TEXTURES
ONLINE PLATFORM FOR INTERWEAVING PERFORMANCE CULTURES

Quad: Euclidean Dramaturgies

W. B. Worthen, 18 August 2010

Since the late 1980s, Samuel Beckett's plays have come to epitomize the conflict at the heart of dramatic performance in the age of print: do we understand dramatic theatre, as Hans-Thies Lehmann puts it, as the "declamation and illustration of written drama" (21), or as a means for using writing in the production of an independent artwork, one agency among many in framing the theatrical event? While Lehmann frames these alternatives polemically, we might well think that this notion of "dramatic" fidelity is itself a form of theatrical rhetoric, a way of situating the audience within the performance event; in this case, in a gesture extending back to Aristotle, it urges the framing of the *mimesis* of the literary action as the sustaining purpose of dramatic performance. Like all rhetoric, though, it operates through a system of identifications that can be denied but not ideologically evacuated. In the modern realistic theatre, we pay to sit in the dark, occupying a position of economic privilege identified within the event as representational, ethical, and active absence, neutrality; realistic *mimesis* is defined as much by this structure of identifications as Aristotelian *mimesis* was defined by the manifest structure of the agon, the contest. Writing provides one of the agencies of Western dramatic performance, and different systems of dramatic performance understand the instrumentality, the use-value of writing in different ways. And Beckett's plays – perhaps like all dramatic writing – provide a kind of allegory of this condition, of the tension between poetry and performance in framing the work of drama.

Beckett's writing is preoccupied with the production of place, places often ambiguously rooted in space. Much as Euripides' drama explores the ways the orchestra and skene might be thematized by dramatic writing, or Shakespeare the "sterile promontory" of the platform stage, Beckett's writing engages the frontality of the proscenium house. Whether in plays like *Endgame* or *Happy Days* or *Come and Go*, or in video works from *Eh Joe* to *…but the clouds…,* Beckett's drama conceives the space of play perspectivally, located before an audience placed – as the notes to *Play* suggest – "outside the ideal space (stage) occupied by its victims" (318). Placed downstage center, toward the edge of this ideal space, the inquisitorial spotlight in Play articulates the activity of the play's audience, soliciting the characters from the darkness it shares with us. This sense of a playing space projected before the viewer informs much of Beckett's writing for video, too. In *Eh Joe*, the camera follows Joe's "opening movements […] at constant remove," then establishes its

position as “one yard from maximum closeup on face,” closing in within this perspective in nine four-inch movements (361). The camera of *Ghost Trio* tracks into a rectangular playing area, following a path perpendicular to the door centered in the rear wall, transforming the virtual space of the tv box into a box set; while the voiceover describes what we see, each of the camera’s movements (from point A to B to C on the track) and closeups maintain this alignment, taking us into and out of the space from a single viewing perspective. In *…but the clouds…* the camera is located at a fixed distance from the illuminated circular playing area, an area nearly contiguous with the camera’s focal field. Beckett’s writing constitutes a performing space in which the auditors face into the playing area, are shaped (whatever their actual seat in the house) within a single perspective (one sometimes articulated onstage, as by the spotlight in *Play*, or by precisely governed camera work in the videos) that reciprocally shapes the space of play and the space of our attention. In Catastrophe, Beckett’s most overtly self-referential play, the Director poses the Protagonist on his plinth, then moves toward the back of the auditorium, at one point to “the front row of the stalls” to “see how it looks from the house” (459). Taking a position behind the audience, the Director frames both stage and audience within his constitutive perspective on the performance: “Good. There’s our catastrophe. In the bag” (460).

Indeed, one of Beckett’s most exiguous works for performance – *Quad* – provides a useful paradigm for questioning the agency of writing in the framing of dramatic place. Written for the Stuttgart Preparatory Ballet School (Brater 109), the text projects an essentially theatrical vision before the motionless camera eye, theatrical enough for director Alan Schneider to have asked Beckett’s permission to experiment with the play for live performance (see Herren 127). The conceptual design of the play is straightforward: each of four players enters in turn, and traces a geometrically precise path around what we learn is a square playing area. In the opening directions, Beckett depicts a square with each corner labeled, A, B, C, D; A–D and B–C are opposite corners. The first player enters at corner A: s/he (“Sex indifferent” 453) paces along one side of the square playing area toward corner C; at C, s/he turns left crossing the hypotenuse to the opposite corner B, turns left along the side of the square back to A, turns left crossing the hypotenuse to the opposite corner D, turns left along the side of the square B, turns left crossing the hypotenuse to the opposite corner C, turns left along the side of the square D, turns left crossing the hypotenuse to the opposite corner A, which completes the sequence. The player, then, has paced each side of the playing area once, and has crossed the hypotenuse from one corner to another four times, always revolving, like Dante’s damned,

to the left. Each player (1, 2, 3, 4) enters at a different corner (A, B, C, D) and follows the same pattern for the series, apparently entering for the subsequent series one corner to the left.

> 1 enters at A, completes his course and is joined by 3.
> Together they complete their courses and are joined by 4.
> Together all three complete their courses and are joined by 2.
> Together all four complete their courses. Exit 1. 2, 3 and 4 continue and complete their courses. Exit 3. 2 and 4 continue and complete their courses. Exit 4. End of 1st series. 2 continues, opening 2nd series, completes his course and is joined by 1. Etc. Unbroken movement.
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> 1st series (as above): 1, 13, 134, 1342, 342, 42
> 2nd series: 2, 21, 214, 2143, 143, 43
> 3rd series: 3, 32, 321, 3214, 214, 14
> 4th series: 4, 43, 432, 4321, 321, 21
> (451)

Each of the players paces to a distinctive percussion ("say drum, gong, triangle, woodblock" 452); while Beckett suggests that the percussionists may be "barely visible in shadow on raised platform at back of set" (452), productions have tended to keep the musicians out of the picture.

"What is there to keep me here?" Clov asks; "The dialogue" (*Endgame* 120–1). Identifying *Quad*'s genre has proven troubling; as Enoch Brater remarks, "there is no real script, only the *pretext* of one" (110). In contrast to Beckett's other wordless plays, though, what seems to distinguish *Quad* is the texture of the writing, Beckett's decision not to adopt a novelistic, descriptive, narrative stance toward the action of the play, but to *direct* the action, to use the conventional rhetoric of the *stage direction* as his principal textual means. In this regard, *Quad* extends one of the most innovative and troubling aspects of Beckett's framing of the work of drama. As the many controversies surrounding directors' departures from Beckett's stage directions imply, Beckett's writing claims to authorize the page of the play in distinctive ways, extending the claims of the "work of drama" from the dialogue to that other writing, hitherto understood as something else, a supporting texture with different, significantly weaker, claims to authority.[1] Conceptions of authority are conventionally – legally – enforced; the sense that Beckett's writing successfully incorporates a previously disregarded zone of the text into the contractual warrant of

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[1] See Worthen, Print 159–75 for a fuller discussion of the competing authority of various zones of Beckett's page.

[2] Describing *Quad* as the "choreography of madness" lacking "the recitation of any spoken

theatrical production gains some of its traction from the character of the directions themselves. The language of stage directions in modern drama is partly a function of the parallel expansion of the printed play as a readerly commodity and of the playwright as a writerly "author" in the late nineteenth century; Ibsen, Shaw, and others used stage directions to articulate dramatic setting to a reading audience, and to articulate it with the apparatus of the stage. And yet, while contextualizing the material framework of the action, the style of modern stage directions often stands apart from that of the dialogue. Ibsen's or Wilde's relatively flat description, Shaw's mildly ironic instruction of the reader's eye, or Stoppard's chatty commentaries maintain a stylistic as well as formal distinction from the play's dialogue.

While it has become conventional to take *Quad* as "really more a set of assembly instructions than a play proper" (Herren 124), or to note Beckett's characteristic attention to the medium of performance ("they were written specifically for television and are not stage plays" Kalb 95), Beckett's writing here extends one of the defining impulses of his dramaturgy from *Play* onward: to write the space of drama. Although *Quad* is a play without dialogue, it's hardly unwritten, no mere pretext. The language is embellished with Beckett's typically laconic ornament, and performs a rigorously Aristotelian purpose here, articulating the play's precisely drawn plot. More to the point, as an *agency* of the playing, writing suggests the construction of dramatic space by its performers: as each actor takes the stage, place is shaped, known, identified with how it is occupied. Each player enters to distinctive percussion (and, if possible, footfall, as "Each player has his particular sound" 452). The illuminated area is given its dimensions and shape by the trajectories of the players' journeys. The players are shrouded, faces concealed, "As alike in build as possible. Short and slight for preference"; "Some ballet training desirable," presumably to make their pacing (six per side) and deviation step as precise and identical as possible (453). The path demarcates the square, and as they bisect the hypotenuse, each swerves slightly but precisely to his/her right, opening another space, a gap at the center, point "E supposed a danger zone. Hence deviation. Manoeuvre established at outset by first solo at first diagonal (CB)" (453).

Dramatic writing, though never brought into the play as "speech," nonetheless claims a place in the spectacle. In *Quad*, Beckett's rhythmic, exhaustive, rather mechanical recitation of the patterns of movement, often in short phrases linked by sequence rather than syntax ("Raised frontal. Fixed. Both players and percussionists in frame" 453), lends a sense of urgency, dispensing with the stray gestures of unnecessary pronouns, articles, verbs: "All possible combinations given" (452). The language of *Quad* is, like all dramatic language, the language of *agency*: it provides a means for doing, and a specific texture of doing that will be granulated by the acts of performance.

The text of the play diagrams the "Area: square" of the play (451), but the place of the play is created by its performance, ordering the course of each actor's journey, and the sequence with which the actors enter and depart. The sequence is arithmetical, so that in the desired twenty-five minutes (453) – which turned out to be considerably shorter when Beckett came to direct the play (Brater 109) – all combinations of individual and group journeys are staged:

> Four possible solos all given
> Six possible duos all given (two twice)
> Four possible trios all given twice.
> (451–2)

The event is rhythmic, each of its four sections beginning with a single journey, swelling to four simultaneous performances, and then receding to a single actor. In the systole and diastole of the performance, the actors, concealed in gowns, are not explicitly forbidden other movement or gesture, but the rigor of the design and its rigorous expression in Beckett's writing seem to exclude actions other than those explicitly stated.

Quad allegorizes the agency of dramatic writing as it engages the material space of the stage. As in many of his plays, Beckett's demarcation of space here is distinctive and relies principally on lighting. The playing area is initially defined as an illuminated zone shading off into blackness, the light "Dim on area from above fading out into dark" (452). The text projects space as limitless and unknown; until the players enter to give it scale, the zone of illumination is demarcated but without dimension. The writing projects place that is – unlike, say, the places of Brecht's theatre – ambiguously located in the apparatus (theatre or video) of its visibility, crepuscular, fading into darkness. Instigating theatrical space; occupying – *taking* – place; rendering it significant through a precisely calibrated sequence of events; instrumentalizing fictive "characters" at the interface of writing, body, movement, physicality; articulating space in time, with a beginning, middle, and end: *Quad* directs light, sound, and embodied movement, carving a signifying place out of nothing, nowhere, darkness. It shapes it literally (a square six by six paces), but also figures it as place *for*, place with a purpose, an *orchestra*, the dancing place of the classical *theatron*, seeing place, a place where the dialectic between the one and the many is at once the presiding subject of dramaturgy and a question animating the civic arena of the theatre.[2] The space is occupied and rendered significant through the means of the drama: explored

[2] Describing *Quad* as the "choreography of madness" lacking "the recitation of any spoken dialogue, strange, poetic, or otherwise," Enoch Brater also reminds us that "one of the origins of Western theater lies in the dithyramb and the choral dance" (107).

in geometrical patterns governed by arithmetical sequence, space is mapped as points, lines, vectors, angles, a Euclidean space that represents the imposition of order, illumination, clarity stepping out from the unformed darkness. The space assumes these features, conforms to the mapping of its potentiality for the period of time that the actors perform. Once Player 1 departs (though it is not entirely clear from the text that he does depart – "Without interruption begin repeat and fade out on 1 pacing alone" 452), the space resumes its unformed undimensionality.

Quad rigorously subjects its space to the authority of writing, or seems to: writing directs how the space will be created, used, rendered meaningful, and abandoned. At the same time, as Beckett's own production makes clear, any production will *use* this writing to construct a specific place, a precise, focused, minimal moment of drama, the moment that erupts just as the shrouded figures appear about to meet one another, and take their step of deviation to the side. This moment of attention, climax emerges in performance but is signaled by the slightly heightened rhythm of the text as well: "Negotiation of E without rupture of rhythm when three or four players cross paths at this point. Or, if ruptures accepted, how best exploit?" (453). *Quad* establishes a movement plot: side, cross, side, cross, side, cross, side, cross to home, exit. The moment of drama is the moment of deviation from this emplotment, a moment that's noticeable with one player in motion, but that rises gradually to crisis when the four actors careen toward one another, and then precisely step to the right. Putting the playing into place, *Quad* suggests, realizes the rigorous execution of the necessary and probable consequences inherent in the drama. The consequences are – in *Quad*, as in any play – visible in the script, but their texture as event depends on the play's execution (no staggering, no stumbling), an act that becomes more arresting, perhaps even more necessary the more precisely it is performed.

"E supposed a danger zone. Hence deviation" (453): the climactic event of the play is sustained by its richest, most suggestive, minimally poetic phrase. To conceive this moment as "deviation" is to allude to a perfect geometry, a Platonic *Quad* that could not be realized in three dimensions, and so would not be *Quad* at all.[3] The deviation is a *deviation* because it deforms the perfect trajectories of the players, the pure arithmetic of movement, confirming their physicality as performers, who cannot pass simultaneously through the same point, occupy the same space at once. The writing directs the

[3] *Quad* has become something of a site of experiment, as have other Beckett works, on YouTube. One elegant black-and-white version shows an open weed-filled square, in what seems to be a housing estate in the suburbs; each figure materializes and begins to trace the "course" and then fades out, to be replaced by a subsequent figure. The figures often appear superimposed on one another, among other technical experiments with the play. Donet, *Quad*.

occupation of space, but it also directs the evacuation of space, a space that is avoided, unfilled, a small "hole" in the center of the play's endlessly repeating history. The point, that central node of avoidance, is never occupied, and remains unknown and unknowable; though square in shape in Beckett's diagram, even its precise frontiers emerge and vanish with the players' footsteps around it (453). Its center, point E, is "supposed a danger zone. Hence deviation," but the terms of the danger are unstated. Although the actors cannot occupy the space simultaneously, Beckett's word "deviation" suggests avoidance, perhaps recalling Mouth's "vehement" deviation from the first person in *Not I* (375). As an agency of the performance, writing creates place and evinces the design of its embodiment, a design that subjects its human occupants to a single space/time order of representation. At the same time, however, the performance also implies a fictive elsewhere mapped onto the concrete parameters of the stage. It's tempting, given Beckett's predilections, to see this central space created by writing but untouched by its performance as the space from which writing emanates, a space writing can create as part of the theatrical event, a space writing can locate but performance can never quite inhabit. Writing enables the occupation and even representation of the space of the stage, while at the same time also creating – here at the symbolic center of representation – a hole, an absence in the mapping at hand.

As a text, then, *Quad* undertakes a suggestive exploration of the agency of dramatic writing in constructing the space of the stage. At the same time, *Quad* is a somewhat eccentric example of dramatic writing, particularly in its relation to performance. Beginning in the mid-1960s, Beckett began to direct his own plays and teleplays, giving rise not only to an extraordinarily rich body of performance, but also bringing the question of the agency of writing in the performance into focus in a different way. How are we to treat Beckett's directorial revisions to the play at hand? As final revisions in the standing dramatic work? As emendations necessitated by the circumstances of a specific production, and confined in their purpose to that production? As one instance, or as the definitive instance, of the materializing of the *agency* of writing in the *scene* of performance?

Quad suggestively models the ways notions of authority mediate our access to and understanding of dramatic writing and its implication of dramatic space. Beckett directed *Quad* with his collaborator Walter Asmus in 1981; produced by Süddeutscher Rundfunk as *Quadrat I + II*, this version was broadcast on BBC 2 on 16 December 1982 (Ackerley and Gontarski 472). The production was at once challenging and instructive: the script's suggestion that the players' coloring be determined by lighting was ineffective, and they were clothed in colored gowns, and the alacrity of the pacing produced a performance significantly shorter than the estimated twenty-five minutes. Moreover, when the German

technicians checked the film on a black-and-white monitor, Beckett was entranced, conceiving and producing a second version, “100,000 years later”; *Quadrat II* stages the first series only, much more slowly, the actors gowned in white, to the scraping sound of their sandals on the floor (see Brater 109). In *The Complete Dramatic Works*, this version of *Quad* is traced only in a series of notes:

> 1. This original scenario (*Quad I*) was followed in the Stuttgart production by a variation (*Quad II*). (5)
> 2. [*Light*] Abandoned as impracticable. Constant neutral light throughout.
> 3. [*Time*] Overestimated. Quad I, fast tempo. 15’ approx. Quad II, slow tempo, series 1 only, 5’ approx.
> 4. [*Problem*] E supposed a danger zone. Hence deviation. Manoeuvre established at outset by first solo at first diagonal (CB). […]
> 5. [*Quad II*] No colour, all four in identical white gowns, no percussion, footsteps only sound, slow tempo, series 1 only.
> (453–4)

Beckett’s direction produced revision, elaboration, cuts, and – in the case of *Quad II* – a performance that adapts the design of an existing script, leaving only the trace of another script, a lost quarto. Ackerley and Gontarski suggest that Beckett’s “video-taped German production constitutes the only ‘final’ and accurate text” (472), and there’s considerable sentiment along these lines, that the play is merely a kind of “pretext” rather than a “play proper.” And yet, in an important sense, even in *Quadrat I*, Beckett seems less to “follow” the text than to map its potential agency in the physical space of play, executing the writing in specific ways – ways that need not be taken as final. *Quadrat I*, for instance, delineates the “Area: square” visibly and distinctly: rather than understanding the paths of the players to describe a square, we see a sand-colored box painted on a darker background. Beckett’s production projects the square as a preexisting place, one that captivates the players in their leftward orbits, rather than being a place shaped by their engagement with it. Similarly, though the text doesn’t specify that the central point of the square be visible (“E supposed a danger zone”), in *Quadrat I* we see a dark central point, a hole, a *thymelê* perhaps, around which the players circle in deviation. Are these ways of instrumentalizing the play now essential to the play? Although Beckett eventually cooperated with the efforts of the editors of *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett* to print revised texts of the plays, he was finally undecided whether some of his directorial changes – cutting the Auditor from productions of *Not I* is the most dramatic example – should be retroactively inscribed in a refitted text. *Quad* was not included in the *Notebooks* series.

Beckett's wordless play presents a concise critique of the drama's writing of space, its ability to transform the nowhere of the stage into a specific location. The problem of writing space stands at the center of one of the most remarkable controversies animating the theatre, a controversy that arises directly from the drama's dual identity between poetry and performance. Beckett's texts – like those of Ibsen, Shaw, Stoppard, and others – clearly extend an authorial voice, presence, and propriety beyond the dialogue, into that zone of the text once considered merely instrumental to the play's staging, but peripheral to its claims as drama: the stage directions. The stage directions materialize the dual status of dramatic writing in the modern era. Since the rise of the director in the late nineteenth century, it has been conventional to see the dialogue as the playwright's property, but instrumentalizing the play in the three dimensions of the stage as the director's job. Insofar as "the text" is understood as *agency*, one element of the mutual construction of the *scene* of drama in the *scene* of theatre, it seems plausible to ask whether its potential *agency* might be represented differentially, different aspects of the poetry articulating with the work of performance in different ways.

One of the most celebrated playwrights of the twentieth century, initially controversial for his scrupulous inscrutability, became more controversial when his inscrutable plans were not followed scrupulously enough. The Beckett controversies of the 1980s and beyond bring this question into focus, in that they typically turn on the materialization of the spatial element of Beckett's writing. Several productions have, in fact, become both theatrical and legal landmarks in this regard: JoAnne Akalaitis's staging of *Endgame* at the American Repertory Theatre in 1984, in which Beckett's legal agents threatened to close the show for staging the "*Bare interior*" of the play in a derelict stretch of subway tunnel (they were satisfied when the show was characterized as an adaptation of the play in the program); Gildas Bourget's pink *Fin de partie* at the Comédie Française in 1988; an all-female *Waiting for Godot* by De Haarlemse Toneelschuur also in 1988; Deborah Warner and Fiona Shaw's *Footfalls* in 1994, which clothed May in a red wrap, illuminated her more brightly, and placed her pacing in two locations in the theatre, on the stage and on a platform above and behind the stalls; and a 2006 production in Pontedera, Italy, in which the casting of twin sisters to play Didi and Gogo was challenged by the Beckett estate, but upheld by the courts.[4] These productions and the controversies they generated foreground the *agential* character of dramatic writing in the theatre, the use of writing as part of the making of an event, an event that necessarily exceeds determination by

[4] On these controversies, see entries on adaptation, censorship, and law in Ackerley and Gontarski; on Akalaitis and the ART, see Kalb 165–84, and Rabkin; on the Warner–Shaw *Footfalls*, see Worthen, Print 159–75; on the 2006 *Godot* production in the Italian courts, see McMahon.

writing, even in the case of such apparently overdetermined writing as Beckett's. After all, in these productions, the dialogue was relatively unchanged: what was altered was either an element of physical embodiment (Beckett noted that "women don't have prostates," but the gender of characters in *Godot* is not otherwise specified; Ackerley and Gontarski 89), or a departure from Beckett's scenographic conception of the play, the text's inscription of theatrical space.

Although generally regarded as a contest of authorities – the author vs. the director – this controversy points more directly to the labile character of writing in the theatre. The Beckett controversies are conceived around the interlocking, and somewhat misleading, questions of property and propriety: has the production mounted a "defensible scenic interpretation" of "the text," respecting both "the meaning of the dialogue" and the implied configuration of theatrical space (Gussow), or has Beckett's property been damaged by its use onstage? Much as these controversies attend to the management of space, they also witness the challenging double *agency* of dramatic writing, its character as poetry in constructing the double *scene* of performance, a dramatic place mapped onto the landscape of an existing theatrical space. Beckett's writing cannot govern this mapping; no writing can. And it's a mark of the situation that the contracts to stage Beckett's plays through Samuel French typically contain a rider, writing meant to constrain the implementation of dramatic writing already said fully to constrain its proper use in the theatre:

There shall be no additions, omissions, changes in the sex of the characters as specified in the text, or alterations of any kind or nature in the manuscript or presentation of the Play as indicated in the acting edition supplied hereunder; without limiting the foregoing; all stage directions indicated therein shall be followed without any such additions, omissions, or alterations. No music, special effects, or other supplements shall be added to the presentation of the Play without prior written consent. By accepting this license and rider, the licensee agrees that non-compliance with the terms will cause the Owners immediate irreparable damage for the which there is no adequate remedy at law and will entitle them, among other remedies, to immediate injunctive relief. (Performance License Rider[5].)

Though Beckett's plays appear to resolve these ambiguities, the need for the rider suggests otherwise. On the one hand, in specifying place, any performance will

[5] I cite from the Performance License Rider attached to a license to perform several of Beckett's short plays at the University of California, Berkeley, under the direction of Patrick Anderson. The agreement is dated 24 February 2000, and, based on other accounts of the Beckett estate's intervention in productions, I assume it is standard. My sincere thanks to Katherine Mattson, Production Manager in the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies, for her assistance in this, and many other, matters. See also Jacobs.

necessarily materialize the writing in specific ways. How might the "*Bare interior*" of *Endgame* be identified with the material theatrical *scene* of a small storefront theatre? With the theatrical *scene* of the Olivier Theatre? How will the "*country road*" be imaged? In most productions, including those directed by Beckett, the road is merely assumed, the stage itself. In *Quadrat I + II*, Beckett depicts a square playing area, though whether a box is to be outlined on the stage floor is perhaps ambiguous; the lighting, "Dim on area from above fading out into dark" (452), perhaps implies an "area" marked by the pacing alone. It might be recalled that the "circular, about 5 m. diameter" set of *…but the clouds…*, "surrounded by deep shadow," is created entirely by illumination (418), nor is the "*Strip: downstage, parallel with front, length nine steps*" of *Footfalls* actually marked by a line on the floor, despite the diagram in the stage directions (399).

Quad argues that the space of the stage is rendered dramatic by how it is seized, occupied: writing provides an instrument for that activity, a means of taking and making place, but insofar as the theatre changes, the space that plays render dramatic changes, too. The rigorous frontality of Beckett's writing for the camera merely extends the frontality of his writing for the stage: Beckett's visual imagination charts the landscape of a proscenium theatre, a darkened audience looking furtively into a space of fitful illumination. And yet, while we continue to use proscenium theatres, as an instrument of the social technology of the theatre, even the proscenium stage gains new uses, the capability of figuring the *scene* of performance in unanticipated ways. Having become the dominant structure of Western theatre space by the nineteenth century, the proscenium theatre is now one of many technologies for emplacing performance; most university and civic performance complexes feature some combination of proscenium, thrust, and/or flexible-seating venues. More to the point, the boundary between the *scenes* of live and mediated performance is increasingly fluid. The contemporary theatre, proscenium or not, tends to be animated by a dynamic desire to amplify the human figure onstage, surround him or her with sound, oppose him or her with video.

The desire to reshape the scripted space of Beckett's plays, and the increasingly commonplace practice of staging Beckett's plays for radio and television as theatre, enforce an important recognition: the familiar spatial potentiality even of proscenium theatricality is, like all space, constantly under pressure, a tool capable of accomplishing different kinds of work as it is deployed through the changing social technologies – including those of writing, acting, directing, and design – of its use. Several recent productions of Beckett's work witness the ways in which a changing sense of the space of the stage asserts changing *agencies* of dramatic writing, not least because they might well have been refused a license not long ago. JoAnne Akalaitis's *Act Without Words I & II*, *Rough for Theater I*, and *Eh Joe* at the Theatre Workshop (December 2007) deployed

Beckett's writing on a frontally oriented, digitally enhanced stage. *Act Without Words I* used video to amplify and distort the various objects tantalizing the anguished protagonist. *Eh Joe*, originally written for television, flanked Joe (Mikhail Baryshnikov) with large projection, magnifying his responses to the woman's voice he hears; rather than hearing a disembodied voice, in this production Joe faced his tormentor, a living actress onstage. Atom Egoyan's staging of *Eh Joe* for the Gate Theatre, which starred Michael Gambon in Dublin, and Liam Neeson in New York (July 2008), followed the scripted television protocol of staging the woman's voice only as voiceover, but similarly doubled the silent actor onstage with a large screen, registering his every minute response to the offstage voice.[6] And despite it's apparently prescriptive textuality, *Quad* has proven an extraordinarily rich inspiration for the stage, especially for choreograpers (see Protopapa, Carboni, and Katsura Kan).

From the moribund Krapp soliciting the palpable, lost vitality of his own extinguished past, the voice from "Box … three … spool … five" (216), Beckett's writing has explored the interface between writing and the different media of dramatic performance; remediating television or radio for the stage, such productions at once rewrite the text in an alternate spatiality and subject the spatiality of the stage to new opportunities as well. *Quad* provides a dramatic allegory of a model of theatrical spatiality associated with Beckett, and even more so with Peter Brook: the empty space. When Brook declared in 1968, "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage" (8), his manifesto laid claim to an essential theatricality, a space, like the unformed space of *Quad*, barely identifiable *as* theatre before its occupation and signification in play. Yet as the argument of *The Empty Space* makes clear, this space is never empty; it's defined both by what Brook urges us to cleanse away – all the boring, stultifying detritus of "deadly theatre" – and by the emerging practices, the social technologies that Brook summons to reanimate it: "rough theatre," "holy theatre," "immediate theatre." Brook's gesture is cognate with Beckett's, and cognate with many rather different gestures of new performance in the 1960s and 1970s: with the importation of Artaud's merciless assault on a theatre of "texts and *written* poetry" (78), with Grotowski's search for a "poor theatre" reduced to its essences, with participatory theatre's desire to undo the licensed boundaries between spectators and performers, with the environmental theatre's spatial redefinition of the theatrical box itself. While much of this revolution – the Performance Group's *Dionysus in 69*, for example – involved multiplying perspectives on and access to the performance, Beckett characteristically empties a proscenium-like space and restricts our perspective on it, approximating the

[6] See Brantley, "When a Universe Reels"; and Isherwood, "Words Fail Him."

audience to the camera's single, unblinking eye. Beckett may have longed for a theatre of pure textuality, but as Brecht suggests dramatic performance necessarily confronts the materiality of writing with the matter of the stage. The technology that transforms writing into an instrument of performance, the *repertoire* of theatre, defines the affordance of its tools, taking the poetry and shaping how it speaks to us, what it can say and do as performance.[7]

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