

Art of Olive Green

Towards Art, an Ethics & a Laugh

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The Role of Art in Chaos Pt. 1: Beckett

Posted by [getraer](#) on [February 24, 2011](#)

Posted in: The Sides of Thoughts. Tagged: art, Beckett, chaos, crisis of modernity, WWII. Leave a comment



Some artists' work is (<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/bex2.jpg>) too rarefied to thrive in times of upheaval. James Joyce was reported to have been furious that World War II was distracting the public and critics from the reception of his new novel, *Finnegan's Wake*. His confrere, Samuel Beckett, may have refined his voice **because** of his experiences during the war. Though Beckett wrote novels indicative of his later style (e.g. *Murphy*) before his time in the French Resistance, it was after the war that he matured into the towering presence that wrote the trilogy—*Malloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnameable*—and the “exercise” that became the enormously influential *Waiting for Godot*.

Beckett participated in the French Resistance as a *boite aux lettres* (letterbox, where information was collected), distinguishing himself with editing and innovation. Eventually in danger of arrest by the Gestapo occupying Paris, he and his wife-to-be, Suzanne, fled to the French countryside and lived as refugees in the farm town of Roussillon. They stayed there until the end of the war. During that time he wrote the peculiar novel *Watt*, which I think showed both the strain and routine of his ill-suited rural life and his developing style.

I should say here that Beckett would greatly resent any effort to interpret or place symbolic values on his work. He said that Joyce's work rewards ongoing analysis and discussion, but not his. That said, one could suppose that *Watt* shows the mind contained, in distress, reaffirming itself and its boundaries through repetition. It was a book written in part to survive the war, and that makes it difficult to read. The trilogy seemed more a project of confrontation by incarnation.

Beckett wanted his writing to *be*, not *describe*, its subject. He wrote, “[This] writing is not about something; it is that something itself.” One critic (http://books.google.com/books?id=wKB8_DBBCHkC&lpq=PP1&dq=Beckett%20versus%20Beckett&pg=PA156#v=onepage&q=1928&f=false) wrote “The earlier novels are, I believe, ‘about’ the things which *Watt* and later work succeed in enacting rather than describing.”

Hence the simultaneous bleakness and hilarity of the trilogy. Quoting disserves it; like a round of antibiotics, it must be taken *in toto* to work. In return for Beckett's courage and the suffering of those during WWII, there is this thin silver gilt on the clouds of war and pogrom. Not a “testament to the human spirit” or such heartwarming malarkey—the catastrophe of life, meaning and culture in those times is too inexpressible for reduction to saccharine tropes. To represent it without eidetic precision is to do it violence, maybe even to represent it at ALL is violent. Beckett tries to circumvent that with a prose that *is* the abyss—and the comedy of living in its existence nonetheless. One has to submit to such writing; it cannot be a pleasure without becoming inevitable.

Olive Green: An Introduction

Posted by *getraer* on *February 17, 2011*

Posted in: The Sides of Thoughts. Tagged: art, DIY, ecology, green, responsibility. 1 Comment

Gentle Reader, don't flee this camo. These colors are, after all, used together to make the wearer one with the earth. This palette's purposes (killing, control) are secondary. The flowers and peace sign of the '60s are freighted symbols too...don't touch that logo, you don't know where it's been. Pacifist earthtones are just commodified camouflage.

Olive Green jubilantly evicts the postcolonial marionette from the acronym O.G. Gangsters are too collegial to be original. Olive Green deserves the acronym more anyway because it's an anagram for GO.

OG is a worldview embracing environmentalism, but without any of its clichés or dogmas: carbon offsets as secular indulgences, the word "natural" used as "new and improved" once was, driving electric cars to be preachy in ignorance of how their batteries are charged because celebrities are doing it.

Olive Green is vegetarian for efficiency, but would kill and dress its own deer to face carnage with courage if it were to eat meat. OG was furious when the bulk bins disappeared from the co-ops shortly before Whole Foods bought them. OG remembers DIY as common sense: "economic" has its roots in the Greek *oikonomikos*, "practiced in the management of a household or family."

OG is accountable. A personal example: I first started working with metal in assemblage sculpture, drilling holes in pieces of metal and bolting them together. I am a self-taught artist and knew my work was mere exercise. Admitting to the electricity I had consumed to produce valueless objects, I engraved the total drilling time into the base of each piece.

Olive Green embraces idealistic doubt and skepticism. Was the '60s a victim of its own innocence? The iconic peace sign, an inverted Elhaz ("protection") rune, could mean *vulnerability* when overturned – we can't let that happen again!

Most importantly, OG knows we are *here*, and together. History has shown we have every faculty and spirit needed to avert disaster; it also suggests that we probably won't. The only struggle worth waging is for this earth and our unity, and its improbability doesn't make it any less worthy. Anything less is desertion.