

DEREK JARMAN

Waiting for Waiting for Godot

Upper Gallery: 15 October – 22nd December 2013

Waiting for.

It can be seen that what is taking place here is a rehearsal. As we might suppose from the title: 'waiting for' *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett first wrote the play in French, *En attendant Godot*, before translating it himself into English, *Waiting for Godot*. The French word for rehearsal is *répétition*. But what is being repeated when the play has yet to begin? The waiting. Waiting for the play to begin. Waiting in the sense of expectancy? Not quiescently or in one place. Rather, waiting in the sense of being ready, and waiting in the sense of being in search of the play. What is being repeated is a certain waiting, the condition of being in waiting for the play to begin, and a waiting as looking for, or looking out for, being ready for when the play arrives, ready to grasp it at the right moment, a grasping which must be repeated until the play opens. And for this repetition a space is needed. A rehearsal space. One which prepares the ground for not being able to control what happens 'on the night'. Thus the rehearsal space is not a space which can be calculated. It can be measured (and we see a measuring tape in Jarman's film), but not calculated. As Hélène Cixous avers in *White Ink*, her writings on the theatre, what is incalculable about the rehearsal space is its time. The time taken to traverse the rehearsal space is the performance. Performance is the way, the time and rhythm and movement, that the body measures space. This is why Beckett's notebooks for the only production of the play he himself directed (in 1975 for the Schiller Theater Berlin) are full of diagrams. Beckett is giving to the actors the measure of space in which they are to perform. And performance is the body. The signifying and signified body and how it affects and is affected by other bodies. The non-verbal body as much as the speaking body. (Jarman's film is silent.) And the meeting of that body with an idea. Whether that encounter has taken place cannot be decided in rehearsal; it can be diagrammed, but a diagram is the drawing of an encounter, between body and idea, it is not the event of that encounter. Then comes the first night. The first night comes after the repetition. The first night is both first and the outcome of a repetition. The first night is not the origin, and yet it is first. The first performance is not the origin because the text precedes it. But what the text is is given in performance, is given first in performance. The first night is first not because it is the origin of the play, but because it is the first encounter of the play with its performance. The first night is what Alain Badiou calls in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* an interruption. The first night is the real of the theatre he says, and it is an interruption – not the culmination of rehearsal but the interruption of it – by the public. If we agree with Badiou then the first night does not put an end to the expectancy but is the occasion of it: has the play arrived after all? A confirmation that can only be given after the fact and by the other that the public is. Then we might also say that the play is waiting. *Waiting for Godot* waiting for *Waiting for Godot*. The play lies in wait for itself. Ready to ambush those who do not stage it in the way it desires. Not the way the director determines or the author dictates, and still less their 'estates', but the way the play itself desires. And this is something that can only be revealed by the play itself in its performance. The play is the gathering of the actors the director the author and the spectator for the performance of the play, a gathering in which all become public. And in this the play is always to come, for that gathering is each time different, and the arriving of the play at that gathering must be repeated again and again and each time anew. And what is it that arrives after the waiting for *Waiting for Godot*? Opacity. There is no 'message' to be had from Beckett, and 'meaning' is impossible to adduce. Beckett's was a practice of 'vaguening' the word, reducing it to tone rhythm affect, subtracting understanding from it, creating images from it. Thus is why so many visual artists take him on. In this Jarman remains true to Beckett. The image that Jarman makes with this Super 8 film is not contentful like those of his feature films, and by no means as determined in its

signification. Indeed *Waiting for Waiting for Godot* is much less communicative and diaristic than the other Super 8 films from around the same time (1983). Nor is it interpretative of the play. Instead we have what looks like a fragment of a struggle. We know from his diaries that Jarman found *Waiting for Godot* 'depressing', to the extent that he left early from rehearsals of a later (1991) production he was designing or 'bunked off' them altogether. But Jarman's subjective response to the play is not the scene of the struggle he visibilises. What Jarman does is show the struggle between theatre and cinema. Jarman's is a film of the rehearsal of theatre. We have already mentioned Cixous and Badiou and their conceptions of rehearsal. Both are aware of the difference between cinema and theatre. For Cixous their temporalities and spatialities are at odds. The time taken for a performer in a play to cross the stage is collapsed by film. In theatre the distances the actor's voice must cross are greater. The rhythms of theatre are not those of cinema. For Badiou, if the theatre is the encounter with an idea then the cinema is the passage of the idea. Again this would be a question of time and space: to the extent that in cinema the idea can be a phantom. Filmed versions of theatrical performances of plays which do not work with and on these ontological disjunctions productively are uninteresting to watch. They cover over or suppress or negate what's filmic about film and theatric about theatre. Jarman's film shows the struggle between the two. A camera films the rehearsals and feeds these images to monitors ('Made in Singapore') placed in the rehearsal space itself. Jarman then films off the screens of the monitors. The film may be silent, but it writes. Watch how at one point the camera filming the action describes a circular motion such that a light source is made to inscribe a 'scribble' on the monitor screen. But the camera filming the monitor is stationary. The 'scribble' remains on screen overlaying the subsequent action for almost a minute. The longer the 'scribble' is held there the more it looks like the lit fuse to a ghostly bomb, but frozen at a point along the light's course through the fuse. There are differing times of image and there are separating spaces of image, and there are images of differing and separating temporality and spatiality, visibilised by grain rhythm and tone. *Waiting for Waiting for Godot* is not so much black and white as grey-blue. In *Chroma*, his 'book of colour', composed in Britain's only classified desert, Jarman calls the works of Beckett those of a 'grey writer'. We remember Jarman's great film work, *Blue*. What we see in Jarman's Beckett is indistinctness, materialised in grey-blue grain, what Badiou calls 'the grey black of being' in Beckett, a dark which is not the opposite of light but which shows non-being or the nothing to be as real as being. We know that Beckett resisted many requests to have *Waiting for Godot* made into a film. *Waiting for Waiting for Godot* is the struggle, the beautiful polemos between, the question of the difference between, theatre and film, the theatre of Samuel Beckett and the film of Derek Jarman. "We are, and to the extent that we are, we are always waiting for something." So Martin Heidegger. I would say that we are always waiting for. Waiting for the nothing as much as something. If we are waiting when we watch *Waiting for Waiting for Godot* it is not for something in the form of an answer to the question 'What are we waiting for?' Our waiting for is the ability to await such a question without demanding an answer.

Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield