

“This craze for explicitation...”

Mischa Twitchin

It is a paradox of standard directorial approaches to Beckett’s plays, adapting and translating what he has written for performance, that they understand “fidelity” to the text to entail some form of “explicitation”. This presumes that an audience – whether in a theatre or watching on screen – requires a reading that reduces what might be strange in the play to what is already familiar in the medium of its performance: whether in terms of what is presupposed of an actor’s work, of the spatial setting of that work, or of the editing that layers its own narrative into the dialogue (all of which is explicitly the case in the widely seen Dublin film versions). Such “standards” of production recur regardless of Beckett’s critical reflections on “straining to enlarge the statement of a compromise” in the *Three Dialogues*, “(Exit weeping)”; or, indeed, the satire of *Regietheater* in his own example of an interpretative *Catastrophe*. As he writes to Alan Schneider (23.7.82), concerning the play’s premiere at the Avignon Festival (fragments of which he saw on television): “Protagonist all trussed up with screaming white bonds to facilitate comprehension.” In this presentation, drawing on Bredekamp’s “picture act” reading of Aristotle, I wish to argue that such compromised “comprehension” is essentially a banalisation of the wished-for *enargeia* of the stage image. Rather than simply describing work with the play, I will also show a performance-film that explores its adaptation in performance precisely by means of performance, staging the interplay between sound and image through time. Additionally, I will explore potential differences in the historical conditions for visualising *pathos* (or catastrophe) manifested in “disciplinary societies” and “societies of control”, where the model for the director of this *Ecce Homo* would no longer be a Party hack but a clone of Simon Cowell.

Short Bio:

Mischa Twitchin is a British Academy Post-doctoral Fellow at the Drama Dept., Queen Mary, University of London: <http://www.sed.qmul.ac.uk/staff/twitchinm.html>. Besides his academic work, he also makes performances, examples of which can be seen on Vimeo: <http://vimeo.com/user13124826/videos>.