

Staging Ireland's Dispossessed: Sarah Jane Scaife's Beckett in the City Project

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Staging Ireland's Dispossessed

Sarah Jane Scaife's Beckett in the City Project

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Abstract

This article explores the tension between the growing cultural capital of the Beckett 'brand' and the issues of dispossession which are at the heart of Beckett's work through an investigation of selected productions from the Beckett in the City project, a series of site-specific performances of Beckett's work directed by Sarah Jane Scaife. The discussion of Dublin performances of *Act Without Words II* (2013) and *Beckett in the City: the Women Speak* (2015) in marginalized urban spaces draws on writing by Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou on dispossession.

Résumé

Cet article examine la contradiction entre le capital culturel croissant de la "marque" Beckett et la représentation des dépossédés qui sont au cœur de son œuvre. Il s'appuie pour cela sur quelques mises en scène de pièces de Beckett par Sarah Jane Scaife hors les murs. L'analyse de la représentation à Dublin d'*Acte sans paroles II* (2013) et du programme *Beckett dans la cité: les femmes parlent* (2015) dans les espaces urbains marginalisés s'appuie sur des textes de Judith Butler et Athena Athanasiou sur la dépossession.

Keywords

staging Beckett – site-specific performance – dispossession – Sarah Jane Scaife – Company SJ – Judith Butler

Seán Kennedy has argued that: “Any account of the reception of Samuel Beckett’s work in Ireland over the last 70 years or so might also serve as an account of Ireland’s changing sense of itself in that period, revealing much about its ongoing processes of self-definition and revision” (55). These processes of self-revision include the Republic’s increasing efforts to become integrated into global multinational capitalism over the past half century or so, while negotiating experiences and histories of dispossession: language, culture, land, economy, and vectors such as gender, sexuality, emigration and immigration. During this period, Beckett’s own global cultural status has continued to rise. In Dublin, for example, productions of his plays have moved from non-mainstream venues like the Pike Theatre on Herbert Lane which premiered *Waiting for Godot* in Ireland in 1955, the Focus Theatre and the Project Arts Centre to the main stages of the Abbey and Gate Theatres.¹ The Beckett Centenary Festival in Dublin in 2006 was an important engine of cultural tourism, as is the Happy Days Festival in Enniskillen in Northern Ireland, inaugurated in 2012. With specific reference to the Republic of Ireland, this essay will consider the tension between the growing cultural capital of the Beckett ‘brand’ and the issues of dispossession which are at the heart of Beckett’s work through an investigation of selected productions from the Beckett in the City project, a series of site-specific performances of Beckett’s work in marginalized urban spaces directed by Sarah Jane Scaife, initiated in 2009.

The contemporary global climate is characterized by speed, mobility and what Gary Becker and others have termed “human capital”: not just the accumulation of money but the acquisition of educational and cultural skills.² Advertising today urges us to do more things more quickly, to participate in the dizzyingly rapid flow of knowledge and consumption where human subjects have become “personal economies,” according to a prevalent HSBC publicity campaign launched in 2014.³ In such a climate, Beckett’s people, profoundly

1 This article draws on data and research produced by the Staging Beckett project (2012–2015), a collaboration between the Universities of Chester and Reading in partnership with the Victoria and Albert Museum, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council. The Staging Beckett project has compiled a database of productions of Beckett’s plays in Ireland and Britain, which can be searched at <https://blogs.reading.ac.uk/staging-beckett/> (accessed 15 March 2016). The article was first given as a paper at the Theatre Performance and Philosophy conference, Université Paris-Sorbonne, 26–28 June 2014. I am most grateful to Sarah Jane Scaife for her comments and information.

2 Becker’s influential book on human capital (1993) was originally published in 1964. Human capital theory has since been modified and critiqued, see for example Feyer 2009.

3 See <http://followwww.com/145401/4392048/campaigns/hsbc-personal-economy> (accessed 15 March 2016). Saatchi and Saatchi created the campaign to relaunch HSBC Premier.

lacking in skills, voluntary mobility, agency and possessions, are a reminder of the marginalized and the indigent. Lance Duerfahrd argues that certain “situations beyond the stage [...] bring audiences into alignment with Beckett’s world. [...] Beckett’s stage emerges in landscapes of dispossession, among people under threat” (8). In addition to situations of crisis, such as Sarajevo under siege in the 1990s, or New Orleans in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina, where, as Duerfahrd demonstrates, performances of Beckett’s work resonated with the lived conditions in which they were performed,⁴ deprivation certainly exists on the margins of global centres of consumer culture. In Ireland, the experience of dispossession is not only a historical memory, but the reality of those left behind by the Celtic Tiger and further impoverished by the austerity measures following its collapse. How might this tension between a poetics of indigence or dispossession and the context of an increasingly commodified cultural marketplace be negotiated or foregrounded? In order to tease out these questions, I will consider two of Irish director Sarah Jane Scaife’s productions in her Beckett in the City series: *Act Without Words II*, especially the 2013 production located in an abandoned carpark along the quayside of Dublin, and a programme of several shorter plays for female actors, collectively presented as “Beckett in the City: The Women Speak”, presented in numbers 20 and 21 Parnell Square in September 2015. I will focus on Scaife’s placing of Beckett’s plays in abandoned urban spaces in order to pose some questions about Beckett’s relevance to twenty-first century Ireland.

In order to explore the representation of dispossession which these productions staged, I am drawing on Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou’s 2013 book, *Dispossession: the Performative in the Political*. Butler and Athanasiou distinguish two different concepts of dispossession that underpin their dialogues: on the one hand, as they explain in their joint preface:

We recognized that both of us thought that ethical and political responsibility emerges only when a sovereign and unitary subject can be effectively challenged, and that the fissuring of the subject, or its constituting “difference,” proves central for a politics that challenges both property and sovereignty in specific ways.

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4 *Waiting for Godot* was directed by Susan Sontag and produced by Haris Pašović in Sarajevo in 1993, and Paul Chan initiated a production of *Godot* in flood-devastated areas of New Orleans in 2007, in collaboration with Creative Time and The Classical Theatre of Harlem.

Dispossession in this sense embraces a position that challenges both the concept of a unitary, authoritative subject and the material, legal or discursive privileges that accrue to such a subject in particular regimes. However, on the other hand, Butler and Athanasiou acknowledge that dispossession is not only a position that is chosen, but one which is *imposed* on many inhabitants of our contemporary world. As Athanasiou comments: “being dispossessed refers to the processes and ideologies by which persons are disowned and abjected by normative and normalizing powers that define cultural intelligibility and that regulate the distribution of vulnerability” (1). While all of us experience vulnerability as a condition of our embodied being, certain subjects and collectivities are protected, looked after and valued much more than others who are abjected in dominant discourse, social and economic structures and cultural visibility (through the media or other forms of representation) because of their vulnerability or their exclusion from the norms which construct dominant definitions of subjecthood. This essay will focus on the unequal distribution of vulnerability foregrounded by both of Scaife’s productions in relation to material conditions of dispossession in post-Celtic Tiger Dublin.

Beckett in the City

Sarah Jane Scaife is an Irish actor and director. She is particularly known for an approach to choreography and directing that focuses on the actor’s body—she is trained in Polish mime and Butoh—and has directed the work of several Irish playwrights including W.B. Yeats and Marina Carr. Beckett, however, has been a major point of reference for her throughout her career since her presentation of Beckett’s mimes in Dublin in the late 1980s, when she returned from physical theatre training in New York (Scaife 2003). In 2006, Scaife received Culture Ireland funding to work with a number of international theatre companies in China, India, Malaysia, Mongolia and Singapore, in staging Beckett’s plays, especially his later, short works. She has written of how her experience of working interculturally in 2006 led to a heightened awareness of the cultural markers of any performance of a Beckett play: “even Beckett’s bodies, once on stage, are forced into a confrontation with specificities, site and location” (Scaife 2016, 154). She began to reflect on the specificity of her own cultural formation and environment: “This experience of watching as ‘other’ in a geographical and cultural space I was not familiar with drove me to look back at my own culture, assessing the incultured and socially inscribed body within the social and architectural spaces of my own city” (156).

When Scaife returned to Ireland, the differential distribution of resources during the Celtic Tiger years and the banking collapse of 2008 had increased the number of homeless and drug-addicted people living on the streets. She connected Beckett's indigent subjects with these "lives lived outside of the social contract of the city, those marginalized and disenfranchised" (Scaife 2018). Placing Beckett's plays in neglected spaces of the city would allow each to comment on the other, defamiliarizing and rendering visible and material the conditions of deprivation encoded in the Beckett plays and physically encountered in the sites. Scaife's Company SJ embarked on the Beckett in the City project in collaboration with actor Raymond Keane from Barabbas Theatre Company, presenting a number of Beckett's short, later plays in carefully chosen sites on the margins of the city.

Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks have emphasized the resonances between site and performance characteristic of site-specific performances:⁵

Site-specific performances are conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of found spaces, existing social situations or locations, both used and disused [...] Performance re-contextualises such sites; it is the latest occupation of a location at which other occupations—their material traces and histories—are still apparent: site is not just an interesting, and disinterested backdrop. [...] The multiple meanings and readings of performance and site intermingle, amending and compromising one another.

2001, 23

Drawing on Marc Augé's theory of non-places, Brian Singleton discusses Scaife's Beckett in the City project in relation to a range of recent site-specific performances by Irish theatre companies, including Dublin-based ANU productions. ANU's Monto tetralogy (2010–2014), for example, brought audiences into close interaction with "the social life of a quarter-square-mile of north inner-city Dublin known as the Monto, one of the most economically deprived areas of the city" (2016, 173–174). Singleton examines both ANU's and Scaife's foregrounding of Dublin's "unsocial" spaces: "Locating performance both on the outside of theatres but also on the inside of the abandoned, the derelict, the

5 Pearson and Shanks emphasize that site-specific works are devised specifically for a particular space or place. According to Fiona Wilkie's survey of the diversity of potential interactions between performances and sites, including the work of company Wrights & Sites, Scaife's productions of Beckett's texts in outdoor locations might be described as "site-sympathetic," where an "existing performance text [is] physicalized in a selected site" or series of sites (150).

transitory and the non-place is a political act designed to question the spectator's relationship both with performance itself and with the unsocial spaces it utilizes" (169).

The first play in the Beckett in the City series was *Act Without Words II*, programmed as part of the 2009 Dublin Fringe Theatre Festival, and performed at the back of Christchurch Cathedral, an area frequented by the homeless and not far from a methadone clinic (Scaife 2013). That production was subsequently remounted in different sites in Dublin, Limerick, London and New York. In 2013, Company SJ and Barabbas Theatre company presented *Act Without Words II* and *Rough for Theatre I* as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival in a disused parking lot on the Quays, overshadowed by the Royal Bank of Scotland's Dublin headquarters. The discussion below focuses particularly on the production of Beckett's mime at this site, though it is informed by the author's experience of other productions of *Act Without Words II* in Dublin and Limerick.

Act Without Words II

Act Without Words II is a mime featuring two players designated only as A and B: at the beginning of the mime the players are curled up in sacks on a long platform. Each in turn is prodded by a long pole, or goad, which prompts them to emerge from their sack and accomplish various daily routines including teeth-brushing and dressing. One is brisk and efficient, the other exhausted and careless. Ultimately however the differences between them matter very little—they are both subjected to the goad and to the necessity of getting through the day. The two figures are at once alone and together: in order to progress from one point to the next (time indicated through spatial progression), they are obliged to carry each other. This mime distils the human condition to its embodied vulnerability to external factors (the goad), to hunger, pain, desire for meaning, an ultimate answer or a direction (one says his prayers, the other tries to orient himself on a map), and to our interrelationship with others on whom we depend and for whom we are responsible, no matter how solitary we might feel.

It was the audience's immersion in the site along Dublin's Quays, as well as the details of staging and performance, which articulated contemporary, culturally specific experiences of dispossession through Beckett's more abstract mime. In particular, the stark opposition between the abandoned site and the shiny buildings of the financial district performed an unspoken critique of the policies and priorities of contemporary globalized Ireland which had con-

tributed to the economic crisis. Scaife also introduced objects scattered in the site that reflected ironically not only on current inequalities, but on the failure of the institutions of the Irish state and the Catholic Church to protect the most vulnerable of the populace over the last century; for example, a tattered copy of the 1916 Easter Rising Proclamation promising “equal opportunities to all its children”; or images of the Virgin Mary or Pope John Paul II, elected in 1978, and given an overwhelming welcome in Ireland in 1979, at a time of Irish economic hardship which continued throughout the 1980s.

While the stage directions of Beckett's mime were meticulously adhered to, the physicality of the two figures evoked extreme corporeal vulnerability and addiction: A was particularly difficult to watch, as he struggled over each movement which seemed to take an eternity, while B was hyperactive and nervous, constantly looking around him. The effort of each actor to lift and carry the other was felt almost viscerally by this audience member, seated on a chair in proximity to the rough cardboard strip along which the performers gradually moved. The lack of ‘protection’ afforded by the seating arrangements of a traditional theatre building intensified the sense of corporeal vulnerability of both performers and spectators.

Nevertheless, the actors were not homeless people, but highly trained physical theatre performers (Bryan Burroughs and Raymond Keane), whose precision was highlighted when the exact gestures of emerging from the sack or interacting with props, for example, were repeated. This foregrounds some of the ethical issues raised by this production. To have worked with the homeless themselves would have produced a different relationship to rehearsal and audience, one which might have been concerned with the processes of giving voice to the performers and the sector they represent, rather than on the experience of the audience. This performance was produced as a professional production, albeit in a Fringe festival context which ensured relatively cheap tickets and accommodated non-traditional performance spaces. The actors were clearly performing, *representing* specific modes of dispossession linked to homelessness, addiction and marginalisation. Having seen several iterations of this production, for me it foregrounded the tension between an awareness of Beckett's locally unspecific placing of this mime where, according to Christopher Morash and Shaun Richards, “any security of place is a distant memory somewhere offstage” (177), with the derelict environment and resonances of its performance. Indeed, the production framed very deliberately the relationship between the performers, site and audience. Incorporating an awareness of the risk of an audience's voyeuristic consumption of the spectacle of deprivation, Scaife used archways and underpasses to draw attention to the interplay of observers as both the performance and its audience were placed under scrutiny



FIGURE 1 *Raymond Keane carrying Bryan Burroughs in Act Without Words II, Dublin, 2009, directed by Sarah Jane Scaife*

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by non-paying spectators: some of the local homeless people who had regularly attended rehearsals, passers-by, cars, taxis, buses, frequently adding sounds such as calls or horns. For me, this framing felt uncomfortable, as I felt the site and its inhabitants were looking at me, challenging my response to the performance and its environment. Scaife refers to “removing the safety net that the contract with the theatre building provides” (2016, 160), and I certainly experienced a sense of my own vulnerability in these unfamiliar sites on the margins of Dublin’s social and commercial spaces.

By taking the play out of a designated theatre space with its recognisable conventions, audiences were confronted very directly with the differential distribution of vulnerability in the city. The production addressed or reflected on the audience’s position in relation to the vulnerable bodies presented: while it risked serving up the spectacle of the dispossessed to be consumed by the privileged, it also framed the relationship between the observer and the observed. Indeed, I would argue that through these interacting frames, Scaife questioned the cultural conventions and embodied norms through which we perceive, represent or interpret ourselves and others. There was a risk of increasing the distance between ‘us’ and the ‘dispossessed.’ In *Dispossession*, Judith Butler asks: are “‘those who have suffered’ at a distance from ourselves? Are we among them, or are they ‘over there’ as the other?” (117). Scaife’s production did not

resolve this question, but posed it through the complex experiential and perceptual interplay of site, spectators and performance. *Act Without Words II* not only framed the failure on the part of the government and the Irish people to address or even acknowledge the scandal of homelessness and drug addiction in Ireland, but, in my view, offered an invitation to reflect on how we position ourselves in relation to persons who experience in acute form a vulnerability that we all share, but that some of us are protected from more than others.

Beckett in the City: The Women Speak

At the Dublin Fringe Festival in September 2015, Company SJ presented a further stage of Beckett in the City, entitled *The Women Speak*: a programme consisting of *Not I*, *Footfalls*, *Rockaby* and *Come and Go*. The site initially chosen for the programme was a Christian Brothers school, Coláiste Mhuire, epitomizing the patriarchal history of Ireland that resulted from the merging of state and the Catholic Church in the Constitution of 1937, under Taoiseach Eamon de Valera (see Scannell 2001). Although the special position of the Catholic Church in the Constitution was removed by referendum in 1973, the power and social status of the Church remained strong, until the public disclosure of sexual scandals and then sexual abuse and its cover-up, starting in the early to mid 1990s. While many suffered under the severe conditions of the Christian Brothers schools and the lack of accountability which enabled them to shelter or cover up abusive teachers / priests (though they included many kind individuals), the choice of this School to host plays featuring marginalized female voices was intended to highlight the particular dispossession of women enacted by the Irish Church-State union (Scaife 2018). This included laws that forbade women to work after marriage, outlawed abortion, which is still illegal in Ireland at the time of writing, and sanctioned a sexual surveillance of women at all levels of society. One result of this was the notorious Magdalen Laundries, where the unruly or sexually deviant, or indeed victims of rape or incest, were incarcerated (the former Magdalen Laundry on Sean McDermott Street was also a former choice of site but was unavailable). James Smith has described the Magdalen Laundries as an integral part of the Irish state's "architecture of containment," and the women who inhabited them as "the nation's disappeared" (xvii). Scaife has commented: "By placing Beckett's writing in interaction with the institutions of family, religion and state I wanted the audience to view the writing of the past framed within the institutions of that past whilst always remaining conscious that we are in the present" (2018).

However, the initial choice of site was unavailable, and the programme was finally presented at numbers 20 and 21 Parnell Square, which incorporates the site of the former national ballroom, next to the Hugh Lane Gallery. The ballroom evoked a gendered historical irony as dancehalls were particularly policed as potential sites of sexual licence.⁶ The ballroom had been long disused and, like the north inner city Georgian tenement in which Company SJ presented their multi-media adaptation of Beckett's *Fizzles* in 2014, the vast rooms, high ceiling, crumbling walls and decaying plaster evoked layers of time and history. Since Scaife has written about this programme from her perspective as director (2018), I will focus on my experience as a spectator. Although there was less of an immediate juxtaposition between the architecture of contemporary global financial institutions and the marginal spaces of the city, as in *Act Without Words II* on Dublin's Quayside, the experience of this site invited the audience to reflect on the marginality and surveillance of women's bodies and voices in the public sphere in the history of the Irish state and the legacies of that history for contemporary women.

On entering the space through the vast entrance hall, we were ushered into a reception room where audience members gathered before being led to the series of rooms in which the performances took place. As in previous Beckett in the City programmes, including *Act Without Words II*, Scaife introduced into the site items and text which created a dialogue between Beckett's work and echoes of Irish history. In this case, the specific history of Irish women's dispossession was evoked through the projection on the wall above the fireplace of Article 41 of the 1937 Constitution. This article defined women's sphere of labour as that of the domestic, her place as "within the home," and indeed promised that the state would endeavour to ensure that mothers (the terms woman and mother are used interchangeably) would not "neglect" their domestic duties by having to engage in labour outside the home. Legislation such as the Civil Service Act of 1956, which required women to resign from the civil service on marriage, followed. This history is well covered by Irish feminist studies (see for example Beale 1986), but continues to resonate in relation to the continuing illegality of abortion in Ireland (north and south) at the time of writing, and the representation of women in the public sphere. Framed in this way, the focus on Beckett's women's insistence on articulating their marginalisation in the public space of performance resonated powerfully through layers of time.

6 The 1935 Public Dance Halls Act "was a social turning point in Irish society, controlling where, when and under whose supervision dancing could take place" (Mulrooney 2006, 11).

To the side of the reception room was a barrier of scaffolding, behind which was placed, in rows on the ground, the original large letters, National Ballroom, which would have been illuminated at the front of the building. Behind these in turn was projected a film which had been shot in a hexagonal room in Coláiste Mhuire, the original choice of site, with light slanting in from the dust covered windows, featuring the three female performers of the programme (Joan Davis, Michèle Forbes and Bríd Ní Neachtain) wandering aimlessly in this enclosed space between windows and doors, as if they had been incarcerated there for years, as in the Magdalen Laundries. This film and further screened images of women glimpsed in corridors and doorways was shown between the performances, creating the effect of a palimpsest of female ghosts haunting the site. The effect of watching this film in the reception space through the cross-hatching of rows of letters on the floor and the scaffolding was of watching the women through bars and barriers, women who might once have danced or dreamed of dancing in the ballroom, but were excluded from the official educational, cultural and political public institutions of the state and at worst, incarcerated within domestic or institutional spaces.

As with Company sj's adaptation of *Fizzles*, the audience were taken into a series of rooms by a group of volunteers where they sat on chairs or benches (all sourced from the site). The first room, in which *Not I* was performed, was the ticket office, with wooden partitions and opaque glass windows at the back of the space. Behind one of these windows, Mouth appeared, suspended and isolated in this cold space. The Auditor was neither male nor of indeterminate sex, but played by Joan Davis in the garb of a homeless woman, dishevelled hair, her gaze fixed on the frantic Mouth (Bríd Ní Neachtain). Rather than gesturing in "helpless compassion" (Beckett, 375), she gripped the pillar she was standing by and in the end slowly sank onto the rubble on the floor. The ambiguity of the role of the Auditor as an interconnected part of the same psyche as v, or as a helpless, compassionate witness was given a particularly gendered interpretation, as the witness was herself represented as a marginalized woman.

For *Footfalls*, the audience then climbed the stairs and entered the space of an upper large room, divided by huge wooden doors into a reception / seating area and an interior with tall windows on one side, another set of doors on the other, and an imposing empty fireplace at the back. As the light faded and came back up, Michèle Forbes as May appeared, a tiny figure in a trailing thin wrap that gathered behind her as she paced back and forth in the vast empty space, conjuring the echoing Big House evoked in the text. Lighting and sound were exquisitely precise, the voice of M echoing in the space (voiced by Forbes herself). The performance was both familiar, respecting the stage directions, yet also defamiliarized by very slight departures from the precise

choreography familiar from photos of productions featuring Billie Whitelaw, who worked with Beckett on the 1976 Royal Court London premiere of the play. The movement was highly stylized, but made up of everyday gestures, reaching out for something beyond reach, then coiled around herself. The effect was of a fractured, traumatised subject, resisting her lack of agency and being through her determined articulations of herself and her experience, like Mouth in *Not I*.

Following *Footfalls*, Joan Davis performed *Rockaby* in an adjacent room. The empty space of the room seemed to take on a physical volume, surrounding the figure in a chair found in the site and adapted to become the rocker which rocks w into death independently of her own volition. As in *Footfalls*, the concrete and visual experience of the site meant that the text is less able to conjure changes in location: from the house to the church in *Footfalls*, from the window to the cellar in *Rockaby*. However, the site here intensified the isolation of w (as in the case of May), as if she had been abandoned here for a long time, while the building crumbled around her.

The final performance was of *Come and Go*, and again the framing of the performance was foregrounded. The audience seats were facing large interior double doors which opened to reveal the three women seated on a small bench. After the strict monochrome of the first three pieces, the floral colours of the costumes were striking. While in keeping with the eye shading hats and matching colour coats specified in the stage directions, the costumes recalled the contemporary fashion for older inner city Dublin women to wear three-quarter length coats and matching floral or patterned skirts. The resonances between the site and the costume evoked different temporal layers of female marginalisation. Meticulously choreographed, *Come and Go* formed a coda to the other pieces, building up a montage of fragmented lives while emphasizing the indomitable testimony of Beckett's women.

Conclusion

Productions of Beckett's plays in the current climate inevitably have to negotiate in various ways the marketing imperatives that are now part of the consumption of artistic goods and cultural heritage both nationally and globally. Beckett has been a testing ground for theatrical and performance innovation in Ireland over the last several decades, and that is still evident in recent productions, and in the ways his work has been adapted by companies like Pan Pan or the work of the Beckett Laboratory led by Nicholas Johnson and Jonathan Heron as part of Trinity College Dublin's Samuel Beckett Summer School. However, I believe that Beckett's work can still speak to us of the contemporary

conditions of the vulnerable, of those left out of the consumer driven climate of our society, and question our response to the dispossessed. I would argue that the productions directed by Scaife, albeit inevitably part of the economic imperatives of cultural production, made visible the marginalisation of the dispossessed through their experiential juxtaposition of performance and site.

Lance Duerfahrd reminds us that Beckett's work "does not illustrate sociological conditions of poverty" (92) and warns of the "cost" of what he terms "localization": "the way directors use the stage to create a specific social or political context for a play" (104). At the same time, he argues that "the condition of need on Beckett's stage exerts a radiant effect over contiguous spaces" (4). Scaife's productions negotiated these positions. On the one hand, it could be argued that she localized *Act Without Words II* in particular with specific reference to the homeless in Ireland. On the other, the Beckett in the City project foregrounded the specific cultural resonances that any performance will evoke for those who attend it in a particular place and time (whatever their own cultural identifications). It therefore confronted the audience, through their immersion in the site and a highly physicalized series of performances, with the condition of need and vulnerability not only as part of the human condition, but as the embodiment of specific histories and conditions of dispossession.

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