Beckett and the aesthetics of Black inexpression

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Introduction

This essay considers two artists and a writer: one Canadian, Stan Douglas, and two British, Steve McQueen and Simon Okotie. All three are Black and all three have acknowledged Beckett's influence as essential. More importantly, in the works discussed here, each explicitly drawing on Beckett in some way, there is a common concern with expression and its opposite, whether we think of the latter as withdrawal, formal structure or, simply, *in*expression. The latter term is Tina Post's, who posits it as a central, if heretofore occluded, component of African-American cultural production from the nineteenth century to date. Before looking in detail at selected works by Douglas, McQueen and Okotie, then, I want to consider Post's argument.

In her 2022 book *Deadpan*: *The Aesthetics of Black Inexpression*, Post convincingly tracks a tendency towards blankness, reserve and inscrutability in Black aesthetics and representation. Arguing that this strategy marks a consistent reaction to the association of Blackness with emotion, affect and the gestural, interpreted body, she assembles a tradition dating back to nineteenth-century vaudeville, where the term deadpan originates. Drawing on examples from documentary and art photography, advertising, minimalist sculpture and theatre, *Deadpan* develops a wide-ranging and subtle taxonomy of the modes of deadpanning. It is in the context of this tradition that I suggest we can understand Beckett's position in the work of our three subjects.

I want to begin with McQueen. His film *Deadpan* (1997) is based on Buster Keaton's stunt from the silent comedy film *Steamboat Bill, Jr* (1928), where a barn façade falls on the motionless actor, who survives by passing through its empty window frame. In McQueen's piece the artist takes Keaton's place, stoical in the face of this violent act of containment, a brutally literal framing, with death or injury being only a matter of centimetres away. Here I want to turn to another of our artists' comments on Keaton. In his essay 'Good-Bye, Pork-Pie Hat', Stan Douglas writes of Keaton's short films:

Their editing was rudimentary, and the generally static camera was only capable of a deadpan stare at a staged event. […] This, combined with a star whose typical character earned him the name 'stone-face', meant that they would offer slight psychological identification. (1988, 17)

Douglas's use of the cognates 'deadpan' and 'stone-face', to refer to both the static camera and the face of the actor, catches something important about the relation between documentary style and personal expression in McQueen's piece: it implies that the eschewal of overt emotion on the part of the subject (here McQueen himself) equates to the dispassionate register of the recording mechanism, so that inexpression becomes truth. It also implies a similar relation in Keaton's performance in *Film*, one that will be important to what follows.

In the last chapter of her book *Deadpan*, tracking a history of Black anti-expressiveness from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, Post reads McQueen's *Deadpan* as a part of this tradition. She also has a chapter on Keaton, where she points out that his father was a vaudeville performer, and that the actor himself appropriated and mobilised the tropes of Black inexpressiveness in his own screen persona (2022, 165–200). Post does not mention Beckett at all in her book. However, once we accept Keaton's debt to African-American inexpression, then the actor's appearance in *Film* takes on a new valency, as does perhaps the abiding sense of fugitivity and the setting in a rundown tenement in the Lower East Side. All of these elements suggest that Keaton's presence in *Film* might be read as a means of associating the deadpan with the marginal and the migrant. In the process, Beckett's inexpressive aesthetic becomes legible within a lineage that runs as follows: Vaudeville – Keaton – *Film* – the *Samuel Beckett: Teleplays* exhibition – McQueen's *Deadpan* and *7ᵗʰ Nov.*, 2001 – Stan Douglas's *Vidéo* – Okotie's 'Peering Out of the Deadlight'.

Stan Douglas, *Vidéo* (2007)

The 1987 exhibition mentioned above, *Samuel Beckett: Teleplays*, was curated by Douglas and is probably the most significant point in this constellation in historical terms. The exhibition showed several of Beckett's lens-based works together for the first time, including both *Film* and *Ghost Trio*. By transplanting Beckett's screen works into the gallery context Douglas reconstructed an important line of influence on his own historically-informed and highly

political film and video work. It also ensured that Beckett's film and TV work became an influence for a generation of artists in the process of rethinking their relationship to the modernist legacy. For the exhibition showed how Beckett's screen work not only asks the kind of formal questions typical of the modernist artwork, but also explicitly raises historical issues of mediation and meaning that challenge, extend and transform the modernist agenda.

Let's take *Ghost Trio* as one example. This TV play explicitly stages the experience of another, historically prior artwork through the constant replaying and contemplation of the titular piece of music. It is no coincidence that the latter piece is by Beethoven (Beckett, 2009a, 124), one of the central figures of admiration for modernists of all kinds. Only think of Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, which includes an examination of Beethoven's piano sonata opus 111, an analysis indebted to Mann's discussions with Adorno (Mann, 1996, 51–8). Another Beckett TV play that appropriates a modernist forebear is *...but the clouds...*, with its citing of the last lines of W. B. Yeats's poem 'The Tower' (Beckett, 2009a, 140). In both cases, Beckett stages relations with a cited artwork in order to come to terms with questions of influence, historical change and media transformations of aesthetic experience.

That Douglas consciously intended his exhibition to be a polemical intervention is clear from the way he treats Adorno in the catalogue essay. Here he mounts a no-holds-barred attack on the German philosopher accusing him of 'modernist nostalgia' (1988, 17). More than this he suggests that Adorno's reading of Beckett sponsors a 'heroic if melancholic identity [which] is always gendered male, classed bourgeois, and of European descent' (17). Finally, Douglas suggests: 'The suspicion with which Beckett regards closures such as this modernist nostalgia provides a content of an obligation to express that paradoxically coincides with having nothing to express' (17). What interests me here about Douglas's use of this familiar quotation from the *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* is the way that it sees Adorno as an irrelevant, nostalgic, modernist and instead affirms Beckett's paradox of expressivity and its opposite. It is in such a context of expression and modernist influence that I want to consider Douglas's *Vidéo*. As I do so, Tina Post's notion of Black *in*expression will be constantly informing my approach.

Vidéo is a roughly twenty-minute piece that re-enacts aspects of Beckett's *Film* and Orson Welles' *The Trial*. Though Beckett was familiar with Kafka – feeling 'at home, too much so' (2011, 464) in his work – and the two are often linked, not least by Adorno (2012) himself, the mediation of the moving image brings them into a new form of historical conjunction, one that displays Douglas's own profoundly historical sensibility. One implication of *Vidéo*'s inspired use of Welles' 1962 *Trial* as an intertext is that both it and Beckett's 1965 *Film* are responses to the modernist legacy, shot within three years of each other, at the height of the

Cold War. In the case of *The Trial* – an adaptation of Kafka's novel (1915/1925) – the reference to modernism is obvious. With *Film* it is initially less so. And yet there is a distinct quality of anachronism about Beckett's piece, deriving from many otherwise puzzling factors: the central role given to an aged Keaton (a totem for many modernists, the surrealists most of all), the lack of sound, the setting in 1929, the use of an ethnographic image. The stage directions' citation of the idea of the urban 'unreal' conjures up a prewar literary world, this being a word and concept inevitably associated with Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) but also much favoured by Proust, as Beckett noted (1976, 48, 68). It is also central to the critical modernism of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (2012, 105). Finally, as we shall see, the modernist notions of the impersonal and the mask – also associated with Eliot and Yeats – are implicated in *Film*'s formal treatment of its star.

There are, however, significant differences to the way each film engages its literary antecedents. The thing that strikes one about *The Trial*, for example, is just how tasteful it is. Kafka's novel is abrasive, refusing conventional poetic satisfactions in favour of a deliberately constrained and crabbed diction and syntax. Welles' *The Trial*, on the other hand, is lovely to look at. It delivers very conventional aesthetic pleasures through inventive camera angles, gorgeous framing and elaborate sets. Here the dense claustrophobia of Kafka's story is replaced by a much more accessible palette: a pastiche of generic markers taken from the gothic, surrealism, film noir, science fiction and, through Anthony Perkins's nervy screen presence, Hitchcockian thriller (*Psycho* had been released in 1960). The film was financed and shot in Europe with European actors like Jeanne Moreau and Romy Schneider, and indeed often feels like a French New Wave film. In summary, *The Trial* is, I want to argue, a Cold War version of the novel that conforms more closely to Fredric Jameson's notion (2002) of an ideological late modernism than to the spirit of Kafka's masterpiece of alienation.

Once this aspect of Welles' *The Trial* is recalled, the distinctive aesthetic of Beckett's slightly later *Film* becomes all the more apparent. From the opening creased eyelid and long take of the obdurate materiality of the wall, through the pancaked make-up of the clergyman, to the frustratingly blurred lens of O's point-of-view shots, the surfaces of both diegetic object and mediating frame are distressed, smeared, textured, the viewer's eye constantly snagged, frustrated, deflected. There could be no more startling contrast with the elegance of Welles' cinematography and the pristine forms of his sets. And this contrast between clarity and obfuscation is felt above all in the two films' treatment of their respective American stars. I have already mentioned Perkins's neurotic intensity and its association with Alfred Hitchcock, mobilised to great effect by the Wellesian camera. One might expect Beckett to take similar

advantage of the legendary figure he had managed to secure. But not a bit of it. Instead, *Film* takes the opposite tack, often picturing Keaton from behind, following him at close quarters. It is as if even the famous stone-face is now too expressive, too recognisable as an incarnation of the modernist trope of the impersonal. Rather than abandon it completely, however, Beckett saves the celebrated deadpan expression until almost halfway through, before allowing a moment of intense expression at the end, even while never allowing us to see the source of the fear and surprise that for once invade Keaton's face.

All of the above, and much more, is provoked and evoked by Douglas's piece. It is a film that sends one back to its historical intertexts alive to their contradictions and continuities. In terms of content and narrative, however, *Vidéo* engages much more extensively with Welles than Beckett. It is mostly during the first three minutes, as the protagonist enters her apartment, checks her pet parrot and window, looks in the mirror, etc., that one recognises substantive images and events from *Film*. Across the whole piece it is rather through the form of *Film* that the Beckettian makes its presence felt. Hence, despite cleaving to certain scenes from Welles' movie quite closely, *Vidéo* emphatically does not deliver the kind of modernist formal clarity that *The Trial* does. In fact, it is incredibly murky, the consequence of a technical decision to shoot with no artificial illumination, using only available light. As a result, everything is seen through a kind of scrim of interference, a device that both recalls Beckett's blurred lens, but is also continuous with the images of a CCTV camera that bookend *Vidéo,* themselves alluding to the extreme close-up of the eye that begins and ends *Film*. This degraded quality of the image should not suggest that *Vidéo* delivers no aesthetic punch, however. On the contrary, in the early apartment scenes, to take just one example, contrasting patches of red and green glow magnificently through brumous murk. There are also some marvellously subtle and ironic moments of image-matching where history and aesthetics are deftly counterpointed. I am thinking in particular of the use of architecture in *Vidéo*, where the clean modernist lines of Josef K.'s new modular apartment block are recalled and re-inflected in the grainy colour footage of social housing of a similar vintage fifty years on.

The second formal device that Douglas carries over from *Film* is his use of dorsal shots. The camera always follows his protagonist from behind, impeding the viewer's identification with the 'star'. Except that the protagonist of *Vidéo* is not a star in the sense that Anthony Hopkins and Buster Keaton were. Beckett might use Keaton in a different way than Welles uses Perkins, and he may not prettify modernist alienation in the way Welles does, but there is more in common between them than between either one and Douglas's *Vidéo*. Thus, in *Film* Beckett toys with Keaton's face, hiding and revealing it, the eyepatch a coy concession to

continuing occlusion in the midst of exposure. In *Vidéo*, Douglas allows us to see that the subject is a Black woman, but he never once shows her face: the erasure of this central character is structural and as such purely formal. In substituting a subaltern figure for Kafka's Josef K., Douglas does of course sharpen the critical and political import of Kafka's allegory. But if we recall his critical comments on 'modernist nostalgia' and 'bourgeois subjectivity', it seems rather glib to say that a straightforward recentering of Black experience is the prime objective here. Rather, by citing and emphasising *Film*'s dorsal imagery, Douglas also interrogates a key trope of modernist impersonality and Beckettian inexpression. In other words, he takes the high modernist trope of the impersonal and confronts it with both its aestheticised Wellesian version and an alternative popular tradition of a specifically Black inexpression that cannot be so easily aestheticised. Where does Beckett's *Film* stand in relation to these?

Steve McQueen, *7th Nov.*, 2001

Let us turn now from America to Britain, and consider Steve McQueen's *7th Nov.*, 2001. This twenty-three-minute installation was one of three pieces included in the 2001 exhibition 'Into this World' at Thomas Dane in London. The title of the show as a whole is taken from the opening words of Beckett's *Not I*: '...out...into this world...this world...tiny little thing...before its time...' (2009b, 85) and it is *7th Nov.* that displays Beckett's influence most clearly. The piece takes the form of a single backlit 35mm colour slide showing the crown of a Black male's shaved and heavily scarred head, accompanied by an audio narrative. The title of the work, as the gallery's information sheet states, refers to the date on which McQueen's cousin Marcus accidentally shot and killed his brother ('Steve McQueen', n.d.). The image is the top of Marcus's head as he lies on his back, and the soundtrack is his description of the event. The latter is an intensely moving narrative, all the more so because we know it is both true and being told, presumably to the artist, by a member of his own family.

As with *Not I*, the narrative of *7th Nov.* bears a flood of vividly pictorial content the intensely affective realism of which seems at odds with the truncated image it accompanies. But *7th Nov.* takes the contrast between the visual and aural still further than Beckett's play. The gnashing, writhing, gibbering mouth of *Not I* does not underwrite the veracity of what we hear in the way that a conventionally realist, spotlit 'talking head' would. In its surreal dislocation this organ without a body tips the affective climate over into nightmare. And yet a mouth is by

its nature and function clearly expressive, and the spoken words the audience hears are synched with the movement onscreen. It is not exactly inexpression that is at stake in *Not I*, then. Rather, the free-floating, unmotivated quality of Beckett's mouth-image points in another direction, to overdetermined speech, excess of meaning rather than its withdrawal.

We can contrast this with the image that McQueen confronts us with: a blunt, stubbled heavily scarred ovoid that could hardly be more inexpressive. It is clearly a head and therefore summons immediate associations of the face, but the latter is simultaneously withheld, and the unfamiliar camera angle denatures the pictured body. Whereas in the TV play version of *Not I* one becomes intensely aware, through close-up, of the mobile and fleshy nature of the central image, McQueen's static slide instils a profound awareness of the dense, bony rigidity of the crown, the thickness of the skull, its function as protector of the brain. At the same time, one feels impelled to find a face in this oval object occupying the space where a portrait might have been expected, only to be continually deflected by the obdurate presence of this impenetrable object. That mute presence raises the spectre of other visual regimes, however, other historical contexts. The image of Marcus's skull recalls nothing so much as the craniometrical diagrams and photographs that form such an important part of the archive of nineteenth century racial pseudoscience, as well as of criminal investigation. Hence like Douglas, McQueen thus follows Beckett's lead but appropriates his formal devices, casting them into a different institutional history. *7ᵗʰ Nov.* inserts itself not only into the history of modernist dorsality, but also evokes the visual tradition of Cesare Lombroso, Alphonse Bertillon and Francis Galton (see Morris-Reich, 2015).

Simon Okotie, 'Peering Out of the Deadlight' (2025)

Finally, I would like to consider the recent text by Simon Okotie that is included in this dossier. Different from *Not I*, 'Peering Out of the Deadlight' replays Beckett's interest in architectural structures of confinement, and in particular the short fictions of the 1960s–70s like *All Strange Away*, with its mysterious whitened dome, and above all *The Lost Ones* with its central image of a purgatorial, cyclopean structure. Yet Okotie's is not quite the uninflected, geometrical space that Beckett often relies upon in the later work. Instead, 'Peering Out of the Deadlight' adheres to its author's usual interest in concrete, recognisable urban spaces. We are in a theatre, and quite a busy one, judging by the way the seats are filling up, a point material to the

narrative, which turns on the protagonist's desire to nab one of the few remaining spaces facing the stage, despite, it seems, not having a designated ticket.

Another crucial difference from Beckett's 'closed space' texts is that here the question of entrance or exit is not problematised in the same way as those fictions do. The structures in *All Strange Away* and *The Lost Ones* seem to be sealed, though possible portals are hinted at. In Okotie's text, however, it is precisely the action of entrance, access and reception into the space that is the focus, just as in his 'Two Degrees of Freedom' it is a question of exit from a similarly public space (Okotie, 2021). In this way the narrative voice dodges the aporia that critics have often raised of Beckett's closed space texts, the question of quite how the narrator knows what is going on inside them, given their self-contained nature. In 'Peering Out of the Deadlight' the relationship between point-of-view and description might seem unproblematic. Although written in the third person, it does not occupy the omniscient, floating, cinematic vantage of a text like *The Lost Ones*. Instead, the narrating voice is focalised, associated with the consciousness of an agent negotiating diegetic space.

And yet a formal barrier remains. This is made clear in the very first lines: 'With the number of seats in each row steadily and progressively reducing, *he thought,* as, increasing his pace, he continued moving forwards down the steps of the aisle' (Okotie, 2025, xxx; emphasis added). Okotie appends 'he thought' to overtly mark the boundary between narrator and 'thinker'. This serves to emphasise the distance between point-of-view and protagonist, in turn mediating the expression of the latter through the language and sensibility of the former. It is, in other words, a pointed refusal of mainstream free indirect discourse. The latter style, so ubiquitous in today's fiction as to be almost invisible, attempts to slip organically from external commentary to the rhythms of a subjective, expressive internalised speech. In this way, the narratological advantages that the third person affords – ease of plotting, variety of voice – are retained alongside the illusion of expressive intimacy that the first person confers on character. Okotie is not the kind of writer that is given to such calculations. More than that, the highly distinctive formal and stylistic choices he makes in 'Peering Out of the Deadlight' question the very possibility of access to other lives that the glib affordances of free indirect style simply presume.

All of which is to say that 'Peering Out of the Deadlight' parallels the concerns with expression and inexpression we have been tracking in Post, Douglas and McQueen. Where the latter two artists deployed some variety of absorptive visual imagery to stage inexpression, Okotie achieves something similar by relying on a highly formal, lexically restricted, syntactically elaborate prose that, while ironic and often witty, seems objective in the precision

of its mapping and the logic of its development. And yet at unexpected moments, continuous with the main voice and unmarked by any punctuation, another idiom, much more subjective-seeming, intervenes. The first of these is typical: 'each section would consist, in fact, of an isosceles (or symmetrical) trapezoid pointing towards the stage *with my first thought being that we were entirely unsuited* (xxx; emphasis added). The italicised phrase again refers to 'thought' but here it is qualified by the possessive determiner and a temporal marker. It also strongly suggests, with great economy, a sense of personal, emotional relations that is at profound odds with the obsessively geometrical sentence it briefly hijacks. Later, equally fragmentary examples suggest the narrative of an affair and breakup: 'and you thought I was unfazed when the split eventually came' (xxx).

It is tempting to assume that such moments are somehow 'real', subjective, expressive memories that punctuate the artificial, formal third person point of view. But some of them at least seem to be traces of the narrative of Beckett's *The Lost Ones*. Thus when we read Okotie's 'and I was searching, having lost you, for I knew not what' (xxx), we might recall Beckett's first line: 'abode where lost bodies roam each searching for its lost one' (2010, 101). Similarly, 'until I found the one who eventually would serve as my guide' (xxx), might remind us of the guide that appears towards the end of Beckett's fiction: 'There he opens then his eyes this last of all if a man and some time later threads his way to that first among the vanquished so often taken for a guide' (2010, 120). While these phrases undeniably lace a certain pathos through Okotie's text, they are also half-remembered murmurs from the canon, whispers of vice-existence, 'voiceless voices' that we cannot rely upon to anchor this fiction in a subject.

If anything it is the main narrative voice, with its straitened, rigid quality that delivers the biggest charge of affect. A feeling of obsessive accumulation, of geometrical detail as a form of defence, increases as the text goes on. Although one can see a precedent for this kind of discourse in Beckett, its ultimate modernist source is probably the affectless tone of the 'Ithaca' chapter in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. But its specific tenor and operative effect here is all Okotie's own. The emotion, one might say, is present negatively, precisely in the lengths that the text goes in its attempt to conceal, control or defer it. It is also from this contrast between formal control and mounting tension that the story's considerable humour arises. Take, for example, the narrative's climax, when the protagonist finally confronts his pursuer, only for her face to be described in a language of truly bizarre functionality: 'the setting of the apparatus of recognition within the field of prime recognisable features' (xxx).

It is also at this point in the story that the question of expression is explicitly thematised, in terms allied to those ideas I have found in Douglas and McQueen. I quote at length:

her eyes, which took him in, as it were, now in what *he judged* to be a kindly if somewhat amused and perhaps even quizzical fashion whilst his own facial features retained, *he thought*, an impassivity consistent both with his attempting to avoid attracting an ascription of guilt or even of condemnation … but which was also consistent, *he hoped*, with the possibility of his pursuer having pursued him so as to be of assistance to him in some way, a facial (and wider bodily) expression whose blankness was, then, *he hoped*, one that both helped defend himself against such ascriptions of guilt yet also expressed an openness to receiving such assistance – in whatever form it might take. (xxx; emphasis added)

A 'hope' of inexpression that might be a 'defence', and yet also as an 'expression' of 'openness'? The contradictions pile up in these lines, and defy any resolution, or adequate paraphrase even. Perhaps it is through that very suspension of resolution that the passage enacts what it describes. But I will finish by sketching a reading that will at least indicate what is at issue, and place Okotie's aesthetic of inexpression in relation to the two artists previously considered.

As ever, the statement quoted is ironized by the distanced and unstable position of the voice that delivers it. But here the stakes are raised by the series of verb phrases that I have italicised above: to 'think', to 'judge', to 'hope'. The earliest of these, 'he judged', introduces a clearly emotive language for the first time in the text, describing the successful reading of the pursuer's expression: kindly, amused, quizzical. Note, however, the play whereby the eyes of the other 'took him in, as it were', that is to appraise the main character, or deceive him. This is followed by a return to the 'he thought', i.e. the standard verb phrase that has accompanied descriptions of the character's inner life throughout the text. But here, again, we encounter a complicating qualification. For what is described is clearly a device with an ulterior aim, the adoption of an outward disposition that is consistent with innocence rather than with 'guilt' or 'condemnation'. This is further reinforced by the final, repeated verb phrase, 'he hoped'. The implication here is that the success – or otherwise – of the character's tactic of inexpression is contingent on circumstance, on how things play out, on the unknowable desire of the other. It is a 'Peering Out of the Deadlight'.

This encounter is thus hedged around with all sorts of phenomenological indeterminacy. But even though the event has a claim to be the climax of the text, it only lasts an instant. For at this point another mysterious character dramatically intervenes, breaking this delicately and

intensively described moment, and introducing a renewed element of threat. Even so, the reflection that follows goes out of its way to preserve the element of indeterminacy and suspension of the original encounter: 'he would, he thought, never know what – if anything – was being mutually acknowledged between them as they looked briefly but unblinkingly into each other's eyes' (xxx).

Conclusion

Okotie's subtle repetition here suggests how 'acknowledgement' takes place even in the absence of exact 'knowing'. The main character is able to make a judgment on the facial expression of the other, without being able to determine its import, or even whether it has any significant import. Conversely, as they make this judgement, they have already offered up their own 'impassivity', which is presumably equally or even more indeterminate. Thus the whole detailed narrative of the encounter, from the pursuer's hand on the protagonist's shoulder, to the latter's turn and tilt of the head and subsequent judgement, is a minutely detailed account of the practice of acknowledgement of the other. In this sense, 'Peering Out of the Deadlight' uses the resources of literature to complement the work of both Douglas and McQueen. Indeed, my close reading of this passage from Okotie's text helps to refine my understanding of the others. For now I see that if the absence at the heart of Douglas's *Vidéo* suggests the 'open', structural nature of inexpression, then the baleful image in McQueen's 7th *Nov.*, 2001 highlights inexpression as 'defence'. Both McQueen and Douglas, as visual artists, deploy the specific resources of the screen to examine the relation of Black inexpression to the history and tropes of visual modernism, the legacy of racial pseudoscience's disciplinary regimes as well as the nature of contemporary technologies of surveillance. All of these things are present too, at some level, in 'Peering Out of the Deadlight' with its regular references to norms, averages and the gaze of 'multiple pairs of eyes' (Okotie, 2025, xxx). But, as I hope to have shown in this essay, the strength of Okotie's specifically *literary* modernism lies in the way it examines the production of inexpression from the inside, so to speak. Which is to say, in the short fiction presented in this issue, that he delineates with great care the complex manoeuvres that attend any strategic resistance to what Beckett famously called 'the obligation to express' (1976, 103).

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