

## Review

S. E. Wilmer & Audronė Žukauskaitė (eds.)  
*Deleuze and Beckett*

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 253 pages.

### JURATE BARANOVA

The question, "How is it possible for Beckett to meet Deleuze?" implies a broader one: "How is it possible for the arts to meet philosophy?" Does the theatre or literature have common points with philosophical thinking? The doubters would say: they have nothing in common. Nevertheless, Samuel Beckett, for some time, studied philosophy, enjoyed Henri Bergson, and his philosophy notebooks on Kant are still kept in the library of Trinity College Dublin.<sup>1</sup> The philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) returned to Beckett's texts and his characters from time to time. In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze, together with Guattari, reflects on what happens when Beckett's characters Molloy, Malone, and the Unnamable decide to venture outdoors.<sup>2</sup> Deleuze was more of a cinema than a theatre-goer. When asked to write the introduction to Beckett's plays, however, he wrote his famous text, *The Exhausted*.<sup>3</sup> Beckett's and Deleuze's meeting is, thus, always a challenge to cultural critics. It has been approached from different perspectives and the strategies differ depending on which side — Beckett's or Deleuze's — is considered to be the starting point. Garin Dowd, in his book *Abstract Machines: Samuel Beckett and Philosophy after Deleuze and Guat-*

---

1. Dowd 2007, 19.

2. Deleuze & Guattari 1983, 9; 12; 14; 20; 76; 84; 319; 324; 338.

3. Deleuze 1998.

*tari* starts from Beckett's texts *Murphy*, *The Lost Ones*, *How It Is*, *Worstward Ho*, and *Dislocations*. Here, Deleuze's methodology appears to be very productive for analyzing unexpected and previously unseen aspects of Beckett's literary texts.<sup>4</sup> In the book, *Deleuze and Beckett* edited by Stephen Wilmer and Audronė Žukauskaitė, the contributors start from opposite directions: from the perspective suggested by Deleuze's concepts and try to discern the Beckettian aspects functioning in the philosophical space between philosophy and the arts initiated by Deleuze. The Deleuzian concepts suggested as useful for Beckett's reading are rather various: becoming-imperceptible, the body without organs (Audronė Žukauskaitė), any-space-whatever (Garin Dowd), copy, simulacrum and difference (Anthony Uhlmann), the stream of becoming (S.E.Gontarski), schizoanalysis, subjectivity as multiplicity, desiring production (Benjamin Keatinge), deterritorialized desire (Isabelle Ost), and sociability without individuals (Timothy S. Murphy). In the fourth section of the book, "Theatre and Performance", the authors reflect on Deleuze's and Beckett's meeting in the possible virtual space of philosophical theatre and explore such useful Deleuzian concepts as event and a crystal-theatre (Daniel Koczy). Arka Chattopadhyay suggests reading the Beckettian first person identification in his plays through Alain Badiou's thesis of performance as encounter. Ruben Borg takes as a starting point Hamlet's formula, "the time is out of joint" and in this new understanding of time — as hesitation not any more subordinated to the rhythms of nature — traces the signs of a possible Beckett and Deleuze encounter. Thus, the book reveals a multiplicity of possible strategies for approaching Deleuze's and Beckett's imaginable meeting in textual space. In reality, all the authors agree that Beckett and Deleuze never met. There are no indications that Beckett ever read Deleuze. On the other hand, most of the authors agree that the main mediator between them was Bergson's philosophy in which both authors took great interest. For example, Deleuze based his philosophical conception of cinema on Bergson's insights.

Deleuze and Beckett were fascinated by cinema. Deleuze described himself as a "moviegoer" and played the small role of the imprisoned philosopher Lammenais in the Michele Rosier film on George Sand, *George qui? (George Who? 1974)*.<sup>5</sup> Beckett wrote and helped direct a short film with the rather intriguing title: *Film*, starring the comic actor Buster Keaton. The main hero is hurrying to someplace through the streets of a gloomy city. The spectator,

---

4. Dowd 2007.

5. Dosse 2010, 397–405.

however, sees only his back, as if the hero emerged from one of René Magritte's pictures, where the main hero with the black hat is visible only from his back and never shows his face. The hero from Beckett's *Film* desperately avoids the situation of being seen, but suddenly he sees the camera filming him and the spectator at least is able to see the one-eyed gaze of the hero-Cyclops. He understands that all his efforts to destroy the gazing world were filmed and so in vain. Terror-struck he covers his face with his hands in despair. Why does the surrounding world's gaze cause terror? Jean-Paul Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, answers: the gaze of the other reduces you to the object.<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault in his works, especially in the *History of Madness*, diagnoses: the gaze means power. Emmanuel Levinas noticed that the gaze is aggressive and the eyes explore.<sup>7</sup> Beckett's *Film* can be watched as a sort of a parody in which the omnipotence of the gaze is reduced to the absurd. Such can be a phenomenological reading of Beckett's *Film*.

However, Deleuze, in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, reflects on Beckett's *Film* from another perspective. Deleuze considers that this film, first of all, asks the question: How can we rid ourselves of ourselves and demolish ourselves? *Comment nous défaire de nous-mêmes, et nous défaire nous-mêmes?*<sup>8</sup> Deleuze reflects the main intrigue of the film not from the point of view that the hero wants to be unperceived, but that he avoids the subjective perception. When subjective perception is eliminated, then only objective perception remains. This objective perception belongs to the camera. When the subjective perception is diminished, the camera becomes the centre of power. Deleuze concludes that "it is the eye of matter, the eye in matter, not subject to time, which has conquered time, which reaches the negative time, and which knows no other whole than the material universe and its extension."<sup>9</sup>

In her chapter in *Deleuze and Beckett*, Žukauskaitė reflects on Beckett's *Film* by introducing one other concept: the perspective of becoming-imperceptible and asks the question: How can we rid ourselves of ourselves and how can we evade perception and self-perception?<sup>10</sup> Becoming-imperceptible, according to her, means not only the total dissolution of the subject, but also the openness of the subject to time and change. Žukauskaitė writes: "Just as in *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze (with Guattari) describes

6. Sartre 1943, 292–343.

7. Levinas 1998, 195.

8. Deleuze 1983, 97.

9. Deleuze 1986, 84.

10. Wilmer & Žukauskaitė 2015, 60.

the opposition between the organism and the body without organs, or between the plane of organization and the plane of immanence, in his film theory Deleuze reveals the tension between the movement-image and the time-image.” The movement-image functions as an organic or conventional visual regime, which can be related to the notion of organism, whereas the time-image is described as an inorganic or, crystalline visual regime, which can be imagined as the body without organs. “It is an image which is simultaneously virtual and actual, composed of different and multiplied time-dimensions and, in this sense, leaves the spectator in a state of mental indeterminacy.”<sup>11</sup> According to her view, this conception is rather original as it does not follow straightforwardly from Deleuze’s text on Beckett’s *Film*. Such a reading takes into account the broader context of Deleuze and Guattari’s works. Thus, Beckett’s film, in Žukauskaitė’s reading, becomes the point of bifurcation in transposing from the movement-image to the time-image. In contrast to Beckett’s literary works, the cinematic example gives us only a negative understanding of what becoming-imperceptible means: after the extinction of all these images we are left to imagine what the positive understanding of becoming-imperceptible could be. But it is precisely this indiscernibility, or unpredictability, that creates the condition for the time-image.

What happens beyond the disappearance of the subject? It is always possible to create a rather different image of the consequences of desubjectivization. This possibility is left open by Beckett and Deleuze and also by the editors and authors of the book.

11. Wilmer & Žukauskaitė 2015, 73.

## References

- Deleuze, Gilles 1998. *Essays: Critical and Clinical*. Translation Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. London and New York: Verso.
- Deleuze, Gilles 1986. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Translation Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles 1983. *Cinema1 – L'image-mouvement*. Paris: Les éditions de minuit.
- Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix 1983. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translation Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dosse, François 2010. *Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari*. Translation Deborah Glassman. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dowd, Garin 2007. *Abstract Machines: Samuel Beckett and Philosophy after Deleuze and Guattari*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Levinas, Emmanuel 1998. *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*. Translation Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul 1943. *L'être et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Wilmer, S. E. & Žukauskaitė Audronė (eds.) *Deleuze and Beckett*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015