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Daniela Guardamagna
Rossana M. Sebellin
(editors)

The Tragic Comedy of Samuel Beckett

“Beckett in Rome”
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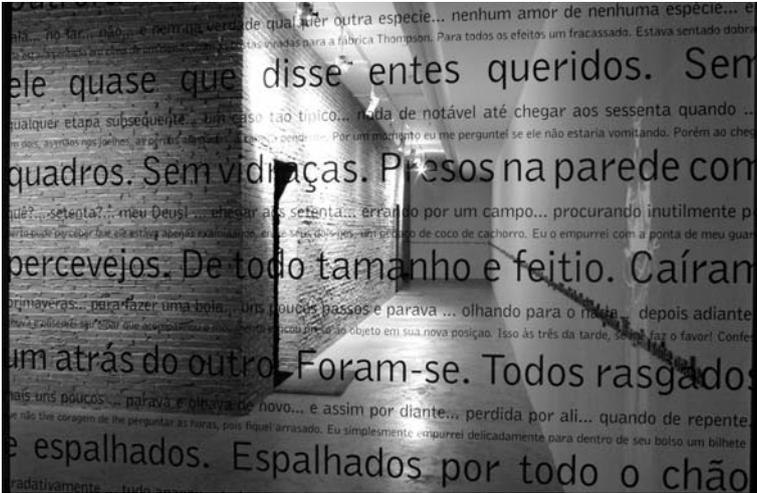
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Redirecting Beckett*

Stanley E. Gontarski

The centenary of Samuel Beckett's birth in 2006 sparked unprecedented world-wide celebrations, particularly of Beckett's theater, and were fully the measure of his international reputation and popularity. Witness the opening of Marjorie Perloff's presidential address to the Modern Language Association in December of 2006, a year that has come to be called the year of Beckett:

This year marks the centennial of Samuel Beckett's birth, and the celebrations around the world have been a wonder to behold. From Buenos Aires to Tokyo, from Rio de Janeiro to Sofia, from South Africa (where Beckett did not permit his plays to be performed until Apartheid was ended) to New Zealand, from Florida State University in Tallahassee to the University of Reading, from the Barbican Theatre in London to the Pompidou Center in Paris, from Hamburg and Kassel and Zurich to Aix-en-Provence and Lille, from St. Petersburg to Madrid to Tel Aviv, and of course most notably in Dublin, 2006 has been Beckett's Year. Most of the festivals have included not only performances of the plays, but lectures, symposia, readings, art exhibitions, and manuscript displays. *PARIS BECKETT 2006*, for example, co-sponsored by the French government and New York University's Center for French Civilization and Culture, has featured productions of Beckett's entire dramatic oeuvre, mounted in theatres large and small all over Paris, lectures by such major figures as the novelists-theorists Philippe Sollers and Hélène Cixous, the playwrights Fernando Arrabal and Israel Horowitz, and the philosopher Alain Badiou. To round things out, in 2007 the Pompidou Center will host a major exhibition of and on Beckett's work. [...] Who, indeed, more global an artist than Beckett? (Perloff 2007, p. 652)

* For the images relative to this essay see figures 1 to 8.

Yet the amount of attention Beckett's work received in 2006 raised many, especially long-term, questions about Beckett's art for the 21st century. For some, such apparent adulation of an experimental theatre artist suggests the blunting of Beckett's avant-garde edge, the taming, domestication, and even gentrification of his work as he is accepted and celebrated by the broad middle class as a "classic" playwright, studied in schools and listed among required texts. Such acceptance raises questions, whether or not anything is lost through such popularization of the avant-garde, and if some essential ingredients of Beckett's art are lost in the process of mass appeal, are they retrievable; that is, is the avant-garde edge of Beckett's work recoverable? In the following argument I explore how certain artists like Brazilians Fernando and Adriano Guimarães, Canadian filmmaker Atom Egoyan, even one-time Beckett apostate JoAnne Akalaitis, and Christopher McElroen, who brought his Classic Theater of Harlem's production of *Waiting for Godot* to the streets of a still-devastated New Orleans 9th Ward, are redirecting Beckett's work toward its avant-garde roots and thereby revitalizing a theatrical tradition that might otherwise be stuck in post-World War II France and Europe. It is a redirection designed to avoid productions that might be considered Xerox copies of previous productions, even as the latter are those most easily sanctioned by the Beckett Estate. While some might (and have) argued that such recovery damages the work's and so the author's reputation since it entails some rethinking of the Beckettian text, such a protectionist position is rejected here. I will suggest, instead, that recovery of Beckett's avant-gardism is not only revitalizing to a theater now more than 50 years old but such redirection toward the avant-garde does not necessarily conflict with the acceptance of Beckett as a "classic," or even, by now, a canonical playwright, and so demonstrates the contemporary vitality of Beckett's work. Artists like the Brazilian brothers Fernando and Adriano Guimarães, and their collaborators, JoAnne Akalaitis, and filmmaker Atom Egoyan, for instance, do not so much "direct" Beckett's work as re-direct it to its imagistic roots and thus restore its political edge. Avant-garde Beckett, I propose, is a Beckett for the 21st century.

Atom Egoyan: "Steenbeckett"

One dynamic possibility for the future of performance vitality is that offered by Egyptian born Canadian film-maker Atom Egoyan, who directed a traditional production of *Krapp's Last Tape*, starring John Hurt, for the *Beckett on Film* series, the ambitious attempt in 2000 to record the Gate Theatre's much toured and touted Beckett festival during which all 19 stage plays were performed. Egoyan subsequently used the completed film as a centerpiece for his own personal artwork, an installation at London's Museum of Mankind that folded continuous showings of the film, in altered, antithetical perspectives, into a larger, environmental exhibit of recorded memory that Egoyan called "Steenbeckett". Egoyan's work – like Beckett's – focused on memory, its preservation, distortion and retrieval. Participants entered the now all but deserted Museum of Mankind, walked through a darkened warren of passages, up stairs, through tunnels, past discarded typewriters, phonographs, record disks, "spooools" of magnetic audio tape, heaps of deteriorating photographs, the detritus of memory, to a makeshift, asymmetrical screening room where Egoyan's commercial version of *Krapp's Last Tape* was screened for a restricted audience, 10-12 at a time, sitting on a makeshift bench no more than six feet from the film projected massively on the opposite wall so that the image was grainy and fuzzy. The film's images dwarfed the spectators, who had discovered or stumbled upon what seemed another discarded cultural object. From there spectators wandered to another room, some not waiting for the film to end, others sitting through it more than once waiting for some sign to move on. In the next room the audience entered the environment of the film itself, 2,000 feet of which, according to the program, ran continuously and noisily along rollers, up and down, back and forth, in and around the room, floor to ceiling, wall to wall, over and over again, surrounding, embracing, engulfing, overwhelming the spectator, and finally it passed through an antique Steenbeck editing table at the far end of the room, where the image was visible in miniature, an image seen through the wrong end of a telescope, seen through the cat's cradle of noisily rolling film. Obsolete, the Steenbeck editing machine was the equipment that Egoyan used to edit his film of

Krapp's Last Tape. The analogue device had all the look of a clumsy antique, the look Egoyan was apparently striving for in his film. As important as the film, both its materiality and the giganticized and miniaturized images it provided, was the material editing machine itself, central to Egoyan's vision of *Krapp's Last Tape* and the centerpiece of his installation, as the material tape recorder had been to Beckett's. The play *Krapp's Last Tape* was thus another deteriorating relic, the commercial film, something like authentic Beckett, now itself a fading museum piece, Beckett frozen in time, but folded into Egoyan's work and so simultaneously a stunningly fresh work of art.

When Egoyan turned his attention to Beckett again, he went a bit more high tech with a staging of "Eh Joe". For the centenary year, the irrepressible Michael Colgan prevailed upon the Beckett Estate to allow the staging of the teleplay, and Colgan in turn prevailed on Canadian film director Atom Egoyan to re-direct Beckett. With tour de force performances by Michael Gambon, who had played Hamm in the *Beckett on Film* version of *Endgame* and subsequently reprised the role on the London stage, and Penelope Wilton as Voice, the production was certainly a (if not the) high point of the Beckett centenary celebrations at Dublin's Gate Theatre in April of 2006. The Gate Theatre production subsequently moved to London's west-end for 30 performances, from 27 June to 15 July 2006.

Egoyan's adaptation (or transformation) was potentially binary, a hybrid production of stage and "live" video, the division of the stage front to back rather than the usual side by side division of other stagings of the teleplay. The media were thus less divided than layered, one superimposed on the other, creating a palimpsest of Joes. He was from the first if unnoticeably separated from the audience by a barely perceptible scrim (itself an echo or metaphor for the TV screen) that then bore his projected image once Voice began her assault. Egoyan's conception, with its hybrid technology of stagecraft, television, and film, allowed for the seamless translation of the television work to the stage. In both of Beckett's own productions the nine camera moves towards Joe, the physical image of the increasing intensity of Voice's assault and the confirmation of the interiority of the conflict, were conspicuous, almost clumsy, as the camera physically advanced on

Joe, but Egoyan's use of imperceptible, computerized zoom added dimensions of mystery to the play. Something apparitional or ghostly was taking its course, live on stage. Camera movement was imperceptible, but at some point audience members realized that they were suddenly watching a more intense close-up of Joe, they were almost inside his head; what was full-bodied Joe on his bed, face in $\frac{3}{4}$ profile, had become just face.

One might complain that Egoyan staged his play as if Beckett had never directed (and revised) the work himself, and so Egoyan worked with a text that Beckett himself found wanting. As Beckett elaborated in detail and repeatedly to his American director Alan Schneider on 7 April 1966, to the final hold of the image of Joe he added a smile, thus changing not only the closing visual image of the play, but its import as well: "I asked in London and Stuttgart for a smile at the end (oh not a real smile). He 'wins' again. So ignore the direction 'Image fades, voice as before.' Face fully present till last 'Eh Joe.' Then smile and slow fade" (in Harmon 1998, p. 202). As a result of his stagings, Beckett also simplified the presentation of the ending voice-over as well: "I decided that the underlining of certain words at the end was very difficult for the speaker and *not good*. So I simplified second last paragraph" (emphasis added, p. 201). He also outlined a change that could only grow out of the practicalities of staging: "In London the only sound apart from the voice was that of curtains and opening and closing at window, door and cupboard. But in Stuttgart we added sound of steps as he moves around and made it interesting by his having one sock half off and one sock and slipper. Sock half off because at opening he was taking it off to go to bed when interrupted by sudden idea or sudden feeling that he hears a sound and had better make a last round to make sure all is well" (p. 202). For Beckett the key to the ending, discovered and shaped in production, was Joe's successful throttling of Voice: "Smile at very end when voice stops (having done it again)" (p. 198). Egoyan's production was stunning, carried by Gambon's magnificently aging face and his long, pianist's fingers, but it also suggests that much is left to discover in this new stage work. Even so, visually Egoyan's production suggested something of the avant-garde power of this (and so Beckett's) work.

JoAnne Akalaitis

JoAnne Akalaitis was all but banished to the deep cold for liberties she took with her 1984 production of *Endgame* at Harvard University's American Repertory Theatre (ART). She seemed to redeem herself some 24 years later with an evening of shorts, a production bound to generate attention in New York as much for the featured actor as either its director or playwright. Celebrated, revered, lionized dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov was featured in all 4 "shorts," which opened in December of 2007 at the New York Theatre Workshop. The grouping of four included the two mimes, "Act Without Words I" and "II", "Rough for Theatre II", and a staging of "Eh Joe", a teleplay, certainly after Egoyan, now part of the accepted stage repertory. The two "Acts Without Words" constitute an inevitable pairing, and Akalaitis took advantage of Baryshnikov's angelic grace, but the pairing of the second half of the evening highlighted the fact that the interrelationship of the shorts cannot or should not be arbitrary.

On stage, "Eh Joe" is one of Beckett's short plays that qualifies, alone, as a full evening's theater, as was evident in Egoyan's Dublin production. In Dublin nothing preceded it; nothing followed it. Akalaitis presented her version as part of a cluster, of a quartet, and tied them together with a consistent set, but the decision to cover the stage in some six inches of sand made sense only for the first of the quartet. As *New York Times* theater critic Ben Brantley noted of Baryshnikov's performance, "for the rest of the show you can feel good old physics tugging at feet that once took flight like no one else's" (19 December 2007). But more than gravity and age were at work on Baryshnikov who was dancing on the beach, and superb as it was for "Act Without Words I", the sand made stage movement all but impossible for the three subsequent plays, and perhaps this was part of Akalaitis's point. The wheelchair of "Rough for Theatre II", for example, was immobilized and so suggested and perhaps even echoed, at least visually, the immobility of *Happy Days*, and Joe could not move about his room to shut out all prying, perceiving eyes. But Akalaitis made something of a virtue of what appeared to be a handicap. Instead, the physical movement of "Eh Joe" was filmed and projected as a multiple set of images in a variety of sizes on a variety of screens.

In fact, this hybrid genre, part live theatre and part “live” film, a technique Egoyan had used for his “Eh Joe” as well, was central to all four plays, used not only to great effect individually but to create a continuity among the plays based on multiple projected images and hence multiple simultaneous perspectives. The most questionable directorial decision may have been to create a bodily presence for Joe’s voice, played by the spot-lit Karen Kandel. That, along with the addition of music by Philip Glass (a feature of all of Akalaitis’s Beckett work), is the sort of decision that caused such a fuss in her 1984 *Endgame*. Conceptual blunders apart, Akalaitis finally transformed an unlikely collection of shorts into a unified, kaleidoscopic evening that overcame (for the most part) the self imposed handicap of sand-enhanced gravity. As Brantley perceptively noted, “This grounding of a winged dancer poignantly captures the harsh laws of Beckett’s universe, where Mother Earth never stops pulling people toward the grave”. But the Akalaitis quartet of shorts were about more than Baryshnikov. They suggested her redirecting Beckett toward the avant-garde with production more or less traditional and yet thoroughly new.

Adriano and Fernando Guimarães

The treatment of Beckett’s text or a performance as a found object, as it appears in Egoyan’s “Steenbeckett”, is central to the aesthetics of the Guimarães brothers, visual artists based in Brasília, Brazil and founders of Companhia Teatral Gabinete 3; they have maintained an on-going and evolving dialogue with Beckett’s work since their first show, *Felizes para Sempre* (literally, “Happily ever after”), which included various versions of *Felizes para Sempre* (*Happy Days*), *Ir e Vir* (*Come and Go*), *Jogo* (“Play”), and *Balanço* (“Rockaby”), and which ran, in a variety of venues, almost all in Brazil, from 1998-2001. Each of those works was usually preceded and then interspersed with works of their own, which the brothers Guimarães call performance, usually an installation which embodies a variation of a theme depicted in the Beckett play. Their approach then is to combine theater, performance art, music, painting, sculpture, and literature into a hybrid, composite art form, and to collaborate with major contemporary

artists of their day, again mostly all Brazilian. For *Felizes para Sempre* ("Happily ever after" or *Happy Days*), for example, they worked with plastic artist Ana Miguel, who designed costumes and stage props, with photographer and lighting designer Dalton Camargos, with museum curator Marília Panitz, and with guest actresses Vera Holtz as Winnie in *Felizes para Sempre* and first Nathalia Thimberg and then Vera Holtz as "Mulher," the "Woman in chair," W, in *Balanço* ("Rockaby"). A second installment of their work "We were not long [...] together," which ran in a variety of configurations during 2002-2003, was built around *Respiração* ("Breath") and featured four other pieces: *Catástrofe* ("Catastrophe"), *Ato sem Palavras II* ("Act Without Words II"), *O que Onde* ("What Where"), and *Jogo* ("Play"). The third incarnation of their dialogue with Beckett was built around *Todos Os Que Caem* (*All That Fall*), again interspersed with their own videos, photographs, objects, and performance pieces, and featuring as well *Balanço* ("Rockaby"), *Eu Não* (*Not I*), *Rascunho para Teatro II* ("Rough for Theatre II"), and *Um pedaço de monólogo* ("A Piece of Monologue"). These three anthologies performed over a six-year period constituted a multi media trilogy of spectacles in a variety of manifestations that connected Beckett's theater works to larger public spaces beyond the confines of theater. It was thus in conception and execution the very opposite of the *Beckett on Film* project taking shape at almost the exact same time in Europe. No two manifestations of the *irmãos* Guimarães project were ever the same. Actors often switched roles in different manifestations of the play in order to prevent performances from getting stale or automatic. Theirs is an art that resists predictability and resists being reduced to homage, the goal of the film project, presumably.

As art critic Vitória Daniela Bousso has written, "The transition between the visual and the theatrical constitutes a hybrid space, a territory of complexities ruled by experimentation in the work of Adriano and Fernando Guimarães" (Bousso 2004, p. 97). As their work focuses on the human body, they engage directly the cultural games of regulation and control that are played upon it. For the Guimarães brothers, the body is less ancillary than it might generally be in Beckett's work, say, and instead becomes the seat of the struggle of power relationships – a theme which, if

not overtly expressed, certainly is a subtext of Beckett's work. According to art historian Nicholas Oliveira, "The body interprets or plays the part of a character but simultaneously represents itself, affirms itself as a recipient of the unconscious, in other words, the body interprets that role, in the installation, that gives access to what is unstable and ephemeral. The body's unpredictable action always offers a condition for rupture or destabilization in the postmodern work" (Oliveira cited in Bouso 2004, p. 98). Here, in both the work of Beckett and that of Adriano and Fernando Guimarães, the body functions more like a machine than as the seat of sentiment, thought, or even being itself – theirs is thus in many senses a thoughtless theatre, as is Beckett's.

Beckett's works are thus treated as ready-mades by the Guimarães brothers, objects to be placed within their own constructed environments, and hence Beckett is in no need of serious revision or renovation in such recovery of Beckett's avant-gardism since they are already – preceded and followed, as they are, by images of the Guimarães brothers' re-imagining of Beckett – after-images of Beckett's own texts. They are thus less critiques of Beckett's work, than specters or ghosts of it. It is wholly a redirection of Beckett's work simultaneously back to its avant-garde roots and forward to a new century of performance art. What is thereby elicited from Beckett is as much the result of their installed environments as it is an intrinsic part of Beckett's work itself, and thus Beckett's works move, unadulterated, into a new poetic space, become part of a new poetics. The *irmãos* Guimarães thus create something like their own Beckett archive, Beckett in or as a cabinet of curiosities, a composite Beckett made up of cultural shards.

Their antiphonal use of Beckett's works and words is a case in point. Their treatment of or variations on *Respiração*, the play "Breath", for example, is presented as a conjunction with several installations that they call *Breath+* (Breath plus, or images after Beckett, or Beckett afterimages). Although performed along with other, better known plays, the lowly "Breath" here takes on the role of a featured work, one version of which features a live, naked actor in a plexiglass box over which an actor or actress lectures on the significance of respiration. The box begins to cloud with carbon dioxide as the human is reduced to the machinery of respiration, man or

woman reduced to metabolic function; the actor or actress begins to gasp for breath and to pound on the inside of the box in desperation. The lecturer (Vera Holtz in the production that I saw) is thus oblivious to the human suffering as she attends solely to the job at hand, her lecture – to outline the details of the process of respiration – and thus is “Breath” powerfully dramatized without altering Beckett’s text at all. Corollary productions, other manifestations of *Breath+*, feature an actor (or actors) submerged in water who respond/responds to an authoritarian and apparently arbitrary bell that commands and controls his (or their) submersions and re-surfacings, hence it controls his (or their) breath. In another version of *Breath+*, often used as an *entr’acte* between the plays themselves, actors immerse their heads in buckets of water at the bell’s command and are released to respire only on the command of the bell. In another manifestation, a single clothed actor is fully submerged in a massive fish tank, the duration of his submersion regulated by the bell. In a third image, a submerged actor, again fully clothed underwater, is grotesquely contorted in a bathtub and viewed from above. In each case the actor’s breathing appears subject to or regulated by an arbitrary, external force, in this case a bell or buzzer, but it might as well be the whistle or prod in the two “Acts Without Words”, or the piercing bell in *Happy Days*, works which the brothers have staged as part of their ongoing dialogue with Beckett. Much of their work then spills out of the theater into gallery space (or out of the gallery back into the theater), *Breath+* as dramatic prelude, *entre-acts*, and postlude. The extension of the playing space into a gallery, courtyard, or the city street emphasizes the idea of broadly expressive space, something other than theatrical space used as a backdrop.

Another series of performances is called *Luz-* (*Light-*, Light less or Light minus) and *Luz+*. Here power (much of it in the form of electrical power) is transferred to a participating audience where spectators turn light switches on and off to control the pace of action in performance, and so the body of the audience, or the audience’s bodies, are folded into the performance making the audience complicitous in the power struggle. The actors perform frantically, running or jumping in place often to the point of exhaustion, as long as the light is on, cease exertion when light is off, and so audience members autocratically determine the duration of exertion.

Double Exposure is an installation composed of four environments with the words of several of Beckett's short plays projected or physically pasted onto walls, windows, and transparent boxes. Beckett's words themselves, as material objects, are presented within boxes, as cabinets of curiosities, the 18th century forerunner of what we today call museums:

Along the whole length of the gallery's entrance glass doors there are texts by Samuel Beckett. Upon entering, the spectator finds himself in the first environment: an almost dark rectangular foreroom, outlined by glass panes, on which fragments from texts have also been written. At each end of this room there are life-size pictures of the character that appears throughout the exhibition. The photographs are almost identical, but they reveal the character under the action of two contrasting lights: one that is excessively bright and one that is too dark. Both make its image evanescent.

(Adriano and Fernando Guimarães 2004, p. 103)

That is, what we see apparently life-like is decidedly an image (as Henri Bergson has been reminding us at least since his *Matière et mémoire* [*Matter and Memory*]), or afterimage, its appearance or disappearance regulated by light which in turn is regulated by (electrical) power, which in turn is regulated (apparently) by spectators. It is light which makes the image possible, on stage and in the body. If *Breath+* emphasized the materiality and machinery of the body, *Light-* foregrounded its ethereality. The focus is thus on the fact that all perception is imagistic if not imag(e)inary. The second environment is a house, a rectangular prism made of exposed brick along which Beckett's texts continue. Along its outer walls spectators can look through peepholes and see real time-videos (again images) of the gallery from a variety of angles through a set of security cameras. The interior lined with dark panes is the third environment. Here the audience watches a black and white video of a character closing windows to stop a flood of light entering that threatens to extinguish his own image since he is only a projection of light. When vapor lamps are turned on in the room the character's image disappears and the spectator encounters his or her own reflection on the walls. They (subjects) have thus *replaced* what appeared to be the "character" (object).

The fourth environment consists of a glass scale model of the house sitting on a table. Projected images are then reflected on the model's glass and on the room's walls. In another section of the installation the audience is encouraged to deposit its own objects, usually, but not exclusively, photographs, mementos of sentimental value – but of course only to themselves. The audience moves through the installation, lingers, examines, reads those images on the walls or Beckett's words on or in boxes and along the walls, words given a materiality when some whole works are written out in letters carved from wooden blocks. The installation is thus a preface or postlude to the performances of those plays that are on display, so that the play itself, once performed is already a repetition, an echo, a double, an afterimage.

All the Beckett projects of the *irmãos* Guimarães came together with performances in February and March of 2008 at Espaço Cultural Oi Futuro in Rio de Janeiro, their fourth major manifestation of (primarily) Beckett's short works. The season, which marked the tenth anniversary of the *irmãos* Guimarães's working with (or through) Beckett, was built around three sets of performances each built around and so foregrounding Beckett's slightest play, *Respiração* ("Breath"). Over a two month period at Oi Futuro they performed three sets of Beckett's works under the general umbrella title *Resta Puoco a Dizer: Peças Curtas de Beckett por Adriano e Fernando Guimarães* (Little Is Left to Tell: Beckett's Short Pieces by Adriano and Fernando Guimarães). To their earlier works they added *Improviso de Ohio* ("Ohio Impromptu"), the opening words of which, "Little is left to tell", served as their overall title with noted Brazilian actor and director Aderbal Freire-Filho (founder of Grêmio Dramático Brasileiro in 1973) as Leitor (Reader) and company stalwart William Ferreira as Ouvinte (Listener). (Aderbal Freire-Filho was simultaneously directing *Hamlet* with Wagner Moura as the Danish slacker for a June opening. Excerpts and discussions of his *Hamlet* production are available on YouTube.)

The future of Beckett performance

Amid the restrictions on performance imposed by the Beckett Estate, its attempts to restrain if not tame or subdue the recalcitrant

artwork by its insistence on faithful and accurate performances, a faith and accuracy no one seems able to define, a resilient and imaginative set of theatrical directors and artists continues to redirect Beckett by developing a third way, through radical acts of the imagination, by folding the authorized, legally owned object, like a ready-made in a gallery, into another context, like storefronts, disused or abandoned buildings, or museum installations. They thus assert the heterogeneity of Beckettian performance without violating the dictates of an Estate-issued performance contract. “Here, precisely, is the Beckett that will hold the stage in the new century”, argues Fintan O’Toole discussing the issue of fidelity to Beckett’s texts in another context; he notes significantly that “The merely efficient translations of what are thought to be the great man’s intentions will fade into dull obscurity. The productions that allow their audiences to feel the spirit of suffering and survival in our times will enter the afterlife of endless re-imaginings” (O’Toole 2000, p. 45). Such redirection as I am suggesting is evident in the all African-American cast of the Classic Theater of Harlem’s 2007 production of *Waiting for Godot*, directed by Christopher McElroen, featuring New Orleans native Wendell Pierce and J. Kyle Manzay, first on a simulated New Orleans rooftop in their Harlem theater in 2006 and then in November 2007 directly on the streets of the Lower 9th Ward of New Orleans, the area most devastated by hurricane Katrina – free productions on November 2-3 and 9-10, although the “free” production reportedly cost some \$200,000 to stage. Writing for the *Times-Picayune* on 9 November 2007, David Cuthbert noted that “The time has long since passed when *Godot* was regarded as ‘a mystery wrapped in an enigma’, as Brooks Atkinson famously described it in his 1956 *New York Times* review of its Broadway debut”. Cuthbert went on to note, in lines reminiscent of the San Quentin *Godot* of 1957: “Christopher McElroen’s staging is the most accessible, the funniest, the most moving and meaningful *Godot* we are ever likely to see. It is ours, it speaks directly to us, in lines and situations that have always been there, but which now take on a new resonance”.

Productions like that of the Classic Theater of Harlem, the Guimarães brothers, Atom Egoyan, JoAnne Akalaitis, among others, offer one approach to the re-imaginings necessary to a liv-

ing art. The alternative is that Beckett's work is often presented as what it may indeed have already become, a curio in a box of curiosities, a museum piece preserved, without deviation (except perhaps for deterioration), exactly as written (at least in some hypothesized version), but, even so, as I have been suggesting, even such a presentation could be re-imagined and altered radically in a new environment, an alternative space. If the Beckettian stage space has become a battleground of political and legal contention, the squabble over property rights more than artistic integrity or aesthetic values, those directors who have taken their cue from Beckett's own commitment to the avant-garde, his comments on theater, and the developing aesthetics of his late plays have found their freedom of expression, a liberation of their imaginations, by abandoning or spilling out of that contested space we call theater into a more expressive one. They have developed a hybrid art, sweeping Beckett along with them, moving it to where he always thought it belonged, among the plastic arts, and accomplishing a redirection of Beckett's theater for a new century.

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