# Modern Hieroglyphics: Samuel Beckett's Debut in *transition*

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## 1. Introduction

This study examines Samuel Beckett's debut essay "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce" that appeared in the June 1929 issue of *transition*. The primary concern of this study is to demonstrate that the literary magazine *transition* and the editor Eugene Jolas played a crucial role in contextualizing Beckett around this period. James Joyce's *Work in Progress*, which was later published as *Finnegans Wake*, was being serialized at the time in *transition*. In the essay Beckett evaluated Joyce's language as a new "hieroglyphics". It is argued that this evaluation is closely related to discussions developed before and after Beckett's essay in some issues of *transition*. Beckett shared critical viewpoints of "hieroglyphics" as a new language with Jolas and *transition*. Using "hieroglyphic" language as an emblem of modernity, Jolas and *transition* explored new relationships of language, sound and image. Beckett's argument in the essay has striking affinities to the ideas that appeared in *transition* around 1929. "Hieroglyphics" is representative of them.

Some of the ideas expressed in Beckett's essay on Joyce have been quoted so many times as essential parts of Beckett's aesthetics.[1] However, little attention has been given to the essay in terms of its relationships to visual media and *transition*. Critics have paid attention to but not fully discussed Beckett's interest in the visual media,

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[1] For example, see Cohn 3 and McQueeney 149. McQueeney's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation is a crucial study of early Beckett.

especially in cinema, in these early years.[2] Nor has his idea of "hieroglyphics" as a new language been taken up in terms of visual media and *transition*'s language reform project. Exceptionally, Sidney Feshbach and Enoch Brater discussed in depth cultural contexts of Beckett's film work *Film* (1963) in which the setting is "about 1929" (*The Complete Dramatic Works* 324).[3] Neither of them, however, related Beckett's essay to *transition* and visual media. This may be attributable to Jolas's and *transition*'s relatively low profile in literary criticism, in contrast to Joyce's reputation as a literary talent.[4] Moreover, in spite of obvious presence of visual materials in *transition*, their relation to literature has not been considered crucial.[5]

In the essay, Beckett argues that the idea of hieroglyphics comes from Giambattista Vico. Biographical facts and comments give us a clue for confirming the affinities between Joyce and Vico, as well as Beckett's faithfulness to Joyce. Beckett discussed with Joyce some ideas of the essay before writing it: "The subject was suggested to me by Joyce. He had no part in the writing" (Cohn 3, 389).[6] James Knowlson reports that Joyce liked the essay (Knowlson 107). While these reports remain valuable primary sources for the study of Beckett's relations to Joyce, Vico or both, they provide few alternative viewpoints from which to examine the essay.

James Terence McQueeney's detailed study shows us that there is an alternative way to discuss the Joyce essay. McQueeney's study demonstrates that Beckett did

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[2] In his biography of Beckett James Knowlson reports that as an undergraduate in Dublin, Beckett enjoyed the early silent films featuring Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. In 1931, Beckett wrote in French his first play *Le Kid* in collaboration with Georges Pelorson. Although Brigitte Le Juez points out that the play demonstrates Beckett's interest in cinema and anticipates later plays such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, she does not explore clearly what implication comes from the relationship between *Le Kid* and his interest in cinema. See Knowlson 125-28 and Le Juez 53-54.

[3] Feshbach and Brater discuss several art movies around 1929 Beckett may have alluded to in *Film* (Feshbach 344-47 Brater 24-5, 76-7).

[4] Suzette A. Henke dismisses a collection of essays, entitled *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, all of which appeared in *transition* defending *Work in Progress*, and Beckett's essay was one of them. Henke's argument assumes Joyce's indisputable authority on which all contributors' arguments depend. Jean-Michel Rabaté argues against Henke that this collection does not serve Joyce but gives us possibilities to read *Work in Progress* in systematically divergent ways in which each word in the text "functions in all its dimensions" (Rabaté 249). Like Henke's, however, Rabaté's assessment of Beckett depends on his later reputation rather than on his engagement with *transition*.

[5] Dougald McMillan undervalues visual materials in *transition*, while overstating literary ones. He summarises *transition*'s activity around the period as follows: "the *transition* revolution restored the word to a position of respectability that it had relinquished to the image" (McMillan 122). Craig Monk casts doubt on Jolas's ability to appreciate photography (Monk 364).

[6] Cohn reports that her quotation is from a note attached to the dissertation of McQueeney.

not use Vico as a primary source. Rather, he argues, Beckett consulted books by Benedetto Croce and Michelet to construct his idea of Vico (McQueeney 10–36).[7] McQueeney's study opens up a new possibility to examine Beckett's essay from other viewpoints, rather than to try to find out how correctly and to what extent Beckett understands Vico. This study is an attempt to search for an alternative viewpoint by considering Beckett's critical views within an environment in which art and literature sought renewal by engaging with new technologies and media.

In the next section we examine Beckett's discussions in the essay. Beckett argues that when we read out loud *Work in Progress*, our aural senses clash with optical deformations of words that constantly highlight their components: letters, spellings and syllables. The effect brings about an opaque materiality of each word. The "hieroglyphic" new language is a hybrid construct that questions our reading by the fusion of visual and aural/oral senses.

The third section examines cultural contexts of photography and cinema that emerged as "hieroglyphic" new language. From the early 20th century, these new technologies have been considered to be hieroglyphic because, compared to language, photography and cinema restore much more directly an ideographic unity of primitive pictograph with one-to-one correspondence between signifier and signified, between language and physical reality.[8] Apart from Joyce's language, Beckett's idea of "hieroglyphics" functions as a typical reference to developments of discourses on photography and cinema as new, "modern" art forms. In the latter part of the third section and through the fourth section, we see Jolas and *transition* use these discourses to restore this "hieroglyphic" quality to language. The fourth section makes it clear that, before Beckett's essay, Jolas explicitly pointed out these ideas of materiality and hybridity of words that affect our senses, discussing *Work in Progress*.

The fifth section gives an example of "hieroglyphic" language. Immediately after Beckett's essay, Robert Brown crystallised these ideas (materiality of words and fusion of senses) into the "readies", a reading machine into which elements of photography, cinema and literature are mixed. Brown's essay was published in *transition* in 1930.

This is the first study to relate Becket's argument in the essay to the radical ideas

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[7] Some of Lawrence Rainey's detailed notes on the essay also point out Beckett's dependence on Croce. See Rainey 1062–65.

[8] For photography and cinema as hieroglyphics, see North 3–105 and Schotter 29–31. Schotter comments that cinema and photography as hieroglyphics have been increasingly considered to be "common" from early to mid-twentieth century (29).

developed by *transition*.[9] It draws on recent studies that explore new relationships of literature to visual media which enable us to discuss Beckett's idea of "hieroglyphic" new language in terms of literary experiments and visual media. Apart from Joyce, Jolas and *transition* give us previously unexpected viewpoints. Beckett was stimulated by the characteristic spirit of radically modernised culture. The "hieroglyphics" was an expression of the culture appearing in *transition* around 1929.

## 2. Connotations of "hieroglyphics"

Beckett argues that the idea of hieroglyphics comes from the work of Giambattista Vico. Hieroglyphics in Vico, he writes, is a "sacred language" like a thunder believed by primitive people to be made by Jove (26).[10] It is a "pre-lingual symbol" produced by a "common necessity" of the people who were taken with an "inability to abstract the general from the particular" (25). Parts of the hieroglyphics consist of paintings in caves and gestures suggesting natural phenomena where "the spoken and written were identical" and "direct" (25). According to Beckett, in the "direct expression", the "form and content" are "inseparable" (25). Applying the idea to Joyce, then, Beckett famously declares that "[in *Work in Progress*] form *is* content, content *is* form" in which Joyce achieves the "primitive economic directness" (27–28).

Critics tend to oversimplify this "direct expression" as a mere unification of "form" and "content" or signifier and signified. Their judgements take on negative connotations. For example, Massimo Verdicchio thinks of this connection between Vico and Joyce as an "easy analogy" and judges Beckett's idea of hieroglyphics to be an idiosyncratic interpretation (Verdicchio 534). Fritz Senn argues that Beckett's argument in the essay is "a truism that with Joyce form and content become one" but "this complete identification remains an ideal rather than achievement" (Senn 4). So far as we think of the "direct expression" as a strained "easy" analogy of Vico to Joyce,

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[9] Yoshiki Tajiri discusses Beckett's early works in terms of his relations to Joyce and *transition*. He argues that "Beckett must have been conscious of the synaesthetic, cross-generic experiments in *transition*" (112). See Tajiri, *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: the Organs and Senses in Modernism*. Laura Salisbury examines Beckett's relations to Jolas and *transition* in terms of "modernist neo-Romanticisms and their work to reforge the coherence of language" (113). Her arguments open up new possibilities to rethink about Beckett's works as a whole and, more broadly, (post and late) modernism(s) in terms of neurology, brain science and aphasia. See Salisbury, "'What Is the Word': Beckett's Aphasic Modernism," in *Journal of Beckett Studies* 78–126. Also see "Linguistic Trepanation: Brain Damage, Penetrative Seeing and a Revolution of the Word," in *Minds, Bodies, Machines, 1770–1930*, 179–208.

[10] All quotations from the essay are from *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (London: John Calder, 1983).

it remains an assertive appraisal of simple, non-intellectual primitivism.

Beckett is not, however, advocating any "complete identification". Rather, he suggests compressed, multiple and diverse meanings this "direct expression" generates. The expression composes of letters, spellings and syllables that include all variable combinations and permutations of words:

> H. C. Earwigger, too, is not content to be mentioned like a shilling-shocker villain, and then dropped until the exigencies of the narrative require that he be again referred to. He continues to suggest himself for a couple of pages, by means of repeated permutations on his 'normative letters', as if to say: 'This is all about me, H. C. Earwigger: don't forget this is all about me!' This inner elemental vitality and corruption of expression imparts a furious restlessness to the form (...). (29)

This anagrammatic process spreads the "'normative [capital] letters'" (H. C. E.) in the text, suggesting the name and qualities of the protagonist.[11] The reader is required to identify all the components of words. Signifiers or forms (all the components combined and permutated) and the signified or content (H. C. Earwigger) remain endlessly and indefinitely approached, but there is always a rupture between reference and articulation. For Beckett, the writing of Joyce is a text always in production. The "direct expression" is a contradictory but productive idea, privileging its "reverberations" and "reapplications" (20), not just reduced to a complete identification between signifier and signified.

"Reverberations" imply vocal qualities when we read the text out loud. "Reapplications" of words suggest visible, anagrammatic ones. Beckett integrates these multiple qualities into the idea of "hieroglyphics". He defines the idea of "hieroglyphics" in Joyce as follows:

> This writing that you find so obscure is a quintessential extraction of language and painting and gesture, with all the inevitable clarity of the old inarticulation. Here is the savage economy of hieroglyphics. Here words are not the polite contortions of 20th century printer's ink. (28)

What is to be noted here is that the idea of "direct expression" in Vico is applied by Beckett to explain "the savage economy of hieroglyphics" in Joyce. But this application does not just mean a simple praise of primitivism, compared to modern

[11] For anagram in the quotation, see Hunkeler 43–44.

"polite" writing. Rather, the "hieroglyphics" in Joyce is a mixture of other media (in this case, paintings and gestures) in all forms of writing. The "hieroglyphics" is a heterogeneous, hybrid language.

The word "inarticulation", moreover, suggests that language as a medium is insufficient in itself and that it needs other media to achieve that economical directness, although these media remain suggestive, never clearly revealed. This heterogeneous nature is a typical example of Vico in Joyce:

> This reduction of various expressive media to their primitive economic directness, and the fusion of these primal essences into an assimilated medium for the exteriorization of thought, is pure Vico, and Vico, applied to the problem of style. (29)

Sight and hearing are two "primal essences" of these "expressive media". The point is visual and oral/aural "fusion". One of the reasons why Beckett provocatively invokes "hieroglyphics" as a new language comes from his dissatisfaction with contemporary English language. He argues that compared to the "hieroglyphics" in Joyce, English language of the day was insufficient as a single medium. Taking the word "doubt" as an example for giving us "hardly any sensuous suggestion" (28), he expresses strong disapproval of the language: "how worn out and threadbare was the conventional [English] language" (30). He suggests that the language in Joyce requires a new "sensuous" quality beyond the word.

Through his detailed comparative study of the manuscripts, Arthur Walton Litz points out the importance of visual and oral/aural fusion of the words in "Anna Livia Plurabelle", an episode in *Finnegans Wake*, part of which Beckett was to translate into French in 1930. He argues that in the episode "Anastomosis of matter and form" and "amalgamation" of visibility and audibility of the words enable us to achieve such a cross-connecting (anastomotic) fusion (Walton Litz 46–47).

The language of *Work in Progress* features compound, polyglot and portmanteau words. They constantly introduce deformations and confusion of linguistic, optical and phonetic signs. These distortions suggest a cross-connection of these elements as a composite new "hieroglyphic" language. Beckett clearly shows the importance of this hybridity and materiality in the language that is "not only to be read; it is also to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not *about something*; *it is that something itself*" (27).[12] And again, "its adequate apprehension depends as much on its visibility

[12] This passage was slightly different when the essay first appeared in *transition*: "He is not writing about something: he is writing something" (248).

as on its audibility" (28). The language is reconfigured into a complex, visual "object" that requires the reader to re-view, repeatedly hear him/herself reading it and rethink about what it is supposed to mean. In the "hieroglyphics", these distortions, both phonetic and optical, induce a variety of cacophonous readings out loud. These readings call in question the very idea of literary language as a signifying medium.

The "hieroglyphics" reveals itself as an affirmation of both singular physical materiality of each word and plural metaphysical meanings. It is a conflicting synthesis of various media and sensibilities that are both old and new, primitive and modern. Joyce's "savage" contortions of the words question the "polite contortions" of normally spelled words produced by the "20th century printer's ink". The "hieroglyphics" is not just an easy appraisal of primitivism. This primitiveness is based on a new "sensuous", visual and oral/aural fusion that lies between and conjoins the verbal and the visual.

## 3. Photography, Cinema and Literature

In 1924, Egmont Arens, an American publisher of literature and art, reviewed works of Alfred Stieglitz, a famous and leading American photographer at the time. He referred to them as "hieroglyphics". His evaluation was established by contrasting Stieglitz's works not only to other genres of art, including painting and literature, but also to more general common speech of the day:

> Stieglitz, with his camera (...) has found the symbol, — a symbol which is as convincing as any brush stroke, or any arrangement of words, rhythmic or otherwise. These pictures of his are hieroglyphics of a new speech between those of us who find all spoken languages too clumsy. (15)[13]

We should note that the works of Stieglitz are a new linguistic construct, "a new speech", rather than a clear picture of visible facts. Stieglitz's photographs restore an ideographic nature of primitive picture language in which picture and language are unified much more directly and completely. These photographs show us how insufficient contemporary languages were in that there were not yet words suitable for appreciation of Stieglitz's photographs. These "pictures" are at the same time an alternative "new" language vastly more flexible and "convincing" than any painting or literature. They embody the new possibility for linguistic legibility of photography.

[13] On Stieglitz's photographic works, see Dijkstra 145–60 and North 35–60.

They also suggest the impossibility for other languages to decode our vision adequately. They are fundamentally a new visual language that reveals "all other spoken languages too clumsy".

Stieglitz's photographic works make us rethink the relationship between visible clarity of objective vision and invisible ambiguity of subjective meanings. Photography has changed the idea of what is supposed to be real into that of a representation of human perception of reality. It also reveals the unnoticed filtering process that changes what eyes see into useful information.[14] In other words, photography records automatically a mass of details which are unknowingly ignored in the process of perception. It records these remnants, which in turn give us an unexpected and contradictory image of our assumed reality. Michael North points out that photography "celebrated from the first as objectivity incarnate, also came to serve as one of modernity's powerful emblems of the subjectivity of perception and of knowledge" (North 11). Stieglitz's photographs as "hieroglyphics" do not just mean a visible immediacy but also a mystery in which visible and objective clarity collides with invisible and subjective meanings, forcing us to reconsider the relationship between them.

The idea of photography as an emblem of modernity meets another "powerful emblem" of modernity. Arens' idea of photography as "hieroglyphics" originally came from that of Vachel Lindsay, an American poet and critic.[15] Lindsay called silent film pictures "hieroglyphics" in his book *The Art of the Moving Picture* (Lindsay 19–20, 109–17). He insisted, as early as 1915, that silent films give us the promise of a new language in which the "new picture-alphabets" can evolve into much more perfection "than any written speech" (Lindsay 114). Like Arens, Lindsay reinvented an ancient unity of word and picture in his theory.[16]

Based on Lindsay's idea, critics began to argue affinities between Joyce's works and cinematic representations. The "Circe" episode in *Ulysses* is the disputed point. In the episode, quite literally, a displacement of human presence into an object takes place when, for example, a cake of soap begins to talk (*Ulysses* 149).[17] Keith Williams

[14] Walter Benjamin's famous idea of "optical unconscious" is a typical example of this unnoticed filtering process. See "Little History of Photography" in *Selected Writings 1927–1934*, 512 and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 237.

[15] For Lindsay and Arens, see North 35–37.

[16] Laura Marcus argues that Lindsay's theory anticipates "a whole gamut of accounts of cinematic representation" (191).

[17] In his book, Lindsay refers to such a displacement as a "yearning for personality in furniture (Lindsay

discusses the relationship of the textual transformations in the episode to trick films. He argues that the visual distortions in Joycean texts correspond to linguistic deformations. Williams extends the idea of imaginative distortions in characters into that of deformations of word-spellings and syllables. These deformations, for him, are part of those "visual" distortions.[18] He points out that Joyce treats words as part of a composite, visual "object" in his works (Williams 101). Williams' studies excellently illustrate the connection between Joyce's works as a whole and his uses of cinematic techniques and representations.[19]

What is to be noted here is that Williams' argument strongly supports Beckett's idea that the "hieroglyphics" in Joyce is a composite, visual "object". The confusion of audibility and visibility discussed in the Joyce essay can be extended to parallel contemporary developments of photography and cinema. Beckett, Arens and Lindsay all invoke an old conception of hieroglyphics in order to achieve the better, more complete, "modern" form of intermixture of words and images.

Moreover, in 1927, two years before Beckett's essay, Abel Gance, a prominent French film director, developed the idea of "hieroglyphics" as a language of silent film in which cross-connecting fusion of senses was emphasised:

> Le cinéma dotera l'homme d'un sens nouveau. Il écoutera par les yeaux (...). Il [le cinéma] sera sensible à la versification lumineuse comme il l'a été à la prosodie. Il verra s'entretenir les oiseau et le vent. Un rail deviendra musical. Une roue sera aussi belle qu'un temple grec. Une nouvelle formule d'opéra naîtra. On entendra les chanteurs sans les voir, (...) Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Beethoven feront du cinéma, car leurs royaumes seront à la fois mêmes et plus vastes (...). (94)
>
> D'autre part, le cinéma nous ramène à l'idéographie des écritures primitives, à

39). Austin Briggs is the first to point out the connection between Lindsay's book and the episode. Briggs considers such "fantastic" aspects as essentially "cinematic". He argues that parts of these elements come from filmic fantasies exemplified by trick films of Georges Méliès and other lesser known movie magicians. See Burkdall 49–80. The word "fantastic" is used by Burkdall in his book where, following the argument of Briggs, Burkdall defines "the fantastic aspects of Joyce's cinematic techniques and aesthetics" as "the representation of dreams, visions and hallucinations" (65).

[18] On this linguistic versions of the visual distortions, see Marcus, "Literature and Cinema," 344–45, and *The Tenth Muse*, 92–93.

[19] Another brilliant study of Williams is "Short Cuts of the Hibernian Metropolis: Cinematic Strategies in *Dubliners*" in *A New Complex Sensation: Essays on Joyce's Dubliners* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2004), 154–67. This study achieves a new level of sophistication by meticulously tracing and arguing clearly and suggestively "a variety of visual tropes that suggest the roots of Joyce's cinematic style" (154).

> l'hiéroglyphe, par le signe représentatif de chaque chose, et là est probablement sa plus grande force d'avenir. (100)[20]

It is evident that Gance defined cinema as the cross-connection of linguistic, optical, and acoustic elements.[21] It was an essentially "new" ("nouveau") cinematic sensibility. Just as in the Joyce essay Beckett does, so Gance emphasises the fusion of visibility and audibility as an essential condition for the cinematic "hieroglyphic" new language. He further demands a total reform of artistic and aesthetic sensibilities of literature including drama (represented here by Shakespeare), painting (Rembrandt) and music (Beethoven). They are required to be synthesized into one. The "hieroglyphic" new language is here expressed as an example of that synthesis of primitive picture writing ("écritures primitives") and modern translucent ("lumineuse") writing.[22]

In the same year, *transition* declared a reform of literary sensibility through a conflict between the primitive and the modern. One of its essential ideas was "hieroglyphics":

> We believe that there is no hope unless there be disintegration first. We need new words, new abstractions, new hieroglyphics, new symbols, new myths. (...) Thus there may be produced that sublimation of the spirit which grows imminently out of the modern consciousness. ("Suggestion" 178–79)

Neither *transition* nor Gance mentions each other but their opinions evidently echo. What *transition* was attempting to do around this period is in the same vein as Gance: synthesis of primitive and modern elements through technologies. It is now clearly possible to see Beckett's argument in the Joyce essay, without doubt, echo and

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[20] Part of the passage is translated into English in Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 221–22 and 227. Benjamin's judgement on the comparison between cinema and hieroglyphics goes against this study. Jean Epstein and Béla Baláz also invoke Egyptian hieroglyphic writing in their essays in the 1920s. For Epstein, see Abel 314–16. For Baláz, see Hansen 189 and Abel 220.

[21] Sara Danius and Tajiri evaluate this cross-connecting as synaesthesia and the importance of it is demonstrated in Joyce by Danius and Beckett by Tajiri respectively. See Danius, 147–98, Tajiri, "Beckett and Synaesthesia" in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui 11,* 178–85, and *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: the Organs and Senses in Modernism*, 75–108, 112 and 180.

[22] Michael North reports that photography was, at the very beginning, described as "Words of Light" or "light writing" by English photography inventor Fox Talbot (North 4). The idea of photography as "light writing" echoes Gance's idea of silent cinema as new "poetics of light" (versitication lumineuse) in that they think of the visual media as a new writing system.

reverberate with these movements in the broadest sense of the word "hieroglyphics" as a symbol of the synthesis. The word "hieroglyphics" symbolizes not only primitivism but also this essentially modern sensibility.

The emergence of photography and cinema greatly contributed to the questioning and rethinking about human perception where the relationships of words, sounds and images were fundamentally brought into doubt. New technologies and their media changed human perception. This changed perception was clearly reflected in literature, especially in language itself. Beckett's reference to the language of *Work in Progress* as "hieroglyphics" is a typical example of this shift. It also implies that the perceptible world is itself a ceaseless fund of representations. They are forced to be reconfigured with the cross-connection of the new sensibility.

## 4. Eugene Jolas and *transition*

This language reform, with the new sensibility, was explored in the little magazine *transition*. Eugene Jolas insisted that a new language should be necessary for the creation of consciousness proper to the twentieth century. It is no accident that *transition* and Beckett used the word "hieroglyphics" as a new language.

Jolas does not specify what the new language is, but he theorizes what it should be in various ways and his theorisation has much in common with Beckett's essay. Basically, Jolas's theory also derives from discussions around *Work in Progress*. Jolas recognises an ideal language in *Work in Progress*. Before Beckett's essay, in the February 1928 issue of *transition* (number11) he defined the language of *Work in Progress* as "a polyglot form of expression" and "the language of the future" ("Revolution" 115). These definitions meant to him the features of the future word and literature.

In the same essay, moreover, Jolas, like Beckett, gave "visible" and "audible" qualities to the language of *Work in Progress*: "Audibility (...) should be considered as of primary importance (...). James Joyce gives his words odors and sounds that the conventional standard does not know (...). [When we read *Work in Progress*] language is born anew before our eyes" ("Revolution" 112–3). Readers' eyes should be trained, according to Jolas, with sensuous, mainly phonetic and optical stimulations, into breaking "the conventional standard" of syntactic word arrangements. As a result, the words in Joyce become opaque, illegible objects. We should note that before Beckett, Jolas explicitly argued these ideas of materiality and hybridity of words brought about by the visual and aural/oral fusion.

Jolas was one of the first to evaluate Beckett's works. "Hieroglyphic" new language

was the key concept. Immediately after the publication of Beckett's essay, Jolas took in Beckett's judgement of contemporary English language "abstracted to death" as part of his language reform program discussed in *Language of Night* published in 1932 (31). In 1933, Jolas discussed *Work in Progress* in a way reminiscent of Beckett's essay. He argued that all the attempts of literary criticism to "identify" and "neatly pigeonhole" *Ulysses* and *Work in Progress* into "the category of naturalism" were bound to fail, and that *Work in Progress* was "written in 'hierophantic terms'" and its theme recurred throughout the work "under numerous guises and hieroglyph" ("Marginalia" 101–02). It is famous that Beckett begins the Joyce essay with the "danger" in "the neatness of identifications" to "pigeonhole" one system into the other (19). The idea of recurring theme in hieroglyphic "guises" clearly corresponds with that of combinations and permutations of capital letters discussed by Beckett in the Joyce essay. We can clearly recognise theoretical affinities between Beckett and Jolas.

Jolas's theoretical formulation, moreover, paralleled contemporary developments of visual media. In the opening essay of the February 1929 issue of *transition*, entitled "Super-Occident", Jolas mentions the latest developments in painting, music and architecture, urging literature to catch up with these latest developments:

> With the development of technology, the possibilities for enlarging the magical have become automatically emphasized. The new use of the camera, with its light and dark contrasts, has made it possible to create expressions of the enigmatic and marvellous, beyond all our expectations. While these arts are going ahead, literature is still rooted in the ideas of the past. The reality of the *universal word* is still being neglected. Never has a revolution been more imperative. We need the twentieth century word. We need the word of movement, the word expressive of the great new forces around us. Huge, unheard of combinations must be attempted in line with the general tendency of the age. We need the technological word, the word of sleep, the word of half-sleep, the word of chemistry, biology, the automatic word of the dream, etc. With this must go the attempt to weaken the rigidity of the old syntactic arrangements. The new vocabulary and the new syntax must help destroy the ideology of a rotting civilization. ("Super" 14–15)

It is evident that Jolas' reference to "the technological word" suggests another close link between literary experiments and the impact of technology. In the "Notes" of the same issue, Jolas repeats the same urgent necessity:

> Literature alone does not suffice (...). Words in the hands of the universal artist are means for expressing thoughts that increase the sense of life, that make possible a heightened feeling for movement. They intensify our optic and acoustic pleasures. (...) We are tired of the word that does not express the kinetic and subconscious. ("Notes" 187)

In addition to "optic" and "acoustic" pleasures, the word "kinetic" suggests the importance of cinema. From the beginning, the Greek origin word "kinetic" (meaning motion) has almost always been associated with the "moving" pictures projected on the screen and the "moved" emotion of the spectator looking at the projected images (Marcus 5).

In the subsequent issue, Jolas and *transition* made a proclamation of the "Revolution of the Word". As Dougald McMillan points out, this proclamation was made by Jolas through discussions "with the writers he thought might be in accord with him" (48). Although Jolas attributed the source of the fifth proclamation to Arthur Rimbaud, he, before the proclamation, admitted the "possibilities for hallucination" ("On the Quest" 195) in cinema. The proclamation does not refer to technology, but implicitly suggests that technology should help the revolution of the word. In his essay "Logos" in the same issue, he mentions the change of perceptions brought about by cinema:

> Through mechanical means they [creators of cinema] flash before our eyes a series of rhythmitized images which produce illuminations without slavish reference points in our sensual lives. (...) Poetry, using the words as mechanics, may, like the film, produce a metaphoric universe which is a sublimation of the physical world. ("Logos" 26)

The "rhythmic 'Hallucination of the Word'" in the fifth "Proclamation" strikes a chord with the synaesthetic, cross-connecting "illuminations" that confusingly stimulate "our sensual lives" with "rhythmitized images". Moreover, in the same essay, he considers that the new literary language should explore the irrational unconscious realm that he believes to be "an other-world reality" (27). In fact, before beginning *transition,* in 1925, when Jolas was a reporter in Paris for *the Chicago Tribune*, he translated part of Jean Goudal's essay "Surréalisme et Cinéma". In the translation, he put a special emphasis on the importance of exploring the irrational unconscious realm of dreams expressed by cinema. According to him, cinema's "three essentials" are "visual, illogical and penetrating" ("Movies" 90–91). This translation

reveals the fact that part of his reform program was originally inspired by cinematic representations of dreams. By "penetrating" into such a universal substratum of the "illogical" unconscious, he believed, a new language "of the future" would be born with the "reality of the *universal word*". By "*universal word*", Jolas meant to break barriers of national languages. He argued that modern technologies, "the great new forces around us" assisted this process ("Super" 15, 428).

Moreover, in 1935 Jolas reformulated ideas of experimental literature and modern technology using the word "hieroglyphs":

> He [the artist of the word] is in search of new symbols and sigils, and weds them (...). He seeks hieroglyphs to express what to many seems the inexpressible. (...) The mutation now going on, which is helped dynamically by the new technological means such as the cinema, the radio, and other mechanical forces, is about to create a linguistic interpenetration that will doubtless have its effect on the final morphological processes of modern languages. ("Workshop" 102–04)

What is to be noted here is that modern technologies such as cinema and "other mechanical forces" facilitate the "interpenetration" of literature and other genres. The "hieroglyphics" was one of the driving forces that encouraged Jolas to keep the ideas of new literature and language reform at least from 1927 to 1935. He considered modern technologies to be essential conditions for "new hieroglyphics" ("Suggestion" 178–79).[23]

When in 1929, therefore, Beckett assessed the language of *Work in Progress* as "hieroglyphic", the reader of *transition* must have seen reflected in that evaluation the language reform policy that Jolas and *transition* were actively urging during the period. By "hieroglyphics", Beckett means the idea of "linguistic interpenetration" between literature and other media in order to urge the "morphological processes of" contemporary English language.

## 5. Readies: a Reading Machine

Among a great number of contributors to *transition*, Robert Brown is the most important and interesting figure.[24] He exemplifies the essential relationship between

[23] In his autobiography, *Man from Babel*, Jolas retrospectively refers to the declaration in 1927, "Suggestion for a New Magic," as his "guide post throughout the *transition* decade". See Jolas, *Man from Babel*, 93.

[24] Private conversation with Laura Salisbury suggested to me roles Brown plays in *transition*.

the visual media and literary experiments discussed here. Immediately after Beckett's essay, Brown's essay was published in the June 1930 issue of *transition* under the rubric of "Revolution of the Word". It was entitled "The Readies". The title came in direct association with cinema during the period. Just as "talkies" represented a modern cinema, so the "readies" represent a form of "modern" reading.[25] Readies are a reading machine in which we are supposed to read printed words written "microscopically by the new photographic process on a transparent tough tissue roll". They require the reader to read and watch the typed words continuously moving on a roll of film ("Readies" 167–68). Readies are another "powerful emblem" of modernity in which words and images are intermixed in their filmic writing forms.

Brown's idea is representative of *transition*'s position in literature and visual arts. In readies, technologies, visual arts and literary experiments converged to construct a new language suitable for the period. For Brown, readies were "a type spectacle" before our eyes. He insisted that "Literature is essentially Optical – not Vocal", and that "Primarily, written words stand distinct from spoken one as a colorful medium of Optical Art" (169–70). The "colorful" words of the reading machine clearly correspond with Jolas's idea of the cross-connecting "illuminations" that stimulate our senses with no "slavish reference points" between the verbal and the visual ("Logos" 26).

These words in the "spectacle", moreover, highlighted an opaque materiality of each word. In the essay, Brown gives an example of the printed words of the machine:

> (...)–machines–more–optical–mental–more–colorful readable–than–books—simple–foolproof–Readie–Machine–conveying–breathless–type–to–eager–eyereaders–(...)–readievision–going–on–more–moving–reading–more–moving–writing. (172).

It is evident that in the surface effects, hyphens divide the continuity of words and emphasise the distinction of each word from one another. Readies at the same time change the moving words into a series of rhythmic "colorful" images, a "readievision" like the movies where each filmed image produces continuous moving pictures. Each word of readies is, to use the expressions by Jolas, "the technological word" and "the word of movement" in its most basic sense ("Super" 15). Comparing the readies to Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma* that is also a film "largely made of moving words", North argues that both works end up revealing "the materiality (...) of what

[25] See Mansanti 173.

is supposed to be a transparently signifying medium (...). [T]he devices adopted to suggest movement carry no meaning but become opaque, unreadable visual forms" (North 78). It is important here to note that not only deformed words but also normally spelled ones are considered an object of visual art. For Beckett, deformation of words highlights their visibility and materiality, but technological developments bring about the same effect on the surface of ordinary words. In this sense, Brown's readies were a conceptual development of the arguments discussed by Beckett, Jolas and *transition*.

Brown's idea of the machine came from "a need of new words" to destroy "some worn-out" contemporary English words (171). He attempted to restore "the healthy hieroglyphic" quality to "commonplace words" (173). Unlike Beckett, Brown made a difference between "optical" and "vocal" qualities of words. His judgement, however, on contemporary English language as "worn-out" came close to Beckett's as "worn out and threadbare". Brown, Beckett, Jolas and *transition,* moreover, insisted on an urgent need of new language by invoking new "hieroglyphic" qualities to their contemporary language. Linguistic hybridity, materiality and fusion of senses were the essential conditions they shared for "hieroglyphic" new language. Brown was just in the same vein as Beckett, Jolas and *transition* in that they used the critical discourses on "hieroglyphics" discussed and developed in *transition* around this period. Readies were representative of the discourses on which technologies, visual arts and literature converge. Readies' hybridity questioned literature's relation with the visual media.

## 6. Conclusion

Beckett, Jolas, *transition* and Brown all shared the belief that there was an urgent need to reconfigure the relationship of the verbal to the visual by invoking "hieroglyphic" new qualities to contemporary words. The state of contemporary photography and cinema was an essential part of the conception. It was an integral part of the language reform program in *transition*. Beckett's idea of the "hieroglyphic" language was inseparable from the radical ideas developed by *transition*. The dissociation and reconfiguration of "visibility" and "audibility" of a word to create a new unexpected word-image is the very idea Beckett expresses with the word "hieroglyphics" in the Joyce essay.

Beckett's idea of "hieroglyphic" new language has striking affinities with these critical discourses on "hieroglyphics" discussed and developed by Jolas, *transition* and Brown around this period. Linguistic hybridity, materiality and fusion of senses were

the essential conditions they shared for "hieroglyphic" new language. They theorised and made use of these discourses to construct a new language suitable for the period on which technologies, visual arts and literature converge. Some ideas had been made before Beckett's essay and others contemporaneously. They converged on Brown's "readies". The point is that Beckett was clearly inspired by the characteristic spirit of radically modernised culture and "hieroglyphics" was an expression of that culture.

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