down through authority (Gadamer 284). Prejudgements borne from over hastiness are considered lazy whereas prejudgements arising out of an authoritative position are not always immediately apparent nor immediately negative, "authority is not *always* wrong" (Gadamer 33). However due to the Enlightenment and Romantic eras distrust of authority, this statement from Gadamer has come to represent his conservatism, rather than an acknowledgment that the text may be in possession of "something to say". Authoritative prejudgements come to light when engaging with a text by allowing the text to interrogate the reader's hermeneutic position. This is an inescapable aspect of interpretation because it is in this interrogation that the text pulls the reader up short. This conception of authority emerging in the interaction with a text is one that is expressly challenged by Burroughs's novel. *Naked Lunch* sets itself up as an authority on "control". The text itself is concerned with expressing the totalising interpenetration of control. However, by establishing itself as an authority on the subject of control, Burroughs's novel appears to contradict itself. This contradiction articulates itself in the anxiously suspicious hermeneutic the reader is encouraged to work within when reading the mosaic *Naked Lunch*.

Naked Lunch appears to dramatise the concerns around the possibility for ideology critique within a philosophical hermeneutic framework.

Authority, and the possibility of its reincorporation in the interpretative process, coupled with the pervasive notion of Tradition, exposes the complex possibility of historical critique within the description of philosophical hermeneutics. The description proffered by Gadamer states that understanding is the “successful appropriation of Tradition” by the reader, in which s/he comes to know that Tradition belongs to them and they belong to it (25). This appropriation is not a blind acceptance of Traditionary values but involves the rigorous interrogation of the inherited forms this Tradition assumes. However, if language is “the reservoir of Tradition” and the “medium in and through which” the reader “exist[s] and perceive[s]” of the “world” then philosophical hermeneutics appears to be asking the reader to place Tradition in critical conversation with itself, exposing a compromised and conflicting relationship. *Truth and Method* states that Tradition is “not a process that experience teaches us to know and govern; it is language.” (366) If Tradition is language then critiquing the processes of Tradition is further problematised because of the incorporation of language into the Traditionary moment.

Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics relies on the interlocution which takes place between text and reader. This dialogue is a process of sublimation for both object and subject. Philosophical hermeneutics relies on an awareness of historicity in order to engage and interrogate prejudice. Thus the reader is caught up in the dialogic exchange whilst maintaining a critical self-awareness. However, when philosophical hermeneutics engages with texts that are overtly self-conscious regarding their construction and the construction of the reader this critical self-awareness becomes a pronounced component in the interpretative process. It ceases to operate as part of the system of understanding Gadamer describes and instead becomes an active part of the interpretation itself. This is certainly the case for the texts in this dissertation: Beckett’s *Watt* and Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* both seek to disrupt the reader’s access to meaning in order to cultivate a heightened awareness of

the interpretative assumptions the reader is practicing. Philosophical hermeneutics will allow me to investigate this heightened awareness of the text's effect in the interpretative dialogue. It is also found to be compromised by an engagement with self-conscious texts—texts which are simultaneously aware of the reader, the modes of reading s/he wishes to practice, and dependent on the reader for the full extent of their subject-matter to be conveyed—challenge philosophical hermeneutics's description of completion and unity in meaning. However by placing philosophical hermeneutics in conversation with a self-conscious text, the Gadamerian framework becomes unsettled and influenced by the text as well. It is in this engagement that the self-conscious awareness of the interpretative “object” presents challenges and crucially potential responses to criticisms of philosophical hermeneutics. It is through this dual relationship that the texts respond to Gadamer's theory. While philosophical hermeneutics is a framework, which allows me to explore the influence the texts exert over the reader, the texts themselves do not meekly assimilate philosophical hermeneutics. They challenge some of its fundamental assumptions. By analysing these challenges (somewhat contrived in the relation of Gadamer's theory to these texts in this dissertation) *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* present ways of thinking about Gadamer's critics.

The interpellation and conflicting relationship of Tradition with itself is a criticism offered by Jürgen Habermas. Habermas argues that Gadamer's philosophical schema assimilates too much of Tradition and sacrifices the potential for ideology critique. Whilst I think that there are aspects of this critique that hold water against Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a universal schema for understanding, I think that both *Watt* and *Naked Lunch*, when engaging with Gadamer's framework, offer potential responses to this criticism. This will be explored and discussed throughout the dissertation. In order to gain access to the severity of Habermas's criticism I need to explain the concept of dialogue that Gadamer uses.

The process of dialogic engagement is described in *Truth and Method* as a game and Gadamer employs a concept of play to elucidate this “game”. Gadamer describes play in very clear terms,

all playing is a being-played. The attraction of a game...consists precisely in the fact that the game masters the players...The real subject of the game...is not the player but instead the game itself. (Gadamer 111).

In Gadamer’s conception of the act of playing, the subject is not only wholly absorbed in the process of the game but comes to be a part of the very fabric of the rules and regulations that dictate the play itself. Play is medial, renews itself constantly and cannot be thought of as repetitious (Valgenti 71). The subject becomes absorbed in the dialogic back and forth between him/herself and the text, yet remains aware of the bound-ness of the exchange to the rules of the game. It is in this exchange that the subject’s historical horizon is brought forth and interrogated by the text’s own historical horizon. The mediation between the two positions is the space in which Gadamer’s play happens. This is the instance in which the reader’s prejudgements, informed by his/her Tradition and interrogated through the process of historically effected consciousness, interact with the prejudgements of the text. This dialogical engagement, which takes the form of play, is the site in which interpretative action takes place.

The dialogic model Gadamer uses when describing interpretative exchange is the Socratic model. Socratic dialogue takes as a starting point the *docta ignorantia* (the doctrine of ignorance). By acknowledging the finitude of knowledge the reader may have about the text’s subject-matter, the dialogue can begin from a position of openness (Warnke 102). This openness acknowledges the potential for the text to teach the reader something through the interpretative dialogue. This in turn advances the horizontal interplay, which affects the renewed position of Tradition. As Warnke astutely notes,

Gadamer’s point in equating hermeneutic understanding with dialogue, then, is that the former is a learning experience. In attempting to understand a text or other aspect of the Tradition, we both bring that object into our world, illuminate the meaning it has for us, and

transform our own previous perspective. Hermeneutics involves mediation or, in other words, a capacity to see the significance of a truth-claim for our own situation. (104)

Dialogue then, is the crucial aspect of hermeneutic engagement which allows the reader to make sense of the subject-matter the text presents. To phrase this another way, dialogue allows the reader to find the effects of the text's subject-matter on his/her "world". Of course in the process of fusion the reader and the text's prejudgements are challenged and interrogated. It is this process that allows for the distinction between productive prejudgements and reductive or, even, destructive prejudgements to take place. The reader cannot approach the text with this knowledge in hand. S/he must remain open to the questions of the text, remain aware of the hermeneutical situation from which the text is approaching him/her, and remain aware of the hermeneutical situation in which they are approaching the text. It must be noted then that this is not a dialogue *from* ignorance *towards* knowledge. Instead this is a dialogue which renews the experience of ignorance in new historicalities. Dialogic exchange exposes *ad infinitum* the prejudgements of both reader and text in ever renewed positions. This requires the reader to assume that the text has something to say, and that s/he can learn from the text. This is described as the experience of the text by Gadamer and it creates the equitable dialogue he deems necessary for interpretative exchange. Yet this does require a level of comfort with the unknowable, "ineffable" (Beckett 52) on the part of the reader as s/he continually encounters aspects of the interpretative exchange which draw him/her up short. It is through this medial dialogue that the concept of "complete-ness" seems out of place in relation to two novels which distinctly challenge the relationship between text and reader. The text can never be "complete" without the reader and the reverse is true for any interpretation offered of the text. It is in the meta-hermeneutic of the text, in which the reader is encouraged to interrogate the ways s/he approaches the novels that this conception of "completion" is incorporated into the dialogic exchange. By acknowledging the instances that both novels disrupt this conception that they are whole, unified and complete, the reader is forced to interrogate his/her relationship to the interpretative dialogue. In a sense the concept of completeness for Gadamer's dialogue finds its fulfilment in the non-complete-

ness of *Watt* and *Naked Lunch*. I would equate this to a radical form of “Negative Capability”, in which the texts actively deny monolithic understandings and encourage a comfort in doubt that initially seems out of place in philosophical hermeneutics. However, I think Gadamer’s dialogic description encourages such doubt around interpretation by encouraging the reader to interrogate the experience of the text as an essential part of its meaning. There is no complete-ness in hermeneutical exploration through dialogue. Instead the questions of the text find ever new locations to confront the renewable prejudgements of Tradition.

In the proceeding chapters I will rely on the theoretical language defined in this section to draw the interpretations of both *Naked Lunch* and *Watt* back to their meta-hermeneutic concerns. Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics encourages an engagement with overtly meta-hermeneutic texts because the theory itself is open to the questionableness of meaning and understanding in interpretation. Habermas’s criticisms surrounding philosophical hermeneutics’s failure to acknowledge the systematic distortion that Tradition and ideology may present through language are concerns that both novels share with the process of understanding. This will be the focus of the close-reading of both texts. I will show how the novels make Habermas’s critique explicit, and I will suggest how the texts present potential responses to the criticism that aligns language with manipulation and ideology. In short I will be analysing the ways *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* influence the reader’s interpretative exchange by obfuscating aspects of Gadamer’s earnest conception of dialogue. Through this analysis I will be able to discuss the consequences of such challenges for philosophical hermeneutics and it is these consequences that I will suggest present responses to Habermas’s monolithic conception of an all pervasive ideology and Tradition.

Chapter Two

Samuel Beckett's *Watt*: Multiple Interpreters and Many Horizons

In an article published in 1972, J.M. Coetzee describes *Watt* as “an uneven and sometimes anarchic work.” (39) In his introductory comments to the 2009 Faber and Faber edition of *Watt* Chris Ackerley describes Beckett’s last novel in English as “a curiosity” (vii). These descriptions of the novel recur throughout the critical oeuvre associated with *Watt*. It would seem that the novel presents interpretative uncertainty in its reception amongst critics. This was certainly my experience of *Watt*, a text that I found to be unsettling in its parodic representation of interpretative endeavour. The opacity of the text’s titular character and the desire to interpret and understand *Watt* as fully as possible is contested by the text’s parodic representation of attempts to understand. The anarchism in *Watt* could be its desire to be wholly misunderstood in order to show the failures of interpretative methodologies. The curiosity of *Watt*, I found, lies in attempts to articulate this failure in interpretation through interpretative processes.

From its inception the text was disjointed, described by Beckett as “only a game, a means of staying sane.”(Ackerley , viii) The novel was written while Beckett was on the run from the Gestapo during the early 1940s the text would only find a publisher in 1953, courtesy of the same publishing house that printed Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* in 1959. The text follows the travails of its eponymous character as he arrives on a late night tram, lives and works in servitude at the enigmatic Mr Knott’s house, and then finds his way back to the train station. In part III of the novel the reader is confronted with the narrative voice of the text, a fictional author called Sam. Sam and Watt share conversations about Watt’s time at Knott’s and his failure to understand anything about his sojourn there. Thus the other three parts of the four part text appear to be a narrative of hindsight, narrated from the “pavilions” Sam and Watt share in part III (Beckett 129). Beckett’s novel is about interpretation and understanding. The simulacra of Watt that focalises the narrative in parts I, II and IV, expose Sam’s

failure to understand the “present” Watt he converses with in part III. This misunderstanding is transposed into Sam’s narrative and, as I will argue, dramatises the influence of “systematic distortion” within the hermeneutic exchange (Warnke 112). This helps elucidate the uncertainty expressed in the critical responses to *Watt* because this exploration of the effect of a “present” historical horizon on another places the reader in a precarious, speculative position. The text seemingly envelopes multiple horizontal interactions creating what James Knowlson described as a “self-generating text” (21). In this chapter I will explore what effect this “self-generation” has on the reader’s attempts to understand *Watt*. By doing so I will suggest that the awareness constructed around hermeneutical situations offers a response to Habermas’s criticisms of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. By encouraging a meta-hermeneutic interpretative discussion the novel shifts the aims of interpretative discourse away from “understanding” the novel towards understanding why the “what-ness” of *Watt* cannot readily be explained. I think it is important to bear in mind the “scholastic *memoria technica*” Beckett used when composing *Watt*: ““who, what, where, by what means, why, in what way, when”” (Ackerley ix). This technique is important because it becomes a central obfuscation in the text on the whole.

Gadamer describes the emergence of hermeneutic engagement as an openness of the reader to the questionableness of the text “[t]o understand the questionableness of something is to already be questioning” (Gadamer 383). This renewable site of engagement emerges because the reader understands that there is a form of address issued by the text, inviting him/her to understand. But *Watt*’s self-referentiality creates an enclosed narrative sequence in which the reader is not invited to hear the questionableness of Watt, Sam or Knott. Instead, the reader is positioned as a spectator to the interpretative manoeuvres Sam and, by extension, Watt exercise. This relationship is further complicated by a growing awareness on Watt’s part that he is a character in a novel. The reader’s attempts to hear the questions of the text are thwarted by the text’s responses to its own questions. But this does not mean that these are not questionable, and to interrogate the veracity of *Watt*’s self-

interpretation is to “be questioning”. The dialogic engagement with *Watt* exposes this spectatorial locale for the reader. S/he cannot access the interpretable object directly because the interpretable object is comprised of Sam’s interpretations of Watt’s experiences. Thus the reader begins the interpretable process with second order hermeneutic questions in mind, creating a meta-hermeneutic discussion surrounding the “what-ness” of *Watt*. Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics encourages this form of meta-hermeneutic discussion, and as I will show in the final section of this chapter, *Watt* anticipates the hubristic anti-teleological conception of understanding which is central to philosophical hermeneutics.

Sam’s interpretation of Watt emerges in a different historical horizon to the representation of Watt’s experiences in the narrative. The interactions of Sam and Watt, largely dictated by the weather in part III, expose Sam’s attempts to “re-capture” Watt’s interpretations of Knott. Part of why this fails is explained by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his critique of Schleiermacher and Dilthey’s attempts to regain an understanding of the initial utterance of the interpretable object. What Sam fails to take into account is that there is an interaction of historical horizons which occurs between himself and Watt. For the reader, Gadamer’s fusion of horizons (the site from which understanding can begin) is complicated because the horizontal interaction occurs within the ambit of the text itself. However, the reader has access to these multiple horizontal interactions and the “systematic distortion” of the differing hermeneutical situations plays out in the interpretations offered by the text. The text is simultaneously constructing the interpretable environment and performing the distortions imposed on this environment through the various prejudgements that enter into the horizontal play of the text. *Watt*, if such a “summation” is of any use, can be described as a narrative of “multiplicity”.

The multiple-temporalities of *Watt* and indeed the multiple “Watts” embedded in the text, express themselves in ecstatic relation to the reader. Mark Byron describes *Watt* as an ecstatic text in a 2004 article entitled “The Ecstasies of *Watt*”. In the article Byron argues for an ecstatic understanding of

Watt through an extended engagement with the material construction of the text. Byron describes the novel as “a study in orientation” in which *Watt* seems to locate itself in space and time. Ecstasy, for Byron, arises specifically out of the interaction of the novel with its own position in relation to Beckett’s body of work and the manuscripts that largely comprise *Watt* (495). The article convincingly reads moments of inheritance from the initial *Watt* notebooks as well as proleptic intrusions into Beckett’s future oeuvre in the “final” text of *Watt*. Byron notes the proleptic intrusion of *Watt* in *Mercier and Camier* in which *Watt* appears and seems to describe Murphy as a dream of his to Mercier (499). However, Byron never extends the discussion to what the consequences of these observations will be for the reader of *Watt*. The article is a materially focused rendering of ecstasy whereas I wish to discuss the term in relation to the reader who must work to understand a text “that is beside itself and never simply ‘there’.” (Byron 495) I will explore this by interrogating the self-generating interpretative processes of *Watt*. In so doing I will offer an explanation, via philosophical hermeneutics, for why *Watt* was “never to know, never never to know” (Beckett 30) anything about his stay at Knott’s.

The word “ecstasy” is derived from the Ancient Greek concept of *ekstasis*, to be outside of, or alongside of oneself. Aristotle used the term *ekstasis* to refer to the spectators’s moments of catharsis when watching a play, specifically a tragedy (sec. 9 i449b28). For Aristotle the relation of the spectator to the spectacle encouraged a self-forgetfulness which Gadamer would later describe as a necessary component in his description of play. Immediately the term is related to the effect produced by a work of art on a spectator. It is only in the seventeenth century that the term became associated with religious mysticism. The term *ekstasis* is significant for Martin Heidegger in relation to his concepts of time in *Being and Time*. For Heidegger time was not a linear process but instead manifested itself through the present ecstasy of a person’s being-in-the-world. He distinguished between three temporalities that coexist ecstatically: “time steps out of itself into past, present and future ... the future involves being ‘ahead of oneself’ and the present ‘being alongside’ things, so the past involves

‘already being in’ the world” (Heidegger 317:328f.). Heidegger is suggesting that these three aspects of temporal existence coexist and are embodied by the interpretative manoeuvres of Dasein coming into Being. This is the sense of ecstasy that Byron is employing in his analysis of *Watt* but his rendering of the term is rooted in the intrusion of the manuscripts into the final text, and the protrusion of *Watt* into Beckett’s larger oeuvre.

The multiple horizons at play within the narrative framework of *Watt* encourage the reader to engage with the second order hermeneutic questions of why, when, how, by what means, and to what end do these interpretations arise in the dialogue. This meta-hermeneutic examination is located in the ecstatic relation of the text to the reader. The ecstatic interpretative relationship is never solely about what the text might be “induced to mean” (Beckett 61), but encourages the meta-hermeneutic interrogation of the dialogue itself.

In the following close-reading I will show that this “locating” of *Watt* as a meta-hermeneutic text is necessary in order for the novel to explore the representation of failure in understanding. *Watt* dramatises aspects of philosophical hermeneutics by the exposition of this failure and, in many respects, anticipates the theoretical description offered by Gadamer in his 1960 publication *Truth and Method*. It is in this discussion surrounding modes of understanding and representation that Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics unwittingly finds an ally. *Watt* exposes the embedded-ness of historicity in interpretation and, in so doing, encourages the reader to interrogate their own historical horizon and Traditional responses.

2.1

Watt begins and “ends” in a train station. The reader is introduced to Watt through a series of characters’s interpretative praxis. The opening section establishes the multiplicity of historical horizons by offering up varied interpretations of Watt’s arrival on a late night tram. The characters who engage in this interpretative moment, Mr Hackett and Tetty Nixon, are caricatured interpreters unaware of their own embedded-ness in a specific hermeneutic situation. Hackett is a parody of Cartesian solipsism, he cannot acknowledge the influence his own interaction exerts on the objects of his “intrigue” (Beckett 12). Tetty’s interpretation, which emerges in her interaction with both Hackett and Watt, is myopically cloistered by her desire to insert her self *into* the world of the novel. Thus both interpreters embody differing aspects of hermeneutic engagement: Hackett recedes from the world of the novel while Tetty subsumes the hermeneutic experience of interpretation into her own horizon. Neither character can make sense of Watt because both embody unacknowledged prejudgements.

The opening line of *Watt*, “Mr Hackett turned the corner”, suggests a change in perspective, a movement around a fixed object to observe a new vista or location from which to perceive. Hackett who “saw things a little more clearly when he was still” and whose “walk was an agitated walk” is presented with this narrative obstacle; an obstacle which instantly locates him within the world of the novel and the spaces off which the narrative will play itself off (Beckett 3). So too, within the first couple of lines, *Watt* situates the reader in relation to a character who struggles to navigate the world of the novel. Hackett can see better when still. Does this mean that the successful rounding of the corner was a fortuitous affair considering the mobility needed to navigate such an obstacle? The narrative is provided impetus by overcoming this first obstacle and, as Mark Byron suggests, the rounding of the corner mimics the reader physically turning the page and reading on (497). In this sense Hackett and this corner could be seen allegorically to describe the desire on the part of the

reader to understand, turn the corner, see around the corner. This allegory could represent, somewhat tantalisingly, the possibility of perceiving more than is immediately apparent in a novel that is “more concerned with procedures and rhetorical turns than [...] narrative line” (Hayman 172).

But this type of allegorical reading is parodied in *Watt* and it is exactly this interpretative assumption regarding figures, symbols and allusions that the text complicates by encouraging the reader to engage with the surface level construction of the narrative. Thus the corner does not become an allegorical allusion, and Hackett’s stilted perambulation does not become a metaphor for the reader’s staccato mode of stringing words together to make a sentence. Instead both of these narrative moments are instances where the reader becomes aware of Hackett’s fallibility as a narrative focal point and the rounding of the corner disrupts the linear progression of Hackett’s walk. The focus on Hackett’s successful navigation of the corner comes at the price of the corner itself which is never described.

The utility of the corner takes full effect when Hackett rounds it and realises that the seat “he thought of”(3) as his is occupied. The rounding of the corner thus, shifts Hackett’s view of the world of the novel, a view which is mired by the way he liked to think of objects in the world as his own.

This seat, the property of the municipality, or of the public, was of course not his, but he thought of it as his. This was Mr Hackett’s attitude towards things that pleased him. He knew they were not his, but he thought of them as his. (3)

The strange musing of the narrative voice on Hackett’s relation *to* things “that pleased him” seems to have very little to do with the object itself. These objects in the world of the novel take the form of pleasant thoughts (incorrect and acknowledged as such) Hackett has regarding them. There’s a slippage between the pleasure Hackett derives from the objects and the thought of possession which follows from this pleasure. It is not clear whether the pleasure he derives from said objects instigates the thoughts of possession or whether his thoughts of possession give him pleasure. He does not

seem particularly pleased with the only other aspect of the seat the reader is aware of: that it is occupied. This would suggest that it is the thought of the seat *as his* rather than the seat itself that “pleases” Mr Hackett.

In these opening lines the text has located Hackett in relation to an obstacle he is forced to overcome and placed his thoughts in dialogue with an object in the world of the novel. Yet this dialogue is fraught because Hackett cannot construe of the object in the world of the novel and finds himself enjoying the sensation of his own thoughts rather than the object itself. The distinction between object and the self-allocation of Hackett as thinking subject (by Hackett) in this opening scene sees Hackett practicing Descartes’s methodology. However, he does not take the next step in the methodology of doubt, he does not reconstruct the world. Instead Hackett enjoys the satisfaction he gleans from the indubitable *cogito*. He appears to enjoy the sensation of thinking rather than gaining any knowledge of the world around him through this process of a thinking “I”.

The reader is encouraged to interrogate Hackett’s version of the train station, rather than the train station itself. Thus the text is ostensibly encouraging a hermeneutic evaluation of the character’s interpretative attempts and because the reader has no access to the train station, except through these interpretative efforts, the act of interpretation becomes an essential component in the understanding the narrative.

This introduction to Hackett’s interaction with the world is a crucial component in understanding his reception of Watt. Hackett describes his intrigue in relation to Watt by interrogating the curiosity he feels rather than expressing his thoughts about Watt:

Mr Hackett did not know when he had been more intrigued, nay, he did not know when he had been so intrigued. He did not know either what it was that so intrigued him. What is it that so intrigues me, he said, who even the extraordinary, even the supernatural, intrigue so seldom, and so little. Here there is nothing in the least unusual, that I can see, and yet I burn with curiosity, and with wonder. The sensation is not disagreeable, I must say, and yet I do not think I could bear it for twenty minutes, or half an hour (12).

It appears that Hackett is once more focused on his own interaction with objects in the world of the novel rather than the objects themselves. Hackett is more interested in the meta-hermeneutic sensation of his intrigue than in the interpretative activity itself. He also seems to derive a pleasure from the sensation of intrigue, a pleasure that might overwhelm him. Hackett has been “pulled up short” and finds his solipsistic position questioned by the arrival of Watt (Gadamer 280).

When Watt is ejected from the late night tram, Hackett and Tetty Nixon fail to distinguish him from a series of inanimate objects. Watt is mistaken for the wall behind him, a carpet or a tarpaulin held together by a piece of cord around the middle (Beckett 11). This instance in the text establishes Watt as an interpretable object. However his misconstrual as object anticipates Gadamer’s concerns surrounding the affect of an interpretable object on the hermeneutic situation of the interpreter. The mistaken distinction between Watt as subject or Watt as inanimate object, challenges Hackett’s interpretative procedure. What Hackett’s mode of narrative seemingly fails to note is the experience of engaging with an interpretable object. Watt intrigues him because he cannot place him as object in the world without doubt. The intrigue he feels in relation to Watt and the pleasure he derives from thinking of the seat as his, are products of an influence he fails to articulate. The narrative presents Hackett as an interpreter who fails to make sense of the impact interpretable objects have upon his solipsistic hermeneutic. Hackett’s attempts to recede from the world of the novel lead to misunderstanding, captured by his failure to grasp Watt. These thoughts seem to *happen to* Hackett. The narrative does not suggest that Hackett *has* these thoughts: Hackett is a separate entity from the thoughts that give him pleasure. In anticipation of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, Hackett seems to be showing that he cannot extricate the world from his methodology and ultimately, exposes the inability to understand through the subjectivist lens he applies to objects in the world.

Hackett’s failure to understand the influence his interpretations of the world effect on and in the world of the novel is an ecstatic instance in *Watt*. The reader is told that Hackett saw better when he

was still, that his stilted perambulation affected the way he perceived of the world (Beckett 3). When Hackett is seated, watching the world wash over him from his static vantage he “saw more clearly”. This is a parody of the subjectivist position which seeks to elevate the individual to an a-historical locale, where the influence of the passage of time and space can be halted, and ultimately negated. The text is relating itself to this position by exposing the intrigue of Hackett, rather than any understanding of Watt.

Hackett appears to lose interpretative authority over the narrative with the introduction of the Nixons. Tetty Nixon’s bestowal of pity in relation to Hackett initially suggests an infantilisation and reduction of Hackett’s narrative agency. But what is crucial to note is not so much Hackett’s relinquishment of authority but Tetty’s myopic responses to the world of the novel:

Oh, my dear, he said, there is Hackett. Hackett, said the lady. *What* Hackett? Where? You know Hackett, said the gentleman. You must have often heard me speak of Hackett. Hunchy Hackett. On the seat. The lady looked attentively at Hackett. So *that* is Hackett, she said. Yes, said the gentleman. *Poor fellow*, she said. (5. My emphasis)

Hackett is now the observable object, noted and pitied by the Nixons. Tetty’s first reaction is to express the interrogative pronoun “*What* Hackett?”, this query turns Mr Hackett into a noun. Tetty then goes on to exclaim that Hackett is a “poor fellow”; a man worthy of her pity. Hackett is transformed from a noun (an object) into a subject to be pitied. The reader is told that when Hackett and Tetty meet, Tetty “stooped towards him, *quivering with solicitude*” (5. My emphasis). In this instance Tetty Nixon is seemingly experiencing a cathartic relation to Hackett, akin to the “self-forgetfulness” of the spectator. She experiences a physical reaction to the pity she bestows upon Hackett and Hackett thinks that she may pat his head or stroke his hump (5). Tetty is desperate to perform her “self” on the world of the novel—regardless of the effect this has upon this world. Tetty’s interpretative failure resides in her externalisation of her own prejudgements. While Hackett fails to note the influence objects of intrigue have upon his understanding of them, Tetty does not acknowledge how her externalisation influences these objects.

The narrative shifts in the opening pages from an internal view of Hackett's relationship with the train station to Tetty's externalised relation of her "self" to the same train station. The conversation that follows between the Nixons and Hackett is a farcical exchange which begins with the retelling of their oldest child's traumatic birth. Tetty introduces the retelling of Larry's birth after Hackett reads a lewd poem written by a murderous solicitor, a poem which Tetty endorses, after being subtly prompted to offer an interpretation which signals the shift away from Hackett's interpretative observations towards Tetty's, with a suitably ambiguous "[a]mple" (7). A pregnant lady then walks past the three and Tetty immediately turns to Goff asking if she ever looked like "that"(8). There are two important things to note about this event. Firstly, Tetty situates herself in relation to a pregnant lady who happens to walk past through a rhetorical manoeuvre in which Goff is responsible for singling Tetty out amongst pregnant women. The word "that" appears again in relation to a character in the novel ("*that* is Hackett"), again objectifying a character in the novel. It is also the second instance of deferral to Goff's perception of someone within the narrative. Secondly, Tetty's immediate reaction to the pregnant woman is to retell her own experience of giving birth. Tetty exhibits a lack of hermeneutical awareness; she pays little attention to the narrative and word triggers that inform her responses (Kevorkian 431). She seems unaware that the story of Larry's birth comes to her at that moment due to the textual indicators that she is determined to appropriate rather than interrogate. The poem, described by Tetty as "ample", is a rich weave of sexual innuendo, corporeality, death and Joycean literary allusion. Thus it is no coincidental segue that leads to Tetty's retelling of what turns out to be a traumatic birth story. These textual indicators seem to serve no other purpose in the narrative other than to expose Tetty's myopic interpretative procedure. As such, they stand as markers for the reader to note and once more interpretative focus is placed on Tetty's inability to note these markers, rather than her bizarre birth story.

The Nixons had been entertaining two of Goff's friends when Tetty felt "Larry leap in her wom"(8). The spelling of "womb" is another moment of ecstasy in the text. Hackett at first does not under-

stand what Tetty means by “wom”. This auralty suggests an ecstatic slippage between the text in its material form and the text as narrative world, a slippage that reveals the text’s awareness of being read. Hackett questions Tetty’s use of the word “wom” but the reader has no access to how this word was pronounced by Tetty. It is conceivable that she pronounced the word in the accepted fashion, and, if this is the case, then Hackett’s concern lies with the written word. Towards the end of the novel this slippage presents itself again in a similar vein when the word “Bando”, a medication for erectile dysfunction, is said to be “spelt as pronounced” (145). Again this suggests a slip between the words on the page (the reader’s access to the text) and the self-consciousness of the novel itself. The reader does not know how “Bando” is pronounced, but does know how it is spelt. In a novel that is interested in the aural similarity between “Watt” and the interrogative pronoun “what”, these instances offer a further ecstatic moment of rupture and another example of the text’s awareness of its reader. The introduction of this auralty in *Watt* is juxtaposed with Tetty’s myopia in this dialogic exchange. I will return to the auralty of *Watt* in the section dealing with Sam and Watt’s exchanges in part III.

It takes Goff, a caricatured patriarchal figure, to explain that Tetty meant her “woom”. Tetty, ever observant of social protocol, does not give any hint of her leaping womb to the guests and this tactful observance is interpreted by Hackett as a strange mixture of guilt and shame, when Hackett says, “how embarrassing for you”(8). She proceeds to relate how her husband and his cronies were oblivious to the labour that was in full swing during dinner (8). Once Goff and his friends retired to the billiard room, she dragged herself upstairs on all fours and gave birth to Larry, cutting the umbilical cord with her teeth. It is not obvious whether Goff knew his wife was pregnant or not and Tetty comes to his rescue by tactfully saying, “He thought I was coy” in response to Hackett’s enquiry (9). This ambiguous statement is meant as an inane quip to which Hackett observes the rules of social protocol, ““Haha,’ *said* Hackett” (9 my emphasis).

This entire story about a traumatic birth revolves around the severing of the umbilical cord. Hackett enquires into the sensation of the removal. Initially Tetty asks him if he asks after the mother or the child, to which Hackett responds that he was “not found under a cabbage”(9). Tetty tells him that it is always one of great relief and that she would have snapped the cord across her knee had she been forced to. Tetty’s insistence that she would have violently snapped the umbilical cord in order to fling her child into the world is reminiscent of her own interpretative strategy: not wholly concerned about what she is “releasing”, but desperate to access the sensation of “relief”.

This burlesque exchange between the Nixons and Hackett appears to foreshadow Watt’s forced removal from a late night tram. The traumatic, violent birth story Tetty retells mimics Watt being thrown from the tram twenty metres before the station. Hackett and the Nixons are the textual locators for Watt’s arrival. This shift seems to transform the three characters on the bench into vulgar narrative devices, designed to interpret the arrival of Watt, the titular character. However tempting it might be to interpret Tetty’s birth tale and Hackett’s apparently threatened masculinity in the face of Goff’s stereotypical patriarchal apathy to Tetty’s labour, I argue that this scene offers a glimpse into the interpretative practices of Watt’s future interlocutors. A glimpse that requires the reader to perform an evaluation rather than an interpretation of their re-presentations of Watt. Hackett’s interpretative strategy is mired by his desire to remain seated while he watches the merging of the horizon “he had come out to see” (18). Hackett’s satisfaction with his evening takes shape when the “western sky was as the eastern, which was as the southern, which was as the northern” (18); wholly assimilated by the darkness of night, the intrigue of Watt’s arrival completely erased.

These hyperbolic interlocutors that witness Watt’s arrival present the reader with a series of interpretations that are ultimately flawed. They are flawed because both Hackett and Tetty respectively fail to note the experience of interpretation as a contributing factor in the understanding of the world they inhabit. The narrative voice uses these characters to explore the inimical dangers of as-

simulation. Hackett and Tetty desire to understand and move on. They both desire to understand *as they are*, unwilling to remain open to the questions and challenges that the interpretable object presents to their hermeneutical situations. This is a recurring event in Sam's narrative which is borne out of the unacknowledged bleeding which takes place between the object/subject distinction. These initial interlocutors are staging the "intrigue" Sam finds in his discussions with Watt in part III. This ecstatic self-relation exposes the multiple horizons at play in the text itself. These horizons seem to resist the uniformity Hackett comes to the train station to see, and neither do they allow Tetty to play herself out upon them without influence. These conversant gathered on a bench at a train station in fading light, witness Watt's arrival: Watt is noted from the external first in the narrative. In an anti-Cartesian move, Watt does not get to construct his own subjectivity through the rigours of logic and method, but has an objectivity thrust upon him. This objectivity, expressed most explicitly in the mistaken identification of Watt, colours the remaining text and bleeds into the rest of the narrative; casting Watt as an oddity for investigation (similar to the Nackybal affair at the end of part III) rather than a conventional narrative agent. This frustrates Sam's attempts to understand Watt's time at Knott's house, because Sam requires Watt to act as interpreter. In the exchanges with Sam, the limitations imposed on Watt as interpretative agent in the narrative become more explicitly linked to his construction as object.

2.2

The third section of Watt begins towards the end of Watt's stay at Mr Knott's house. Watt's narrative of life and its confusions at Knott's house is disrupted by the newly located narrative voice, Sam. The narrator is ecstatically located within the text itself and presents an interruption of the narrative events to regale the reader with a retelling of how he came to *know* Watt's story—how *Watt* was made. Part three details the exchanges that took place between Watt and Sam which provide Sam

with the information he needed to retell Watt's tale. This section of the novel extends the ecstatic understanding of the text suggested above as characters in the text are not only responsible for interpreting their actions in the world of the novel, but appear to be responsible for the compilation of the text as a whole. Along with this meta-textual exploration of the making of *Watt*, the sequence continues to locate Watt as object for interpretation. Watt continues to draw Sam (as reader) up short and Sam continually fails to see that his construction of Watt as object denies him access to Watt's hermeneutical situation. This process confuses the linear development of the narrative as well as the causality of the text: it is never clear whether Watt's failure to understand precedes his narrative construction by Sam or is an effect of this construction. I will argue for the latter, considering that any claims to the former would be impossible to verify and that Sam's attempts to re-present Watt's story ultimately elide the interpretative potential of Watt within this construction. This elision is perhaps the central frustration for Sam with Watt, because he relies on Watt's interpretative potential, yet, in his attempts to express Watt's story ultimately denies Watt the requisite subject-hood for interpretation. This section is paradigmatic of the text's attempts to capture the systematic distortions of historical situations in hermeneutic discussion.

The opening section of part III revolves around boundaries, thresholds, mirrors and weather. Sam's interactions with Watt are dependent on external factors. Sam and Watt would only meet and "converse" when each was tempted by the weather, leaving their respective "mansions" to enjoy the garden (129). The disruption in the narrative is attributed by Sam to the fact that he and Watt no longer share a garden to walk and occasionally talk in. The narrative resumes when Sam discovers a hole in a fence which allows him to regain access to Watt. Thus the narrative creates the impression that it is being constructed in "real time" as the disruption in Watt's story of Knott's house is brought about because he is removed from the space he shared with Sam. This in turn creates space for Sam's narrative surrounding the construction of parts I and II. This creates the impression that the text is occupying multiple temporalities and in turn, that there are multiple "Watts", and multi-

ple historical horizons. Before I explore Watt's failed interpretations, I wish to continue the exploration of his construction as interpretative object. By analysing the construction of the narrative describing his time at Knott's, this section explores, in an anticipatory manner, the failed hermeneutic of Watt.

The hole in the fence sequence is perhaps the paradigmatic moment of ecstasy in the novel.

I [Sam] thought I saw, in the fence, on my right, a hole, large and irregular. Judge then of my astonishment when, upon approach, I found I was not mistaken. It was a hole, in the fence, a large irregular hole, caused by numberless winds, numberless rains, or by a boar, or by a bull, flying, pursuing, a wild boar, a wild bull, blind with fear, blind with rage, or who knows perhaps with carnal desire, crashing at this point, through the fence, weakened by numberless winds, numberless rains. Through this hole I passed, without hurt, or damage to my pretty uniform, and found myself looking around me, for I had not yet recovered my aplomb, in the couloir. My senses being now sharpened to ten or fifteen times their normal acuity, it was not long before I saw, in the other fence, another hole, in position opposite, and similar in shape, to that through which, some ten or fifteen minutes before, I had made my way.(136-137)

This hole, of unknown origin, opens an interstitial space for Sam and Watt. Where previously the fences had separated them, denying the continuation of the narrative, this hole in the fence regains access to Watt for Sam and therefore the text. The separation has been absolved by fortune (be it a bull, boar or wind) and the gap has not been overcome, but penetrated. I read this as an idealised version of Gadamer's fusion of horizons, albeit a simplified one. The holes in both fences creates a new space for the continuation of the dialogue. However, this space is delimited by the fences on either side, something that is not readily understood by Sam. The interstitial space between the two fences is crucially constructed out of the thresholds designed to "pen" in each character. It is in between each of the character's gardens that the narrator and his eponymous character can survey each other's gardens and begin a burlesque waltz:

I turned him round, until he faced me. Then I placed his hands, on my shoulders, his left hand on my right shoulder, and his right hand on my left shoulder. Then I placed my hands, on his shoulders, on his left shoulder my right hand, and on his right shoulder my left hand. Then I took a single pace forward, with my left leg, and he a single pace back with his right leg (he could scarcely do otherwise). (139)

The imagery of Watt and Sam dancing shoulder to shoulder in a space between two fences is paradigmatic of the meta-textual elements in *Watt*. Sam takes control of Watt and manipulates him into the movement that, in my limited understanding of dance, mimics a waltz. Watt is forced to move his leg out of the way because Sam thrusts his leg forward. We are told by Sam in the first part of the novel that Watt's preferred mode of travel was with his "back to his destination" (20). Watt is seen by Sam across the divide walking backwards and when Watt turns, to return the way he had come, Sam sees Watt's garden as a mirror image of his:

(His resemblance, at that moment, to the Christ believed by Bosch, then hanging in Trafalgar Square, was so striking that I remarked it.) And at the same instant suddenly felt as though I were standing before a great mirror, in which my garden was reflected, and my fence, and I, and the very birds tossing in the wind, so that I looked at my hands, and felt my face, and glossy skull, with an anxiety as real as unfounded. (For if anyone, at that time, could truly be said to resemble the Christ supposed by Bosch, then hanging in Trafalgar Square, I flatter myself it was I.) (136)

The passage resonates formally with the content. The parenthetical references to Hieronymous Bosch's Christ shifts from "him" (Watt) to "I" (Sam) only after Sam "remarked it". The parenthesis frames this description of Watt. Sam's linguistic desire to place Watt in relation to something external shifts from a description of Watt to a description of himself. The self-consciousness of the narrative voice describing his remarking on this description reminds the reader of the ecstatic-ness of the text. Sam is self-consciously aware that by acknowledging his remark, rather than actually *making* it, the reader interacts with his text. The novel, once more, betrays an awareness that it is *being read*. In this instance the specular imagery distorts any understanding of Watt into a portrayal of Sam. Much of Sam's narrative construction rests on his inability to "represent" Watt, to capture his dancing partner (marionette perhaps) as separate from himself. These failures manifest themselves throughout *Watt*, particularly in Watt's inability to understand events as they happen. It seems that explanation is not only exorcism for Watt¹⁰, but that by externalising his own "unfounded" anxiety, Sam exerts a subjectivist interpretation onto Watt.

¹⁰ "For to explain had always been to exorcise for Watt" (64) I will be returning to this point in the next section of the chapter. It needed to be briefly introduced in relation to Sam, as I will link the construction of Watt as character for Sam to Watt's inability to "explain".

The space in which the titular character and the fictionalised narrative voice perform their dance sacrifices its potential neutrality with Sam's specular description. Even as the text is trying to capture the ecstasy of being "beside itself", it cannot extricate itself from its hermeneutic situation. In a similar vein to the opening section of the novel, Watt's role as interpretable object, is made more pronounced by his interlocutors's desires to *know about* him, rather than hear him, or find themselves interrogated by him.

When Watt spoke, he spoke in a low and rapid voice... Of this impetuous murmur much fell in vain on my imperfect hearing and understanding, and much by the rushing wind was carried away, and lost forever (133).

Even in Sam's description of Watt's voice, the failure to hear lies largely with Watt's characterisation. His voice was low and rapid "lower voices, voices more rapid have been heard...than Watt's... But that there ever issued from the mouth of a man...a voice *at once* so rapid and so low, is hard to believe." (133) These aspects of Sam's narrative serve to involve the reader in a discussion around the compilation of the text itself. Sam does not see Watt as subject, instead he tries to relate him to a prior representation. This fails and instead Sam reveals the extent of his own failings as narrative voice for a text that seems to be constructed around the interstitial spaces that exist between gardens of reference.

When Sam translates Watt's disintegrating language the reader is made aware of the multiple gaps in the retelling of *Watt*. Doubled with Sam's failing hearing and Watt's low, rapid voice, the distorted language in these sequences speaks to the unreliability of Sam's representation of Watt's story. Sam's narrative does not attempt to cover these gaps however and instead he self-consciously makes the reader aware of how the various lacunae came into being. I will quote these sections in full, because they portray an overt sense of ecstasy and more particularly a historical inheritance in the language of the text. Sam's "translation" of Watt's language at this point betrays the encroaching influence of the narrator within the story as a whole. Up until this section the narrative voice is tak-

en as an observer rather than a constructive element in the text. The mediation of Watt's story is fairly total in that, whilst he is quoted verbatim, his language is changed and adjusted to meet the understanding of Sam's ear.

Day of most, night of part, Knott with now. Now till up, little seen so oh, little heard so oh... Thing quiet, dim. Ears, eyes, failing now also. Hush in, mist in, moved I so... But soon I grew used to these sounds and then I understood... Ot bro, lap rulb, krad klub, Ot murd, wol fup, wol fup. Ot niks, sorg sam, sorg sam. Ot lems, lats lems, lats lems. Ot gnut, trat stews, trat stews... But soon I grew used to these sounds and understood as well as before... Of nought. To the source. To the teacher to the temple. To him I brought this emptied heart... But soon I grew used to these sounds, and then I understood as well as before... Deen did taw? Tonk. Tog da taw? Tonk... But soon I grew used to these sounds... Say he'd, No, waistcoat the, vest the, trousers the, socks the, shoes the, shirt the, drawers the, coat the, dress to ready things got had when... But soon I grew used to these sounds... Lit yad mac. ot og. Ton taw, ton tonk... But in the end I understood... Dis yb dis, nem owt. Yad la, tin fo trap... But soon I grew used to these sounds, and then I understood as well as ever, that is to say fully one half of what won its way past my tympan. (140-144)

The emphasis placed on Watt's delivery and Sam's ability to hear harkens back to the spelling and pronunciation of "bando (spelt as it sounds)" and Tetty's "wom/woom", mentioned in part one of this chapter. The text toys with the idea of aurality, betraying an awareness of being read. *Watt's* words take on a life in sound as well as in the private realm of the mind's voice. The words in this sequence carry little meaning in a linear reading, and Sam's refrain, disrupting these garbled sequences, describe a growing "used to these sounds" *before* he understood. In a potentially self-destructive inversion, Sam seems to be elevating the spoken word over the written in his understanding of Watt. The invitation to slip between "Watt" and "what", "Knott", "not" and "knot" is matched in a meta-textual sense by the relation of "Hackett" to "Beckett", and in the comparison between "Hackett" and "Watt"¹¹ made by Goff in part I. The aurality of *Watt*, the homophonically similar interrogative pronoun and the proper noun attributed to Watt, challenge conventional linear narratives. The text seems to spill off of the pages.

¹¹ Early drafts of *Watt* present Hackett as the character who Sam grapples with for understanding (See Marc Byron "The Ecstasy of *Watt*". *Samuel Beckett Today*. Vol. 14. *After Beckett* (2004). Pp. 495-506.)

This glimpse into the construction of the narrative becomes a further ecstatic moment when, later on in section three, the reader comes across a similarly deranged section of text which appears to have a direct connection to these incomprehensible exchanges.

As for his feet, sometimes he wore on each a sock, or on the one a sock and on the other a stocking, or a boot, or a shoe, or a slipper, or a sock and a boot, or a sock and a shoe, or a sock and a slipper, or a stocking and a boot, or a stocking and a shoe, or a stocking and a slipper...And sometimes he wore...And sometimes he wore...(173)

This listing of the possible combinations for what Mr Knott wore on his feet bears a striking resemblance to the garbled syntax which Sam “grew used to”. The scene is punctured by “[a]nd sometimes” which reminds the reader of Sam’s involvement in the narrative construction as a whole. This scene physically disrupts the page of the novel with its repetition and extended nature. It is a decidedly aural passage with the sliding sounds of “sock/shoe/slipper/stocking” disrupted by “boot”. The text is thus referring to itself and considering that some critics have misread Watt as a mute¹², the auralty of the text becomes an important aspect of a text that is never “simply there” (Byron 495).

In a sense this slip off the page into auralty, mirrors the relationship between the spoken and the written word. The homophone of “Watt/what” is the first instance of the text drawing the reader up short, “what” is *Watt*? This question that seems to drive and obfuscate Sam’s narrative. The text is both *on* the page and *off* the page in its aural dimension. Watt’s activities in Sam’s narrative mirror Sam’s descriptions. Considering that Sam’s hands “often left his shoulders, to make a note in their little notebook”, this inversion of the assigned causality of Watt’s narrative creates further uncertainty in Sam’s attempts to represent, rather than interpret. This in turn creates consternation surrounding the role of the interpreter, and the impossibility of understanding an object entirely as *itself*. For Gadamer an object can never be fully understood as *itself* because of the constant renewal of Tradition, carried forth perpetually through effective historical consciousness. The movement Sam and

¹² John Mood makes this mistake in his 1971 article ““The Personal System”— Samuel Beckett’s Watt”. PMLA, Vol. 86, No. 2 (March, 1971). Pp, 255-265

Watt make, whilst reminiscent of a dance, is also a mirroring of one another's steps. The imagery of reflection is carried throughout the text's multiple variations, repetitions and sequential descriptions of Knott's food, furniture, and dressing habits for example. In a physical manifestation of Gadamer's hermeneutic horizons, the fence delimits the range of Sam's access to Watt. The hole in the fence, which for Gadamer would become the space in which the questions of the text reach the reader, grants access to Watt for Sam. But he does not call Watt through, he crawls into the space and grasps Watt in dance. The fact that Sam sees these separate sections as mirrors rather than differing locales is an attempt to mitigate the distance between himself and Watt. The distance is not present if it is a reflection. Thus while Sam constructs Watt as an object for his observation he also fails to note his own thrown-ness, as he crawls into the void between the two fences. In the comparison to Bosch's Christ, Sam appears to be suggesting that it would flatter him to be cast as the central character in the work of art. It is not Watt that so intrigues him, but, in a moment of dorsality reminiscent of Hackett, it is his own sense of intrigue that he wishes to understand. This is a prejudice on Sam's part, an attempt to assimilate Watt's historical horizon (a horizon Watt navigates with his eyes facing backwards) into his own.

Thus the reader is further removed from the interpretative action of the novel. It appears that the text is a compilation of Sam's understandings of Watt rather than an attempt to represent Watt's story. While Sam's failure to see Watt as subject denies Watt the potential to understand his own narrative, this section does provide *Watt* with a historicity. In a sense it explains the initial utterance of the text, allocating itself a historical horizon. This process is complicated by the fact that this hermeneutic situation is enclosed within the work itself. This presents a multiplicity of horizons within a text which is constantly disrupting its own unity in the form of sounds which escape the page, characters who seemingly become aware of the limitations in their own characterisation and failed hermeneuticians betraying the inability to understand the effect they have within the world of the text.

The main contention with this objectification of Watt expressed in the prejudgements of Sam, is that the narrative preceding this waltz obsessively reconstructs Watt's failures to understand. Sam expects Watt to perform interpretations of his time in Knott's employment, but does not grant him the requisite subjectivity to make these interpretative manoeuvres. The narrative seems to be driving Watt's actions, rather than re-presenting his actions. Instead Sam would transcend the barrier between Watt's experience of Knott's household, in order to re-create, rather than mediate, said experience. This is again an anticipatory Gadamerian manoeuvre in which the language of the text, language which belongs to Sam, structures Watt's interaction with the world. The pervasiveness of this structure delimits Watt's potential as interpreter. In turn, this frustrates Sam's desires to capture Watt's understanding. This cyclical relation between representation in language as a tool which frustrates rather than exposes, is suggested in Beckett's comments to George Duthuit:

B. —The expression that 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. (103)

This relationship to language as something which frustrates the very expression of its own frustration pervades *Watt*, and gradually becomes pronounceable in the exasperation of the titular character with his own failing interpretative process. In the next section I will illustrate how Watt's interpretative failures betray a burgeoning awareness of his construction as narrative object in a world created by Sam's desire to understand.

2.3

Considering that all of Watt's interlocutors cast him as an object to be understood, rather than an articulate subject to be *experienced*, it is little wonder that his world became "unspeakable" (Beckett 71). Watt's relationship to the unspeakable world of Knott's house is linked to his failure to under-

stand. Watt, who “had not seen a symbol, nor executed an interpretation, since the age of fourteen, or fifteen, and who had lived, miserably it is true, among face values all his adult life...” (60), begins to uncover the “fragility of outer meaning” which causes him to “seek for another” (60). It becomes increasingly apparent that Watt is aware there is potentially more going on around him in Knott’s house than he has access to. It is these instances, where Watt seeks for another meaning that he finds the nominative descriptions of objects in his world incomplete, and unsatisfactory. It becomes increasingly difficult for him to separate the objects of Knott’s household from a conception of himself.

The “unspeakable” aspects of Watt’s world suggest his growing awareness that he is inextricably bound to a hermeneutical situation, a situation that has been thrust upon him by Sam. The breakdown in language’s relation to objects in Watt’s world renders them unspeakable. He cannot with any confidence attribute the word “pot” to the corresponding object in Knott’s kitchen (69). Yet, being a narrative construction created by language, his “desire for semantic succour” is very strong (68). But Watt is not the generative narrative voice of his text and thus he relies on external voices, or authorities, to *make* his world. When, for example, Erskine does not consent to name the “pot” a “pot” it is not that his description would have transformed the “pot” into a “pot” for “Watt, for it would not” (69). Instead what Watt seems to desire from Erskine in his naming of the objects in his world, is the confirmation that at the present instance Watt’s language has failed him, but that he will recover in the future. This futurity that Watt begins to rely on suggests his growing awareness that in Sam’s narrative he is a simulacrum of himself. This is an ecstatic rupture in the text in which Watt himself is beside himself. What this suggests is that Watt’s construction as interpretable object denies him a hermeneutical situation from which he can engage with his present locale. Instead, he needs an external voice, “wrapping up safe in words” the objects in the narrative, including himself: “it would have shown that at least for Erskine the pot was a pot, and Watt a man.” (69)

The infamous pot scene is matched by Watt's discovery that the designation of "man" to describe himself, is a historical inheritance that he is deeply suspicious of. These instances betray a burgeoning self-awareness in his characterisation. His growing awareness that he is ill-equipped to describe and make sense of the world, are directly attributable to the hermeneutic failures of Hackett, the Nixons and Sam. By casting him as an object for interpretation Watt's interlocutors and his scribe have removed both narrative agency and historicity from Watt. Considering that Sam wishes to understand what Watt understood about Knott's household this objectification seems to be the crux of the failure. But this failure does not necessitate an absence of meaning. In fact what this failure represents is a critical portrayal of methodologically devoted interpretation. Once Watt begins to look, seek for a meaning, the object under investigation changes and can no longer be described by the words and names Watt is familiar with—"For Watt now found himself in the midst of things which, if they consented to be named, did so as it were with a reluctance." (67) The fact that it is these "things" that resist Watt, rather than a failing on his part to understand them linguistically, speaks to Watt's burgeoning awareness that the Tradition he has inherited through Sam's narrative construction has an influence over the way he understands. It a structuring force that is external to his conceptions of objects within his world.

Dirk van Hulle notes that in Beckett's 1965 *Film*, starring Buster Keaton, the effect is similar.

O ('object') tries to avoid the looks of E ('eye'), who chases him everywhere. In the end, it turns out that all this time, Buster Keaton (who plays these roles) has been both running away from and chasing himself [this representation ...] enhanced the awareness that every text is both O[bject] and E[ye] at the same time, something which is embodied by a physical carrier (O) and which is inevitably transformed when it becomes a reception text (E), that is, when a reader sets eyes on it. (Van Hulle 284)

Watt's lack of awareness that he is both "O" and "E" in this narrative is a direct result of Sam's construal of Watt as solely "O". Thus, Watt's failed interpretative gestures become an indictment of Sam's failed interpretation of Watt. Sam's narrative does not convey the fact that Watt was both an object and a subject influencing the narrative. As such, Sam's interpretative attempts are criticised

for not only failing to understand, but failing to experience the interpretative process (a decidedly Gadamerian concept). While Watt is not as overtly, and absurdly, self-conscious as Buster Keaton's scurrying, wall hugging tramp in *Film*, he is certainly beginning to understand why he will "never know" much about Knott's house. This burgeoning awareness is an ecstatic rupture within the text. Watt's seeking for meaning in the aftermath of the Galls father and son piano tuning incident was not "so peculiar" that he sought after what the incident "really meant" but only sought what it "might be induced to mean, with the help of a little patience, a little ingenuity." (61) Watt is not seeking an essential "truth" in these instances, but rather an interpretation that makes sense to him within his current location. Again this is a Gadamerian concept of understanding, that truth is not a finite position, immutable in its transference through history. Instead truth is the experience of the work of art, the truth that imparts itself on the interpreter during the interpretative fusion of horizons. This is a crucial distinction for the criticisms that Habermas levels at Gadamer. Gadamer never claims that philosophical hermeneutics is complete. Instead, the position of fusion is constantly rejuvenated and reassessed. The possibility for ideological critique, that Habermas claims is missing from Gadamer's description, is readily available as each interpretation experiences the fusion of horizons in different locales, negotiating different versions of Tradition through language. This meets the criteria for critique which often seeks to expose what was previously taken for granted. In *Watt* Sam, Hackett and Tetty take it for granted that Watt can be understood. There is a parody of the reader in this relationship. It is not that Watt cannot be understood, it is not that he "resists" nominative attribution, but rather that he can only be understood if he is allowed to understand. This is the "what-ness" of Watt that creates such interpretative intrigue in his interlocutors. But, in the Gadamerian framework, this requires a form of subject-hood denied him by his interpreters and Sam. This denial of Watt's subjectivity through his construal as interpretable object, dramatises the tyranny of hidden prejudgements that Gadamer describes in philosophical hermeneutics. This process emerges because of Sam's failure to acknowledge the multiplicity of horizons and his assimilation, rather than mediated interrogation, of Watt's historical horizon.

Watt's interpretative ecstasy exposes the systematic distortion of Watt's interpreters. The text dramatises the effect of prejudgement through the representation of Watt's failure to "know". By exposing the interpretative prejudgements, assimilated and transferred onto and into Watt by Hackett, Tetty and Sam, the text encourages the reader to remain aware of his/her own location as both "O and E": affecting and changing meaning in the text and, in this case, being affected and changed by the text in each new interpretative moment. This allows an understanding of Watt to emerge which addresses the second order hermeneutic questions of the text. By engaging with the meta-hermeneutic concerns which constitute *Watt*, the reader is encouraged to interrogate his/her own interpretative process. Presented with a series of bad hermeneuticians, the reader must cultivate a spectatorial position, in which s/he is responding to "what" is bad about these interpretative methods. It is this discussion around the failure of understanding that leads many critics to disavow meaning in *Watt*, attributing to it a "failurist" perspective in which the text grasps for "nothing" but finds itself incapable of representing this "nothing".

The ecstatic-ness of *Watt* is represented by Watt's growing awareness that he is a finite textual entity, incapable of interpreting the objects that surround him because he cannot interpret himself. Watt presents an absence, an aporia, in which the prejudgements of his interlocutors create him for the reader. In these instances where the world of objects that surround Watt begin to defy his nominative attribution that he seems to become aware of this absence.

For the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something, just as the only way to speak of God is to speak of him as though he were a man, which to be sure he was, in a sense, for a time, and as the only way one can speak of man, even our anthropologists have realised that, is to speak of him as though he were a termite. (64)

In this chapter I have shown how the multiple horizons in the text position the reader as a spectator, engaging with interpretations of the text by the text, rather than mediating an interpretative en-

gement with a conventional narrative. This in turn exposes the prejudgements of the characters in relation to Watt which affects his ability to understand the narrative world he has thrust upon him by Sam. I have argued that this is an anticipation and dramatisation of Gadamer's concerns with methodologically devout hermeneutic praxis, which seeks the same "semantic succour" Watt desires. The effect of this on the reader is to create a heightened awareness of the role hermeneutic situations play in interpretative exchanges. As such, the dramatisation of systematic distortions, or the tyranny of hidden prejudgements, becomes the site in which the reader is engaged in interpretative dialogue. *Watt* creates this relationship with the reader by disrupting habitual reading practices and linear narrative, creating a third space where the text exists beside itself. It is in the relationship between the text and the reader that *Watt* becomes ecstatic and gestures towards the limitations of representation through the uninterrogated prejudgements of language. By dramatising these limitations, expressed through interpretation, the text anticipates Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic description of interpretation as Being, and Being that is understandable as language (Gadamer 1960, xxxi). The only way that the text could conceivably represent "nothing" would be to gesture towards an absence: this absence is centred around Watt. His representation, through interpretation by Sam, is an exercise in failure because he has no Being that can be understood. The reader, located in a spectatorial position, engages with the multiple historical horizons which create this absence of Watt. The text is flush with meaning by exposing this dramatisation of horizontal interaction, and the reasons for its failure.

In the next chapter I will investigate *Naked Lunch* under the rubric of philosophical hermeneutics. The chapter positions *Naked Lunch* on the opposite end of the scale to *Watt* in its relationship with the reader. Burroughs's text relies explicitly on the reader's engagement, and, instead of locating him/her in spectatorial relation to itself, it draws the reader into the world of the novel, casting him/her as alternatively ally and enemy throughout the series of routines which comprise the novel. The effect of this on the reader's hermeneutics is similar to the heightened awareness of systematic

distortion present in representation that I have shown to be the case in *Watt*. Yet it is a radicalised version of this awareness in that the text creates a powerful uncertainty and anxiety in the reader's hermeneutic engagement. I will be working with the central thesis that *Naked Lunch* tries to con the reader into a submissive relation with its criticisms on authority, as a means to illustrate the pervasive power of language's relation to authority.

Chapter 3

William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*: Interpretative Anxiety and Tradition.

“*Naked Lunch* demands silence from the Reader. Otherwise he is taking his own pulse...” (187) This statement, made by Burroughs in the *Atrophied Preface: Wouldn't You?* appended to the 2009 4th Estate “restored text” edition of *Naked Lunch*, carries with it an uncomfortable didacticism. It is a demand made on the reader once s/he has reached the “end” of the book; an interpretative insistence issued by an authorial presence in a text which is anxiously suspicious of any authority at all. The text is littered with such paradoxical intrusions drawing the reader “up short” in his/her interpretative moment (Gadamer 280). The novel situates itself as a cataclysmic criticism of the mechanisms of control exposing the nefarious ways in which language is used to manipulate thought and experience. Yet the text also establishes itself as the authority on such matters: “*Naked Lunch* is a blueprint, a How-To Book[...]How-To extend levels of experience by opening the door at the end of a long hall...” (187). Burroughs defines control as being intimately bound up in “suggestion” and “manipulation” and, if the control mechanism is extended to decimate any thoughts of resistance, then control becomes unnecessary.

I *control* a hypnotised subject (at least partially); I *control* a slave, a dog, a worker; but if I establish *complete* control somehow, as by implanting electrodes in the brain, then my subject is little more than a tape recorder, a camera, a robot. You don't *control* a tape recorder—you *use* it. (39)

The ultimate form of this manipulative coercive control is language, what Burroughs terms the “word virus”. For Burroughs “words are [...] the principal instruments of control” (39) and it is this suspicious relationship with language which creates the potential impasse of *Naked Lunch*.

Naked Lunch establishes itself as a novel *about* the coercive intrusion of language on experience. The text is continuously preoccupied with manipulation rather than domination. By establishing itself as an authority on authority, *Naked Lunch* fosters an anxiety in the interpretative exchange between itself and the reader. The reader is made aware of the novel's attempts to manipulate him/her

through the interpretative exchange and as such becomes suspicious in his/her engagement with the novel. Thus the text presents a dramatisation of its own criticisms of control through language as the reader is placed in a precariously anxious location within the back and forth of the interpretative dialogue. I will argue that this suspicion creates the potential for a response to the perceived impasse.

The text's antagonistic relationship with its own medium (language) exposes the interpellation of language and meaning within a Traditional framework. This locating of language and meaning overtly exposes the embedded ideology Habermas feared was overlooked in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. However, it is only by engaging dialogically with *Naked Lunch* that the embeddedness of language comes to be pronounceable through a critically appraising, and self-reflective silence. Gadamer's anti-teleological description of understanding through interpretative dialogue encourages the reader to remain open to the horizontal clashes between the text and his/her hermeneutic situation. Without the reader's attempts to understand, the novel remains a proselytising document expounding the evils of control. However when the reader opens him/herself up to the questions of the text, there is an anxiety which enters the dialogic exchange. This anxiety is borne out of the growing suspicion that the text is trying to both "wise up" the reader, and con him/her into a position of complicity with the novel's criticisms of control. This anxiety in the hermeneutic exchange does lead to the silence that Burroughs "demands" of the reader. But it does not lead to silence *because* Burroughs demands it. It leads to silence because of the dramatisation of control through language that the text effects through the interpretative engagement with the reader. As Oliver Harris notes, "Control and its terrors are *present* rather than represented in this writing, *produced by* as much as reproduced in it. We grasp these terrors by the experience of being grasped by them" (54).

The dramatisation of control through language relates to Habermas's criticisms of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. If language gives structure to and indelibly influences thought, and "being that can be understood is language" then the critique of interpellation that Habermas accuses Gadamer's historically inherited horizons of succumbing to, seems to be an essential component of the coercive effects of control with which Burroughs is concerned (Gadamer xxxi). I will interrogate the relationship between these two aspects of language, and suggest that Burroughs's use of "The Word" is an attritional usage: his words "atrophy" and die out. The "death" of these words leaves the reader in a critically appraising silence from which the potential for the interrogation of Tradition can begin.

Importantly, *Naked Lunch* challenges distinctions of textuality as well. The novel is encased in a series of prefaces, introductions, essays, letters, and annexed routines. While these have been conventionally treated as fascicular documents in relation to the "main body of the novel", I find the distinction in relation to such an anarchic text tenuous at best. Most of the material found in these "peripheral" texts correlates strongly with the material found in the novel itself. Harris claims that the introductions to the texts published in the 1950s have "upstaged" and "set the terms" for how they should be read (57). This betrays an interesting association of authority with the "atrophied prefaces" of *Naked Lunch* in particular. I would suggest that the critical focus on these fascicular documents is simply that the distinction between the "text itself" and the accompanying introductions is not readily available. As such, I will be treating these documents as part of the interpretative *experience* of *Naked Lunch* and in possession of as much "authority" as the routines traditionally considered to make up the novel.

This chapter is broken into three distinct sections. Writing about a text as fractious as *Naked Lunch* is a difficult proposition and I wish to avoid, as much as is possible, imposing a structure onto a text that overtly defies structures. It must be stated from the outset that *Naked Lunch* is not a novel that

“begins” and “ends” in any conventional sense: it does not lead the reader to a conclusion through a series of propositions and fictional premises. Instead the text explodes on the page and requires the reader to balance the multiple routines as individual segments as well as snapshots coalescing to form a vista of a paranoid, antagonistic world. In the first section I will discuss the context from which *Naked Lunch* emerges and discuss the potential dangers in ascribing historical allegory to the novel. I will discuss the multiple, deferring historical horizons that *Naked Lunch* represents in its mosaic structure in relation to a critique of allegorical readings of *Naked Lunch* and the Cold War. This section will also discuss Burroughs’s views on censorship and thought control. The discussion around censorship will allow me to segue into Burroughs’s theory of language. In both of these sections I will be relying heavily on *Naked Lunch* to explain, complicate and affirm aspects of anxious hermeneutics. In the final section of the chapter I will perform a forensic reading on the opening section of the book. In the concluding section I will discuss how anxiety informs the interpretative self-doubt that allows *Naked Lunch* to dramatise its critiques of language in the interpretative exchange. This silence, borne from an anxiety fostered in the interpretative exchange, encourages a self-reflective awareness on the part of the reader. S/he is constantly aware that they *are reading*. Anxiety in this sense, becomes a positive, productive interpretative tool for the reader of *Naked Lunch*, but it is only available through a Gadamerian interrogation of Tradition, hermeneutic situations and historical horizons. As with the chapter on *Watt*, Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics will inform all my critical engagement with *Naked Lunch* and I will show how Burroughs’s desire for silence on the part of the reader, becomes a critically valuable response to the critiques of interpellation in philosophical hermeneutics.

3.1

Them Communists they wus comin' around,
 They wus in the air,
 They wus on the ground,
 They wouldn't gimme no peace . . .
 (Bob Dylan, *Talkin' John Birch Society (Paranoid) Blues*)

Bob Dylan was invited to perform on the Ed Sullivan Show in March 1963. Dylan wanted to perform his parodic talking blues of the John Birch Society but was told that the song was too risqué for the show. Dylan refused to perform and walked off the set (Willentz 92-93). The song details the paranoid ramblings of a new John Birch Society recruit as he begins to uncover Communists all around him in suburban America. The irony of censoring this song was of course that there was an Aesopian truth to the absurd representation of looking for Communists in a “T.V. set”—at least for the censors at the Ed Sullivan Show, the fear was that television viewers would “find them”. “Well, I was sittin' home alone an' started to sweat, Figured they wus in my T.V set. Peeked behind the picture frame, Got a shock from my feet, hittin' right up in the brain. Them Reds caused it!” (Dylan)

William S. Burroughs's second novel *Naked Lunch*, was also the subject of censorship between 1959 and 1966. In a landmark appeal to the Massachusetts Supreme Court, *Naked Lunch* was cleared of obscenity charges. The clearing of all charges against *Naked Lunch* was to be the “last instance of complete literary censorship in the US” (Whiting 145). The fact remains that this process took seven years. In a great feat of bureaucratic irony, the courts affirmed Burroughs's “word hoard” (*NL*, 188) to be in possession of a literary and representative authority that *Naked Lunch* avidly critiques and defers. It also suggests that whilst Dylan's *Talkin' John Birch Society (Paranoid) Blues* was provocative enough to be considered coercive, *Naked Lunch* offered enough societal comment to warrant a legal stamp of approval. In both Dylan's and Burroughs's cases the censorship of their creative works adds a materiality to what they were both attempting to capture through phantasmagoric farce.

Although prosperous, post-war America was a country enmeshed in Cold War anxieties. Having emerged from the Second World War relatively unscathed (the majority of the fighting and destruction being limited to Europe), with war time savings amounting to 140 billion dollars, and an entrenched position of global prominence, America of the 1950s was an economically viable nation (Fried, 78-79). American citizens purchased an average of twenty-thousand television sets daily in the mid-fifties, automobiles rolled off of the factory floors and an intricate weave of highways shut-

bled men in grey suits to work and back (Fried, 78-79). But as materially buoyant as the era may have been it was by no means peaceful.

It was in this climate that the Truman regime came under fire from Republican senators, employing the public's fears to gain political purchase in their frustrations at being repeatedly denied office, for "selling out to Communism" (Fried, 81). Senator Joseph R. McCarthy came to the fore as the leading voice in what rapidly devolved into a witch hunt. McCarthy and HUAC came to dominate political discourse of the period and elaborated upon speculations of an intricate network of Soviet spies desperate to steal American atomic secrets and the like. However, it would be truly reductive to suggest that McCarthyism was solely a consequence of Senator McCarthy and other Republican senators's politicking. Instead, anti-Communist rhetoric and fears were buttressed by a commitment to a shared "American way of life", which was becoming increasingly contained and claustrophobic throughout the decade. As Richard M. Fried notes,

[m]any Americans were bewildered by the deep social and political changes at work in the twentieth century. Many such changes occurring in the neighbourhood, the nation, and the world could, consistent with America's anti-Communist consensus, be attributed to Communist scheming. Thus a profound cultural aversion to communism also underlay McCarthyism. It was this detestation that gave politicians broad leeway to pursue anti-Communist endeavours. A related factor was the nation's underdeveloped appreciation of the importance of civil liberties for repudiated minorities (84).

This commitment to a shared ideology encouraged an uncritical climate, in which universities were discouraged from prescribing works by Marx and intellectuals were afraid to posit their political viewpoints. This "cultural aversion to Communism" is also captured by the Bob Dylan song. By using a talking blues to satirise the paranoid detection of Communist affiliation from spaces as intimate as the toilet bowl to objects as ubiquitous as the American flag, the song suggests the universal or totalising nature of this fear. This is ultimately a form of tautological reasoning; Communism is everywhere because everywhere there is Communism.

The totalisation of a "way of life" left an indelible mark on the ways texts were censored during the period. Due to the encroaching fears of Communism, censorship was not left to the governmental

agencies alone but had proliferated amongst a populace determined to remain loyal to an economic prosperity which was uncritically related to the successful ideological underpinnings of Capitalism. As Stuart Ewan notes in his study of advertising and its role in the emergent consumer culture of the era,

[c]onsumerist ideology became rampant, critical social thought became anathema...The Consumerised universe was...erected with unprecedented vigour, positing an economic nationalism which signified the inviolate sanctity of the world of goods. The definitions of “freedom” and “choice” were being unified and firmly implanted in the conception of loyal commitment to the political, religious and social arenas [of] brand names and consumer credit...[T]he definition proffered by a “freedom-loving” political ideology was one in which to produce one’s own world was subversive (except where it was legitimised by the “do-it-yourself” industry); to assert the idea that a community might control its own destiny was “communistic.”...[T]o look different; to act different; to think different; these became the vague archetypes of subversion and godlessness. ...The vision of freedom which was being offered to Americans was one which continually relegated people to consumption, passivity, and spectatorship. ...While heralding a world of unprecedented freedom and opportunity, corporations (in concert with the state apparatus) were generating a mode of existence which was increasingly regimented and authoritarian (105).

As much as the American public was victimised by the anti-Communist propaganda and Communist witch hunt initiated by Senator McCarthy’s “Red Scare”, the reality was an intricate dialectical relationship between the public sphere and the so-called private sphere. In Dylan’s *Talkin’ John Birch (Paranoid) Blues*, the narrator concerns himself with finding Communists secreted in physically intimate spaces, such as his toilet bowl and his chimney, as well as the metaphorically intimate space of his selfhood when he “couldn’t imagine doing anything else/So now I’m sittin’ at home, investigatin’ myself.” In these instances the threat of global Communism has moved irrevocably from the international political sphere into the toilet bowls and psyche of the individual. Despite the histrionic sentiment behind Dylan’s representation, there is a sense in which this representation was accurate for many.

The collapse of previously held distinctions between the private and public spheres in the name of public “safety” and “health”, is forcefully illustrated in Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* in the baroque rou-

tine entitled “Meeting of International Conference of Technological Psychiatry.” Here a doctor presents his monstrous version of a de-anxietised creature,

“Gentlemen, the human nervous system can be reduced to a compact and abbreviated spinal column. The brain, front, middle and rear must follow the adenoid, the wisdom tooth, the appendix...I give you my Master Work: The Complete All American De anxietised Man...” (87)

In this section “Doctor ‘Fingers’ Schaefer, the Lobotomy Kid’s[...] Master work: The Complete All American De anxietised Man” (87) is presented to the “Gentleman” of the international delegation of technological psychiatrists. The creature arrives in the room as a man but rapidly transforms into a black centipede after shedding its human flesh. The “de anxietised man” in this routine appears to be a scientific anomaly which sheds its human form. The audience members mutter about Schaefer’s irresponsibility and failings as a man of science, but most damningly “a fat frog-faced Southern Doctor who has been drinking corn out of mason jar” (88) yells out that they “must stomp out the Un-American crittah.” (88.) The invocation here, in conjunction with Stuart’s assertion that freedom for American citizens had “relegated people to [a position of] consumption, passivity, and spectatorship”, is that the de anxietised man is “Un-American”. The fact that this mutated form, from man to insect, is un-American in the Southern Doctor’s diagnosis suggests that the notion of humanity is intimately linked to the moniker: American. Also, the fact that this creature only transforms once it has been “de-anxietised” suggests that there is both a humanity in anxiety and that this anxiety is a condition of being an American. Stuart’s suggestion is that the relegation of citizens to the positions espoused above denies a sense of humanity and individuality to the increasingly homogenised “consumer”.

The “consumer” is thus placed in parallel with the metamorphosing “All American De anxietised Man”. There is something human in anxiety as opposed to the constant references to the dehumanised position of an insect; a position reinforced in the rhetoric of the McCarthy era. Fiona Patton notes in her study of *Naked Lunch* as a gothic novel emerging from the “gothic fifties”, that the rhetoric of “otherness” which dominated the anti-Communist and un-American sentiment was

largely achieved through metaphorical allusions to disease and monsters. McCarthy's descriptions of Communism often took the form of allusions to "octopi, snakes, and spiders" (Patton, 54). It was simpler to construct "The Communist" (definite article necessary) as a monstrous entity, or a "malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue" in order to cultivate both the sense of pervasive fear as well as a dependence on authority for protection from what was feared (Kennan qtd in Patton, 54). Thus the Cold War and McCarthy's "Red Scare" saw the collapse between spaces of interaction, which was achieved through the reinforcement of fast binary distinctions between "Self/Human" (American) and "Other" (Communist). These fast binary distinctions were established through the manipulation of metaphorical language. By casting Communism as a monstrous disease it became much easier to deny "communists" a sense of shared humanity. This allocation of humanity *away* from Communism is also prominent in the proliferation of articles on brainwashing emerging in popular culture at the time.¹³ It was inconceivable that human beings would willingly subjugate themselves to a system associated metaphorically with disease and monstrosity.

At the end of his technological psychiatric conference routine, Doctor Schaefer is tried by the DA (District Attorney) and the existence of his "All American De anxietised Man" is questioned because it had been incinerated by the attendees. Importantly the "All American" must be constructed, cultivated in a lab and once it has reached this totalising state, it cannot support its human form.

Secondly, the destruction of the black centipede is what the DA is investigating in the routine, not whether Schaefer should have created it:

Gentleman of the jury, these "learned gentlemen" claim that the innocent human creature they have so wantonly slain suddenly turned itself into a huge black centipede and it was "their duty to the human race" to destroy this monster before it could, by any means at its disposal, perpetrate its kind. (88)

¹³ Unlike McCarthyism, which by the mid-fifties had come to operate in an increasingly marginalised space in American culture, "brainwashing", by the mid-sixties, "had been the subject of more than two hundred articles in popular U.S. magazines" Melley, Timothy. "Brainwashed! Conspiracy Theory and Ideology in the Postwar United States" *New German Critique*, No. 103 *Dark Powers: Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in History and Literature* (Winter, 2008), pp. 145-164. p, 148.

The language of the official authority, the DA, ironises the positions espoused by those in charge during McCarthy's witch hunt. The contentious words "duty", "human race", and "creature", all serve to reify the rhetoric of good/evil, healthy/diseased, human/insect (monster) which litter the rhetoric of the Cold War. J. Edgar Hoover wrote that the Communist Party "seemed little more than a freak [in the beginning]. Yet in the intervening years that freak has grown into a powerful monster endangering us all." (Hoover qtd in Patton, 53) In the infamous "Long Telegram" sent from Moscow in 1946, George Kennan had this to say regarding Communist-American polarity: "Much depends on the health and vigour of our own society. World Communism is like a malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue. This is the point at which domestic and foreign policies meet." (54 in Patton) Kennan's telegram positions both the binary of public and private spheres of influence in relation to anti-Communist sentiment as well as the binary of healthy and diseased. In the rationale of the "Long Telegram" a healthy society had no need for Communism because Communism had no need for a healthy society. When Burroughs's *Deanxietised Man* turns into a black centipede he is collapsing one of the key binaries in this historical context—that of human being (American/Capitalist) and that of illegitimate, monstrous creature (Communist).

In many respects Burroughs's novel parodies, in its form, the acquiescence of allegory to the dictates of censors deciding what can be presented to a reader when. In *Naked Lunch* the text attempts to present the reader with the "naked" reality, an attempt to illustrate "the frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork" (*NL*, 199). But to attribute an allegorical reading to the text, one that ties it directly to the concerns surrounding the rhetoric of the Cold War is to minimise the broader claims of Burroughs's work. *Naked Lunch* is a series of routines, placed in no particular order, asking the reader to participate in the juxtaposition of said routines—"I do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot' 'continuity'...I am not an entertainer..." (*NL*, 184). Burroughs asks the reader to negotiate each routine on its own terms, whilst maintaining a conception of the effect of the whole of the text. Because each section could be read as a stand alone piece a multiplicity of historical horizons and hermeneutic situations are presented to the reader. As such to ascribe a sole

context which then explicates any understanding of *Naked Lunch* as a “Cold War novel” is to avoid the collision of these horizons and the effect they perpetuate in the interpretative dialogue. Burroughs’s conception of language is central in this respect. He distrusts the medium entirely, and works within a framework of hard linguistic determinism. This conception of language is manifested throughout his oeuvre and particularly in his views on censorship. Thus the historical context of the Cold War seems to offer much in understanding Burroughs’s preoccupation with language as coercive creator of false realities but such readings offer Burroughs’s works up as an exemplar of the period, exposing that Cold War rhetoric was employed rather than discussing the effects of this conception of language in the interpretative instance. I think Burroughs’s ambitions were more lofty and that *Naked Lunch*, by showing the reader how s/he can be manipulated and coerced during the interpretative process, encourages a critical awareness of language within a Traditional horizon. For Gadamer’s conception of dialogue as interpretation this meta-hermeneutic engagement responds to the claim that philosophical hermeneutics remains unaware of the location of language within an ideological Tradition. This is fostered through a mildly paranoid relationship between the text and the reader.

3.2

In 1962 Burroughs was invited to present a talk on censorship at the Edinburgh Writer’s Conference. His speech suggested that censorship was a form of mind control and, despite its somewhat polemical position, coheres with his thoughts surrounding language more generally:

Censorship is the presumed right of governmental agencies to decide what words and images the citizen is permitted to see: that is thought control since thought consists largely of word and image — What is considered harmful and therefore censored will of course depend on the government exercising censorship — in The Middle Ages, when the church controlled censoring agencies, the emphasis was on heretical doctrines — In Communist countries censorship is close in the area of politics — In English-speaking countries the weight of censorship falls on sexual word and image as dangerous to an economic system depending on mass production and a large public of more or less uncritical consumers — In any form censorship presupposes the right of the government to decide what people will think — I am precisely suggesting that the right to exercise such control is called into question. (Burroughs, 5)

Burroughs's conception that thought "consists largely of word and image" and that these are the zones in which censorship is felt most acutely, allows him to suggest that censorship is a version of thought control. This theoretical conception of thought as language is a hard form of linguistic determinism and ascribes a level of authority to the written word that Burroughs's oeuvre seeks to disrupt. If patterns of meaning and understanding can be mapped out in relation to language and images, and certain combinations deemed unsavoury, then for Burroughs language can be controlled. In Burroughs's estimation "control can never be a means to any practical end...it can never be a means to anything but more control..."(*NL*, 135) which entails that control is never "complete" and will remain "impartial" (a key component in his distinction between control and utilisation). The anti-teleological momentum of control for Burroughs is intimately bound up in his somewhat deterministic conception of language as the site in which free thought is denied.

The author's paranoia surrounding language as suppressant of free thought can never be accurately described because this description would depend on language. It is this exact tension which permeates and colours the reader's interpretative engagement with *Naked Lunch*. However there are instances where Burroughs seems to suggest that language can escape the control of the writer:

The writer sees himself reading to the mirror as always...He must check now and again to reassure himself that The Crime of Separate Action has not, is not, cannot occur...Anyone who has ever looked into a mirror knows what this crime is and what it means in terms of lost control when the reflection no longer obeys...Too late to dial *P o l i c e*... (*NL*, 186).

The temporal shift in the second sentence claiming that "The Crime of Separate Action *has* not, *is* not, *cannot* occur" implies that language is escaping from the writer, his reflection is shifting through a series of temporal locales, both past, present and even into the future. Language, as it exists in *Naked Lunch* "spill[s] off the page in all directions", deferring the temporal locale of the Crime of Separate Action so that it is never clear whether it "has" happened, "will" happen, or is "happening" (*NL*, 191). But Burroughs conceives of language in even harder terms than these. For him language *is* a virus.

The Word is literally a virus, and it has not been recognised as such because it has achieved a state of relatively stable symbiosis with its human host; that is to say The Word Virus (the Other Half) has established itself so firmly as an accepted part of the human organism that it can now sneer at gangster viruses like smallpox, and turn them in to the Pasteur Institute. But The Word clearly bears the single identifying feature of the virus: it is an organism with no internal function other than to replicate itself. ("Ten Years and a Billion Dollars", Burroughs, 47)

The perpetual replication of The Word Virus is intimately bound up with Burroughs's conception of control as never being fully manifested. In this rendering The Word becomes material, occupying both time and space. This materiality of The Word *as* Virus, allows Burroughs to explore mechanistic responses to language, whilst avoiding the inferential and representational consequences of such a rendering of meaning.

Burroughs has three explicit concerns regarding language: the definite article, the concept of either/or, and the "is" of identity. Burroughs's contention with the definite article "the" is that it is totalising and his solution is to replace "the" with "a". Burroughs's solution to the distinguishing quality imbedded in the concept of either/or is to replace it entirely with "and". Finally Burroughs contends that the "is" of identity, which, in his formulation, stultifies and suggests finality, should be abandoned altogether (*Electronic Revolution*, 32-36).

The mechanistic overhaul of language and basic grammatical codes are indicative of Burroughs's attempts to work from within a system to dismantle its apparatus. His concern with these basics of grammar is not to reduce language to a more abstract representational mode but to expose the routines, and potentially determined nature of linear discourse. By dismantling some of the stricter definitive claims made by language (the either/or distinction, the "is" of identity and the finality accorded to "the") Burroughs lessens its control, "Burroughs's strategy of resistance is always to turn the enemy's weapons against themselves" (Lydenberg, 43).

Burroughs's attempts to materialise The Word in order to repair and expose its habitual modes of understanding manifest themselves in *Naked Lunch's* narrative tics. In *Naked Lunch* Burroughs employs a litany of narrative techniques to challenge conventional modes of understanding through language. Parataxis is the most evident technique employed by the narrative. By allowing the descrip-

tions of people and places to run into each other through an asyndetic syntax, the reader is denied the comfort of coordinating conjunctions and required to work harder to create a unified image from a series of fragments.

Chicago: invisible hierarchy of decorticated wops, smell of atrophied gangsters, earthbound ghost hits you at North and Halsted, Cicero, Lincoln Park, panhandler of dreams, past invading the present, rancid magic of slot machines and roadhouses[...]And always cops: smooth college-trained state cops, practiced, apologetic patter, electronic eyes weigh your car and luggage, clothes and face; snarling big city dicks, soft-spoken country sheriffs with something black and menacing in old eyes colour of a faded grey flannel shirt... (NL, 11)

The descriptions work from the general to the specific, from a pejorative slur (“wops”) describing European migrants to the US, to a country sheriff whose eyes hold “something black and menacing”. The reader is asked to work these colliding images into a complete mosaic of “Chicago” (11). This technique is overtly hermeneutic and requires interpretative effort on the part of the reader to find a point of cohesion in the litany of adjectives.

The text also employs malapropisms, misquotes, misspellings and typographical errors to explore the inaccuracy of language in conveying meaning: “A battalion of rampant bores [boars] prowls the streets” (33). A rampant bore, as opposed to the more conventional “rampant boar” exposes the slipperiness of the word and the potential violence of a “bore”. The malapropism has the added effect of disrupting, and surprising the reader evoking an irony in the use of the word “bore”. It also slips into the meaning of creating a hole, “boring into...” which relates to what Burroughs thinks the role of a poet is: “all poets worthy of the name are mind parasites, and their words ought to get into your head and live there, repeating and repeating and repeating” (Qtd in Harris, 2003, 6). The notion of repetition is important for “bore” because the hole created is generally made by a cylindrical tool.

Burroughs also puts his own spin on a quote from *Macbeth* “Confusion hath fuck his masterpiece” (35). A famous adage from Nathan Bedford Forrest, a confederate general during the civil war receives similar treatment in, “He really got there firstest with the mostest” (50) and there is also the insertion of expletives in common idioms, “that citizen wouldn’t give up the shit, I mean the

ship.” (53), “We should look a gift horse in the ass already?” (133) These examples show the slippage that the word is capable of and the impossibility of assigning The Word a single meaning. These techniques are expository and seek to disrupt the habitual modes of understanding in the reading process.

Language as virus takes on a visceral form in the infamous “carny man” routine. The routine is related by Dr Benway and he prefaces the routine with a description of the audience reception of the “carny man’s” act:

Benway: Why not one all purpose blob? Did I ever tell you about the man who taught his asshole to talk? His whole abdomen would move up and down you dig farting out the words. It was unlike anything I ever heard. This ass talk had a sort of gut frequency. It hit you right down there like you gotta go. You know when the old colon gives you the elbow and it feels sorta cold inside, and you know all you have to do is turn loose? Well this talking hit you right down there, a bubbly, thick stagnant sound, a sound you could smell. (110-111)

A preface, detailing the effect of the asshole’s speech on the audience, reminds the reader of the encompassing effect of The Word. The language of the asshole is presented as something that is not simply heard, but smelt and felt in the colon (apt for this routine). This description of the language of the “asshole” lends a sensory physicality to the routine.

Benway goes on to describe how the asshole grew to take over the rest of the body:

“This man worked for a carnival you dig, and to start with it was like a novelty ventriloquist act. Real funny, too, at first... After a while the ass started talking on its own. He would go in without anything prepared and his ass would ad-lib and toss the gags back at him every time. Then it developed sort of teeth-like little raspy incurving hooks and started eating. He thought this was cute at first and built an act around it, but the asshole would eat its way through his pants and start talking on the street, shouting out it wanted equal rights. It would get drunk, too, and have crying jags nobody loved it and it wanted to be kissed same as any other mouth. Finally it talked all the time day and night, you could hear him from blocks screaming at it to shut up, and beating it with his fist, and sticking candles up it, but nothing did any good and the asshole said to him: ‘It’s you who will shut up in the end. Not me. Because we don’t need you around here any more. I can talk and eat and shit.’ After that he began waking up in the morning with a transparent jell like a tadpole’s tail all over his mouth. This jelly was what the scientists called un-D.T., Undifferentiated Tissue, which can grow into any kind of flesh on the human body. He would tear it off his mouth and the pieces would stick to his hands like burning gasoline jelly and grow there, grow anywhere on him a glob of it fell. So finally his mouth sealed over, and the whole head would have amputated spontaneous...except for the eyes, you dig. That’s the one thing the asshole couldn’t do was see. It needed the eyes. But nerve connections were blocked and infiltrated and atrophied so the brain couldn’t give orders any more. It was trapped in the skull, sealed off. For a while you could see the silent, helpless suffering of the brain behind the eyes, then finally the brain

must have died, because the eyes went out, and there was no more feeling in them than a crab's eye on the end of a stalk." (111-112)

The performer is consumed by the performance in this routine and the "carny man" ceases to exist as a separate entity from his act. But the consumption of the man is built around the wrestling for control of language. The other bodily functions (barring sight) are not needed by the asshole; once it has control of language, it controls the carnary man. Ultimately his loss of control is brought about because he fails to listen to a frustrated "asshole" who desires to be understood. Gadamer states that, "Being that can be understood is language" and in this routine the language acquisition of the "asshole" constructs a subject-hood which disavows the "asshole's" previously purely ontic existence; the "asshole's" growing ability to be understood grants it an ontology (Gadamer 1960, xxxi).

The competition for control of language in the "Carny Man" routine exposes that there is no innocent performance in *Naked Lunch* (Lydenberg, 40). There is a combative air to the interpretative dialogue in which the reader is embroiled when reading *Naked Lunch*. Burroughs's theory of language and his overt concerns with the biological create the experience of being subsumed, or enveloped by the text. In the case of the "carny man" his secession of language to *his* "asshole" destroys and replaces him. This eradication is intimately bound up in Burroughs's biological construction of language.

In a similar vein to that of the "carny man" the reader finds him/herself in a resistant dialogical relationship with *Naked Lunch*, rather than the earnest description of dialogue proffered by Gadamer. The text makes use of the term "agent" repeatedly. The term refers to the world of subterfuge and covert representational police action, but it also has strong biological connotations. The role of the agent in *Naked Lunch* is particularly convoluted because it appears that almost every character is working for someone, or has some party affiliation. There are four distinct "parties" in Interzone, the fictional city scape where a bulk of *Naked Lunch* takes place. These parties are: the Liquefactionists whose "program involves the eventual merging of every man into One Man by protoplasmic absorption" (123). The Divisionists who,

literally divide. They cut off tiny bits of their flesh and grow exact replicas of themselves in embryo jelly. It seems probable, unless the process of division is halted, that eventually there will be only one replica of one sex on the planet: that is, one person in the world with millions of separate bodies. (137)

There are the “Senders” who can never receive messages but have to constantly send all the time (137). The “Senders” appear to be the most feared party in Interzone because they betray a myopic lack of empathy and never attempt to understand anything beyond their own sending. Agent Lee informs the reader that he is a member of the “Factualist” party who are in direct opposition to the other three parties of Interzone, and work to keep a balance amongst the desires for domination expressed by the other three parties. The “Factualists” are opposed to the telepathic tools of the “Senders” because “Senders” use these communicative abilities to “control, coerce, debase, exploit or annihilate” the individual (140). However, it is never clear what the Factualist party aims for. There is no express ideology they represent apart from resisting the total domination of the other competitors in Interzone.

It is within this competing ideological landscape that Agent Lee operates, a world in which no one is certain of anyone’s affiliations and double agents abound. This anxious world of interconnected networks of parties seeking total control represented by “agents” who could potentially infect the reader constructs a paranoia in the narrative of the text. Considering the construal of the word as virus and the climate of paranoia established by the text, the reader has little recourse except to remain suspicious of agent Lee. Lee operates as the reader’s locator within the swirling milieu of *Naked Lunch* and the distrust he inspires forces an anxiety into the interpretative exchange between text and reader. This interpretative anxiety is pronounced amongst the competing factions (political parties, drug addicts and narcotics agents, industrialists and anarchists) seeking to subsume one another under the various programs they are fighting for.

The enveloping experience of *Naked Lunch* is most explicitly evident in the routine called “Bradley the Buyer”. The routine describes the collapsing human form of Bradley, a successful narcotics

agent, as he becomes addicted to contact with the “junkies” he is hired to catch. Bradley pays a young junkie to rub against him and help him ““get fixed”” (15). The boy describes the process:

“Most distasteful thing I ever stand still for,” he says. “Some way he makes himself all soft like a blob of jelly and surround me so nasty. Then he gets wet all over like with green slime...” (15)

Bradley’s collapsing human form craves to envelope junkies. He is eventually destroyed by a flamethrower and the inquiry into his death deems his destruction a necessity because he had become “a creature without species and a menace to the narcotics industry on all levels.” (17) The Bradley the Buyer routine collapses the apparently rigid boundary between law enforcement and junkie. The collapse between the two positions is manifested in the collapse of Bradley’s form. The “aberration” of addiction, in *Naked Lunch* has an abhorrent persecutor in the form of Bradley the Buyer (Loewisohn, 578).

The addict and the narcotics agent are united in their dependencies on systems of control. These collapsing binaries challenge the distinction between the interpreting subject and the object of interpretation, eradicating the distinct forms of either as Bradley subsumes the junkie. Bradley the Buyer is such a successful narcotics agent (for a time), because “he can walk to a pusher and score direct. He is so anonymous, grey and spectral the pusher don’t remember him afterwards.” (14) He has taken on, initially through performance, the aspects which Burroughs uses to define the “junk” addict. Again, Lydenberg’s words ring true: “performance is never innocent in *Naked Lunch*; it eventually replaces life itself, the imitation absorbing and devouring the original.” (40) For the Gadamerian reader, the text “devours” the dialogic exchange by presenting an authoritative rendering of control. The text approaches the dialogic exchange in such a way that the reader becomes aware of its manipulations during the interpretative dialogue. Like Bradley the buyer who could pass as a junkie, *Naked Lunch* passes as a text, desiring to be read and understood. However, the understanding available in *Naked Lunch* manifests itself in the effect of the text on the interpretative gestures of the reader. As with the talking asshole routine, Bradley the buyer’s consumption of all that surrounds

him becomes a constant menace in a text which combats the reader's interpretative efforts. The text challenges the reader's location as separate from the world of *Naked Lunch*, dragging him/her deeper into the bowels of the novel and exposing how *Naked Lunch* can become a coercive manipulative force in the interpretative dialogue. It is this enveloping quality of the text which encourages the reader to remain suspicious of *Naked Lunch's* interpretative engagement. The Gadamerian desire to interrogate prejudgements through horizontal collision drives this interrogation and suspicion surrounding the engagement with *Naked Lunch*.

3.3

As with *Watt*, *Naked Lunch* opens in a train station. But unlike the open air tram station where Hackett and the Nixons observe Watt's arrival, *Naked Lunch* descends into a subway rail system. The opening lines of the text, "I can feel the heat closing in" establish the paranoid air of the novel as it drags the reader into the bowels of an unnamed city (3). The unnamed and faceless "heat" is revealed to be a narcotics agent chasing Lee down into the subway. Lee moves quickly as he "vaults a turnstile and two flights down the iron stairs, catch an uptown A train" (3). The words seem to run into each other as the lines merge to create a parataxis connoting the blur of Lee's movements. To open the novel in this way, with a pursuit and an escape, establishes the anxious-ness of *Naked Lunch* as the novel draws the reader into "a literal descent into the underworld" it has constructed (Loewensohn, 566). From the outset the text evades the reader, beginning in *medias res* the reader is left to piece together the reasons for Lee's escape.

Lee just makes it on to the A train aided by,

a [y]oung, good looking, crew cut, Ivy League, advertising exec type fruit holds the door back for me. I am evidently his idea of a character. *You know the type*: comes on with bar tenders and cab drivers, talking about right hooks and the Dodgers, calls the counterman at Nedick's by his first name. A real asshole. (3, my emphasis)

The reader is drawn into the train with Lee by the assertion that the reader “knows the type”. Lee’s narrative seeks to construct an ally in the reader against the purported “phoniness” of the “square” who “wants to come on hip.” (4) However, in what comes to be a typical manoeuvre in *Naked Lunch*, Lee uses two slang terms that are parenthetically glossed specifically “for the reader” (Hilfer, 253). Lee also tells the reader that he “put it on him for a sawski” and sets up a “meet to sell him some ‘pod’ as he calls it, thinking ‘I’ll catnip the jerk’.” (5) An editorial note reveals that to “catnip” someone is to promise the potential “mark” marijuana and sell them catnip, which is “[f]requently passed on the incautious or the uninitiated” (5). In these opening pages the reader is presumptuously allied with Lee in his distaste and mistrust of the “square” advertising exec, involved in Lee’s potential scam, and reminded of the narrative’s authority in the interpretative relationship through the editorial notes (Hilfer, 253). The glossing immediately creates a suspicious relationship with the text. The reader is not sure whether the text is trying to teach him/her something despite the fact that they “know the type” it appears the text assumes a level of ignorance with the slang employed. For Gadamer’s hermeneutic description this is a fascinating instance where the slang of the “hip” drug addict, slang that is bound up in the contextual moment of the text, is explained by the same text for the “uninitiated”.

In Gadamer’s description of interpretative dialogue the moment of being drawn up short usually involves an instance of misunderstanding or confusion. However in the editorial intrusion the confusion for the reader lies in the authoritative definition of words designated for a counter-culture. This authoritative tone becomes more pronounced when a later parenthetical intrusion describes an interpretative strategy rather than a glossing: “(Note: This is not a figure. *Anopheles Mosquitoes are silent.*)” (39) The note attached to the description of an *Anopheles Mosquito*, employed in this instance to evoke images of the jungle at night, authoritatively demarcates what can and cannot be interpreted. “This is not a figure” delimits the space the reader has access to and the reader begins to doubt his/her own interpretative enterprise. If the mosquito is authoritatively deemed “not a figure” what else in the text has been set aside for explanation rather than interrogation? The mos-

quito is used to convey the varied existences of the German doctor Carl is talking to. In another paratactical description, the mosquito features briefly to reinforce the dense, muffled night-time jungle scape glimpsed in the doctor's eyes:

Carl talked to the doctor outside under the narrow arcade with rain bouncing up from the street against his pant legs, thinking how many people he tell it to, and the stairs, porches, lawns, driveways, corridors and streets of the world there in the doctor's eyes...stuffy German alcoves, butterfly trays to the ceiling, silent portentous smell of uremia seeping under the door, suburban lawns to sound of the water sprinkler, in calm jungle night under silent wings of the *Anopheles* mosquito (Note[...]) (39)

The point is that the mosquito does not do much work for the description glimpsed in the Doctor's eyes. However, what the note achieves is to foster a sense of interpretative doubt on the part of the reader. The text will not allow the *Anopheles* mosquito to be interpreted as a figure, yet in a meta-hermeneutic manoeuvre the parenthetical glossing becomes an effective device in the interpretative exchange. This note, coupled with the alliance shared with Lee in the opening pages create the sense of being "conned" in *Naked Lunch*. The text wishes to manipulate the reader in order to show him/her how easily this is achieved through language.

In the opening section, once Lee has made his way onto the A train, he encounters the "kid" who held the door for him: "'Thanks kid,' I say, 'I can see you're one of our own.'" Lee's ingratiating tone is directed towards the advertising executive rather than the reader in this instance, and the executive's face is described as lighting up with "stupid, pink affect." (4) The reader is told earlier that Lee provided the executive with "*his* B production" and that he knows what the executive is thinking about Lee, "'What a character!! Wait till *I* tell the boys in Clarks about this one.'" (3 & 5. My emphasis.) Lee portrays an expedient awareness of how he is perceived and this has two interpretative consequences for the reader: firstly, Lee comes across as a paranoid con artist, desperately seeking a way to "put it on" someone whom he deems to be vulnerable. Secondly, the reader cannot know for sure that Lee is not trying to turn him/her into a "mark". This is because the "B production" the "kid" is presumed to desire is exactly what the reader is engaged in. The same ingratiating tone employed

on the “kid”—“you’re one of our own”—is employed in relation to the reader—“*you* know the type”. Both interpretative consequences effect a heightened sense of anxiety in the interpretative moment.

Naked Lunch’s manipulation of language takes on many guises. The malapropisms, misquotes, misspellings, and typographical errors disrupt habitual modes of linear reading. *Naked Lunch* seems to present the reader with the anxiety inducing infection of Burroughs’s “word hoard” (97) in order to show how the text is destroying its own language: “The word cannot be expressed direct...It can perhaps be indicated by mosaic of juxtaposition like articles abandoned in a hotel drawer, defined by negatives and absence...” (97) Because the word cannot be directly accessed *Naked Lunch* presents a mosaic, a juxtaposition of scenes which play against one another exposing the spaces in between. Oliver Harris describes this fascination with Burroughs’s “word hoard”:

What fascinates us always calls us back for more. At the same time, this “more” remains forever beyond the meanings or narratives we can produce, because it is a materiality we can recognise but whose content escapes narrative knowledge. (Harris, 17)

The consequences of seeking out this “more” described by Harris manifest themselves in the interpretative experience of *Naked Lunch*. The anxiety induced through a desire to understand the text, is accessible by acknowledging the incompleteness of the document. The text relies on the effect it produces on the reader for its meaning to be conveyed. The dramatisation of the manipulative effects of language in the interpretative exchange between reader and text become the site in which *Naked Lunch*’s meaning is conveyed. In this sense the text is flush with meaning on two levels: it possesses it in great quantity and engenders a radical negative capability in which the reader needs to acquaint themselves with the delimitations of his/her hermeneutic situation. It is this radicalised negative capability that delimits the scope of hermeneutic enquiry and encourages the meta-hermeneutic discussion surrounding meaning in *Naked Lunch*. Secondly, the text flushes meaning *away* from itself and locates it in the dialogic space. It is the experience of being “conned” by *Naked*

Lunch that enforces Burroughs's concerns with control, authority and language. In Gadamer's hermeneutic description this "more" comes to light in the dialogic exchange between reader and text; the collision of prejudgements exposes the "negatives" and "absences" that work on the fringes of meaning. It is exactly this space that Gadamer's theory has been critiqued for blindly assimilating. However, through the anxious interpretative engagement produced in the reader as s/he reads *Naked Lunch*, these marginal areas become pronounceable in a silence which is "demanded" by the text. This silence responds to the critiques levelled at Gadamer's theory, and is accessible by interrogating the anxious effects of *Naked Lunch* on the Gadamerian reader. As such Habermas's criticisms do not seem to hold up against philosophical hermeneutics. By reading *Naked Lunch* through Gadamer's dialogical description of interpretation, it becomes apparent that the novel's deep mistrust of language heightens the reader's awareness to his/her position within a Traditional structure. "It is important to note that all interpretation points in a direction rather than to some final endpoint, in the sense that it points toward an open realm..." (Gadamer 1961, 68) The "open realm" in Gadamer's formulation finds purchase in *Naked Lunch* in the silence of the reader.

The dialogic relationship between *Naked Lunch* and the reader is a contested space in which both parties are vying for the chance to be heard. However, through this dialogue the reader becomes aware that the only way s/he could be heard is through an ideologically compromised language. The use of language as a medium of control reinforces the text's position in the dialogue and as such, the reader is not interrogating the document but embodying the text's concerns. Thus the solution for the reader is found in silence. A critically appraising silence in which the concerns the text expresses are noted, reflected and his/her position in a Traditional structure is interrogated. This heightened awareness responds to Habermas's criticisms of assimilationist hermeneutics in Gadamer's system because the reader has begun to question the interpellated role of language in his/her horizon. Through silence the paradoxical relationship Burroughs shares with language in *Naked Lunch* is avoided and the impasse is resolved.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation I have attempted to highlight the tension that exists between Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and the two avante-garde, proto-postmodernist texts *Watt* and *Naked Lunch*. This tension is borne out of a theoretical description of meaning and understanding as it "always occurs" in the shape of philosophical hermeneutics, and two novels who expressly challenge the possibility of understanding at all. What I have argued for is that this does not mean that Gadamer's description of meaning and understanding has nothing to offer an interpretation of these two notoriously difficult works. Instead, Gadamer allowed me to describe the interpretative experience of an interrogative dialogue with *Watt* and *Naked Lunch*. Philosophical hermeneutics encouraged a discussion around the effects both texts create during the interpretative dialogue. This in turn allowed me to describe the meta-hermeneutic concerns of both novels. It is this meta-hermeneutic that I have argued is particularly fecund when engaging with these works. It is in *Watt's* and *Naked Lunch's* interpretation as meta-hermeneutic that the effects of both novels on the reader's interpretative experience can be expressed. These effects, as I have shown, are the site in which the meaning of both texts manifests itself. The consequences of this for Gadamer's descriptive hermeneutics has allowed for a response to Habermas's lasting criticism of philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer's description of meaning does not blindly assimilate the prejudgements of an uninterrogated Tradition, as Habermas claims. Instead, by allowing the effects of the novels to become an essential component in the interpretative exchange, philosophical hermeneutics illustrates the multiplicity of Traditionary forces at play during interpretative dialogue. In turn this encourages the reader to remain aware of what would otherwise take place "behind [the reader's] back" (Gadamer 38). It is this conscious engagement with the forces of "systematic distortion" that both novels employ in their complication of habitual modes of reading.

This complication takes on different guises and strategies in *Watt* and *Naked Lunch*. In *Watt* the reader is exiled to a spectatorial space, encouraged to engage with the text's multiple historical horizons and multiple versions as the novel interprets itself. In turn this spectatorial position allows the reader to note the failed hermeneutic efforts of Watt's interlocutors and narrators. But it is not the failure that carries the fascination—the “more” in Oliver Harris's description—it is in the reasons for the failure that the reader is drawn “up short” (Gadamer 1960, 280). The failed hermeneutic of Watt, brought about because of his lack of historicity, encourages the reader to reflect on the meanings and interpretations s/he finds in the text. This discussion of *why* does not necessarily involve a solipsistic enquiry into the reader's hermeneutical situation and the reasons for their own interpretative manoeuvres. What it does allow the reader to discuss is *why* the text would encourage such interpretations. This is the effect of the text on the reader's hermeneutic enterprise and, as I have shown to be the case with *Watt*, this effect is the site in which the meaning of the novel is made manifest. In *Naked Lunch* this hermeneutic effect is the site in which the meaning of the text is dramatised. The reader's dialogic engagement with the novel, in which s/he is simultaneously constructed as “gentle” and as a “blood brother in the same dirty needle” is indelibly influenced by the anxiety of being conned and manipulated by the novel. This anxiety reinforces Burroughs's concerns surrounding language as a medium of control. For *Watt* the text parodies conventional interpretative strategies and symbol analysis. *Naked Lunch* lures the reader into an interpretative trap, ensnaring him/her in the “con” job of the narrative, ultimately validating its critiques of language. The effect of these processes is to foster an interpretative relationship with the reader that anticipates the description of philosophical hermeneutics provided by Gadamer.

By rejuvenating the concept of prejudgement and creating a theoretical description which located the historically inherited prejudgements of the reader and the text as central to the interpretative effort, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics blurs the distinction between “object” and “subject”. Prejudgements influence one another when brought into dialogic contact. This influence is the site

in which the historical horizons of both parties fuses, and perpetually renews itself. In *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* this renewal and fusion is given expression in the texts themselves. In the myriad routines Burroughs's places in juxtaposition, colliding and vying for control of the narrative, the text dramatises the collision of historical horizons through juxtaposition. In *Watt* the simulacra of Watt interrogates the narrative world created by Sam and finds himself unable to "know" anything about said world. Sam and a "present" Watt waltz in a divide between two separate and distinct locations, but Sam fails to understand Watt's capability to influence and affect him. This bleeds into the narrative and the simulacra of Watt is interpretatively stunted because of Sam's failed hermeneutic efforts. The horizons represented by the text influence and change experiences of characters in the novel. This effect is what Gadamer calls "effective history", in which the understanding of the reader is indelibly influenced by his/her location in time as well as their interaction with a text. In *Watt* this process is dramatised by Sam's failure to note the influence Watt has upon his construction of Watt's story.

Gadamer's rejuvenation of prejudgement, as I have argued, presents a unique way of engaging with these fractious and compelling novels. Beckett's and Burroughs's novels challenge Gadamer's conception of historical horizon by multiplying any understanding of it. They do this by contesting any notion of meaning that is whole or unified in its representation. However, they do require an interpretative commitment manifest in the dialogic relationship with the reader. The monolith of Tradition that Gadamer is guilty of describing at times, is fractured and shown to be multiple. This is true of the text's multiple meanings as well. The challenge to unified, coherent meaning that both texts issue, as I have shown to be the case, is the claim made on the reader. This claim encourages a meta-hermeneutic engagement with both *Watt* and *Naked Lunch*.

The multiplicity of Traditionary forces illustrated by the texts's engagement with fractious, and often fictional, horizons, illustrates the systematic distortions that Habermas was concerned were over-

looked by philosophical hermeneutics. However, in both novels the reader is able to note the effect these text's have during the interpretative dialogue, effects which dramatise the distortions of interpellated language and embedded ideology. As such Habermas's concerns surrounding systematic distortion are given voice through the manipulation and parodic treatment of interpretative strategies in the novels. These dramatisations are available in the hermeneutic dialogue through the meta-hermeneutic interpretation that both novels encourage. The meta-hermeneutic focus of both novels finds expression in the challenges issued to Gadamer's conception of meaning as whole, unified and coherent. By challenging Gadamer's notion of unified coherency the novels become critical interlocutors with philosophical hermeneutics and, represent responses to Habermas's ideology critique. It is through Gadamer's descriptive framework that key interpretative challenges are issued by the texts. As I have shown, this framework is indelibly influenced by an engagement with *Watt* and *Naked Lunch*. By dramatising the embedded ideologies residing in language, both novels show that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics does not blindly assimilate these historical horizons. Instead, philosophical hermeneutics allows the interpreter to engage with the effect these dramatisations of Traditionary prejudgements have upon the interpretative dialogue with the text. The effect this has on philosophical hermeneutics is to suggest that (at least with the two novels in question) the dialogic relationship between text and reader is more highly contested, and antagonistic than Gadamer describes.

Philosophical hermeneutics makes these tensions explicit and, in the case of *Naked Lunch*, encourages a resolution to the potential impasse of self-destructive language in the critical silence the text leaves in its wake. Thus philosophical hermeneutics has come to indelibly affect the texts under discussion, but it has also been influenced by the texts it has been "applied to". This affirms philosophical hermeneutics because it does not act as a rubric for interpretative endeavour. Instead philosophical hermeneutics, as I have shown, is malleable, capable of both influencing and being influenced by interpretative engagement. The pre-emption of many of Gadamer's concerns surrounding interpre-

tative praxis shown to be present in both *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* speaks to this malleability. It also relates to the belated nature of theoretical descriptions. Yet even this belated-ness speaks to the anti-teleological elements of philosophical hermeneutics. The pre-emptive dramatisations presented in *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* seemingly reinforce Gadamer's claims that understanding is always in process. This also lends credence to his potentially rhetorical claim that philosophical hermeneutics is a descriptive theory of understanding, because much of what the theory describes finds allegiance in the representation, and complication of meaning in both of these preceding novels. The influence the texts exert on philosophical hermeneutics is a central tenet of Gadamer's descriptive theory and by allowing *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* to bleed into the hermeneutic framework, I have shown how Habermas's criticism is not as damning as it may have first appeared. In fact his criticism becomes a crucial part of understanding the dramatisation of Tradition in language represented by both novels.

These novels are flush with meaning. Firstly they are both hermeneutic novels interested in the ways a reader will engage with them. They both try to complicate the interpretative relationship between the reader and the text and as such, remain aware of being read. This opens up a new space for the reader to interact with these novels. A space created by the claims made by the text on the reader. While both novels have conventionally been thought to be exercises in failurist hermeneutics, I have shown that it is this exact failure which proposes a response to Habermas's criticism of philosophical hermeneutics's treatment of ideology. By incorporating systematic distortion into the interpretative dialogue, the novels encourage an awareness of Traditionary forces at play in language. Secondly, both novels anticipate aspects of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and as such are flush with philosophical musings on *meaning* itself. The fact that both novels effect and influence philosophical hermeneutics as a guiding theoretical mode, consolidates the sense of flush I am trying to tease out here: in both texts meaning is so abundant that it has spilled beyond the fictional and begun to engage with the theoretical.

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