

THE UNNAMEABLE

by Neil Stewart

It is time to move on. It is time we must move on. Time.

Time itself. Time is the subject. The subject is time.

Time moves, it flows, that much we know. But which way? Forwards? Or backwards? Backwards. That's it. Time flows from the future through the present and into the past. Surely. Time comes towards us.

How can that be? Birth, life, death. Isn't that how it is? Time moves on. That's what they say. Time goes on. Surely? No. No.

We go on. That's how we see it, because we are the subject; not time. Our consciousness of time might move forwards, but time itself moves backwards. Time goes by. Literally.

So there we are. In time, perhaps; but not with time. Against time. We must go on: 'in the silence you don't know, you must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on.' So ends Beckett's novel *The Unnameable*. The end as beginning? Not nameless, that which has not been named; past tense. But the unnameable, that which cannot be named; future tense. Anticipation...without resolution.

But what is it? What remains unnamable? (Pause.) Bad question. It is not an it at all. Not an object. Not even one that triggers the past in the present. No. Forget Proust for a moment (whom Beckett wrote about earlier). Forget Bergson (whom Beckett could quote at length). Let's try Husserl for size: The difference between object and subject? The subject cannot be reified, cannot be named. Pure subjectivity remains unnameable, when subjectivity is our consciousness of the flow of time(1). The subject is time.

So too for Beckett? Certainly, in *The Unnameable*, it is clearly the mind, a mind, talking; not a person talking. Pure subjectivity? Perhaps. If so, the inevitable question 'where is it located?' is, once again, a time and not a place. We are now familiar with Beckett writing, from a surprisingly early age, in that space between life and death, or even death and life. But the Unnamable is somehow out of character - being without a character. Not a being, but still becoming.

Difficult in theatre: No object, no character...er, no play (enter Not I). And still, always heading towards the writer is the seamless flow of the finished production, destined for eternal repetition. Against time. But between the text and the performance lies the rehearsal. Read *The Unnameable* again and the darkness could easily become a theatre between productions. Here Beckett, Beckett the Director, would forget himself. Writing is solitary hard labour, not enjoyment, whereas 'Rehearsing was work too, but - if he felt well and it was going well - he enjoyed it.'(2)

'Rehearsals are the studio practice of the theatre world, where directors

and actors can work, often behind closed doors, perfecting their production for the audience. It is where the work is done and the performances made.'

Jessica Wiesner - REHEARSING/SAMUEL BECKETT (3)

This is from the introduction to a catalogue for an exhibition of an archive of material from rehearsals by Beckett with the San Quentin Drama Workshop at Riverside Studios, London. The catalogue was published in November 2006. The exhibition at CHELSEA Space was in March 2005, the rehearsals were in the 1980s. The plays written in the 1950s. Time moves backwards as we move forwards. The connective tissue is the archive, a living entity that, strangely, lives outside of time. In this case material collected by theatre director David Gothard at the time. But it doesn't just document the past, it opens up the future. This is a recurring theme for shows at CHELSEA Space, where exhibitions director Donald Smith turns the gallery from repository for the objects of critical art practices into a critical art practice in itself. The gallery as a living rehearsal space for the rehearsal of the archive? Perhaps. And perhaps that's why it's the most 'now' art space in London.(4)

But if 'Rehearsals are the studio practice of the theatre world' what of the reversal? Is studio practice solitary hard labour, producing more objects? Or is studio practice a rehearsal? And if so, for what? Or of what? A subject? Unnameable? We'll see. Time will tell. Meanwhile, we must go on, 'you must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on.'

Neil Stewart's video 'Part III _ The Unnamable' shows in '3 Things', RUN Gallery, London (www.rungallery.co.uk) until 5th August 2007. His next show 'Heimat' runs at Galerie Lorenz, Frankfurt (www.galerielorenz.com), 31st August to 5th October 2007.

Notes:

1 See Edmund Husserl 'On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time'.

2 John Calder, *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett* (London: Calder Publications, 2001), p.56

3 Jessica Wiesner and David Gothard, *REHEARSING/SAMUEL BECKETT* (London: CHELSEA Space, 2006)

4 See www.chelseaspace.org