Inter-, multi- and trans-media Beckett

Instructor: Carla Taban

Thursdays, 4-6

Office: NF323

carla.taban@utoronto.ca

Office hours: R, 3-4

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course deals with semiotic issues raised by the mediatically diverse work of Samuel Beckett and its appropriation in contemporary artistic practices and popular culture. An iconic figure of 20th century literature and theatre, Beckett was also involved in radio, TV and film. We will study some of Beckett’s radiophonic and televisual pieces as well as his Film so as to see how the author exploits the properties of these media in order to produce and transmit meaning. Moreover, we will tackle various types of contemporary artworks – such as artists’ books, films, videos, installations, net art, sound art, dance, etc. – that creatively appropriate Beckett’s work and transpose it into different media. What kind of semiotic interactions are at play in such transpositions? At what level do they operate? And how do we come to make sense of them? Finally, we will also look at popular culture phenomena (such as ad campaigns and gadgets) to see what kind of “Beckett”-sign they put forward.

This is an applied semiotics course that focuses on the analysis of primary works. Ideally it will also comprise activities such as: invited guest speakers (i.e. artists engaged with Beckett’s work); the organisation, by students, of an exhibition of Beckett artists’ books housed at Ontarian (university) libraries; the creation, by students, of a database of contemporary artworks that have an important Beckett dimension; visits to relevant performances and exhibitions.

EVALUATION
The evaluation methods relate to different stages of a research project that each student develops throughout the term.

- 2 Homework assignments (HA): 30% – Weeks 3 & 6
- 1 Oral presentation (OP): 20% – Weeks 9-11
- 1 Final research paper/Final outcome of the research project (FRP): 40% – Week 12
- Overall assessment: 10% – Ongoing

SCHEDULE
Jan 13 | Introduction: Beckett – arts – media – pop culture
Jan 20 | Beckett in performance: multimodal semiotics in the theatre
Jan 27 | Beckett’s work for film and television ........................................... HA1
Feb 3  | From page & stage to screen: adapting Beckett
Feb 10 | Beckett and artists’ books
Feb 17 | Beckett in contemporary visual arts 1: Installation, object, painting, net art ..... HA2
Mar 3  | Beckett in contemporary visual arts 2: Video
Mar 10 | Radio Beckett
Mar 17 | Beckett in contemporary music and sound art .................................
Mar 24 | Beckett and dance ................................................................. OP
Mar 31 | Beckett in pop culture ......................................................... FRP
April 7 | Revision and conclusion .........................................................
**WORKS THAT WE WILL STUDY**

Texts are short (maximum 15 pages). Visual and audio-visual works include films, videos, TV broadcasts, artists’ books, exhibition catalogues, net art, etc. Audio works include radio broadcasts, CDs, mp3 files, etc. Visual, audio and audio-visual works are short as well (maximum 1 hour).

Texts
- Beckett, Samuel, *Krapp’s Last Tape* (*’58, play)
- ---, *Play* (*’63, play)
- ---, *Cascando* (*’63, radio play)
- ---, *Film* (*’65, script)
- ---, *Imagination Dead Imagine* (*’66, short prose)
- ---, *The Lost Ones* (*’72, short prose)
- ---, *The North* (*’72, short prose)
- ---, *Not I* (*’72, play)
- ---, *Rough for Radio II* (*’76, radio play)
- ---, *Quad* (*’81, TV play)

Audio works
- *Cascando* (d. McWhinnie, ’64)
- *Rough for Radio II* (d. Esslin, ’76)
- Feldman, *Neither* (opera, ’77) & *For SB* (ens., ’78)
- Various, *Bend It Like Beckett* (CD, ’06)
- Migone, *Foursome* (radio piece, ’07)

Visual and audio-visual works
- *Film* (d. Schneider, ’64)
- *Krapp’s Last Tape* (d. Schneider, ’71)
- *Krapp’s Last Tape* (d. Asmus, ’88)
- *Krapp’s Last Tape* (d. Egoyan, ’00)
- *Not I* (d. Page, ’77)
- *Quad* (d. Beckett, ’81)
- *Play* (d. Minghella, ’00)
- Beckett & Erhardt, *Bing* (’70)
- Beckett & Arikha, *The North* (’72)
- Beckett & Etrog, *Imagination...* (’77)
- *afterthelostones* (exhib., ’02)

Most of the material will be available on Blackboard.

**IMPORTANT NOTE**

This course is organized as a seminar. It is thus VITAL that you prepare for each class by reading, viewing and/or listening to the assigned material, so as to be able to participate in discussions.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

The University of Toronto is serious in its efforts to ensure academic honesty. Documents containing information on plagiarism and other issues of academic integrity are posted on the Blackboard site of this course. Please be sure to view these documents and familiarize yourself with their contents.
DETAILED STUDY LIST WITH BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

January 20  |  Beckett in performance: multimodal semiotics in the theatre


January 27  |  Beckett’s work for film and television


*Film*. Director, Alan Schneider; screenplay, Samuel Beckett; photography, Boris Kaufman; performer Buster Keaton. 1 reel, 22 min.: sd., b&w; 16mm. [ROBA: 080159]

*Quad*. Directed by Samuel Beckett; with Helfrid Foron, Juerg Hummel; Claudia Knupfer, Susanne Rehe; camera Jim Lewis; set Wolfgang Wahl. SDR Stuttgart, 1981, 15 min.

February 3  |  From page & stage to screen: adapting Beckett


*Play*. Directed by Anthony Minghella (15 min.) In *Beckett on film* [Vol.4]. [ROBA: 750187]


February 10  |  Beckett and artists’ books


[York, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections: FOL 161]


February 17 | Beckett in contemporary visual arts 1: Installation, object, painting, net art


March 3 | Beckett in contemporary visual arts 2: Video

*Nauman, Bruce.* *Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk).* New York, NY: Electronic Arts Intermix, 1968. 1 cassette (ca. 62 min.): sd., b&w; 1/2 in. VHS.


March 10 | Radio Beckett


*Rough for Radio II.* Directed by Martin Esslin; with Billie Whitelaw, Harold Pinter, Patrick Magee and Michael Deacon. BBC 3, 1976. In same as above.

March 17 | Beckett in contemporary music and sound art

Various, *Bend It Like Beckett* (CD, ’06)

Migone, *Foursome* (radio piece, ’07)

Feldman, *Neither* (opera, ’77) & *For SB* (ens., ’78)

Kurtag, *What Is The Word* (voice & ens., ’90/’91)

March 24 | Beckett and dance


Laurin, Ginette. *Étude #3 pour cordes et poulies,* 2007

March 31 | Beckett and pop culture

Beckett in Apple’s “Think different” campaign, 1999

Oscar Grillo, *Waiting for Godot* cartoon poster, 2005

Various gadgets