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#failbetter

The failures of Samuel Beckett are strangely successful. His own biographical failures, compassion for the failures of others, and his writerly craft of failure through manuscript revisions, abandoned works as well as production notebooks, have been well-documented (e.g. Knowlson, 1996; Beckett, 1999; Van Hulle, 2013). Beckett's own sense of the creative tension between failing and trying (*Worstward Ho*, 1983) is not the primary focus of this study, but we shall see that his earlier treatment of failure (*Three Dialogues*, 1949) establishes a trope within Beckettian aesthetics that has continued to inform critical and artistic readings. Indeed, that 'fidelity to failure', representing the author's own distrust of mastery (and expression itself), is only one way to re-assess the influence of his work over time and across cultures. Earlier still, we read the young man in 1935, writing to Thomas MacGreevy that 'Miss Costello said to me: "You haven't a good word to say for anyone but the failures". I thought that was quite the nicest thing anyone had said to me for a long time' (Beckett, 2009b, 275). This essay troubles the scholarly record of Beckett's treatment of failure by attending to the wider ethical implications of his 'fidelity to failure' and the affordances of the phrase 'fail better'. In doing so, it invites a fundamental reappraisal of the concept of *bettering* failure (for whom?) as much as the act of failing itself (by whom?). After establishing the uses – and misuses – of Beckett's failure, this essay considers: a) aesthetic failure in Beckett's creative practice through to his legacy in experimental theatre and popular culture; b) performance more broadly, including intersections with disability culture and queer studies; and c) performative interventions in public discourse, from Brexit in Europe to the 2016 US Presidential Election as well as social movements such as Black Lives Matter.

Try again.

Were a Beckett scholar so inclined to enter the term 'fail better' into a popular internet search engine, they would encounter c.791,000,000 results (Google, accessed 22 June 2020). Despite the reservations of scholars outlined below, the phrase has taken on a life of its own as a meme

and a hashtag in its own right. Those images (not filtered by license) tend to feature the phrase written as motivational quotation against an appropriate digital background which one imagines can be installed on one's device for inspiration – close readers of *Worstward Ho* may be particular appalled by this – 'Pending worse still' (Beckett, 2009a, 89). Some of these tagged images cite the author, misquoting with abandon, and also display Beckett's image (cf. Alba, 2019). Amongst this Beckettian cornucopia of failure, several examples link to cultural events, such as Poet in the City's *Fail Better* in London in 2020, discussed below, or the 2014 Dublin Science Gallery exhibition of the same name: 'the goal of FAIL BETTER is to open up a public conversation about failure, particularly the instructive role of failure, as it relates to a very different areas of human endeavour' (Gorman, 2014, 4). Even science communication, such as *Failure: Why Science is So Successful*, makes use of 'Advice from Samuel Beckett' (Firestein, 2016, 25) in terms of progressive narratives of collective success as a result of learning from experimental error. Across digital environments, from YouTube to Instagram, the hashtag '#failbetter' serves a number of contradictory functions: from health and fitness channels, to wealth and market speculation; from political struggles for nationhood, to books on overcoming personal crisis. It would seem that Beckett's words speak to a digital generation across popular culture, as much as those who first received his writing as literature in print. Considering this online phenomenon alongside academic reflections on the political and cultural efficacy of failure (e.g. Ridout, 2006; Bailes, 2011), we could conclude that Beckett's treatment of failure takes on a number of ambiguous and indeterminate roles within culture, many of which directly contradict each other or cancel themselves out. This, of course, is imbued with Beckett's own sense of creative failure as a writer who composed drafts across multiple manuscripts, generating texts that resisted simplistic interpretations and in turn encouraged theatre artists to 'vaguen' his writing in performance as a special condition of their embodiment (Pountney, 1988; McMullan, 2010).

Early in 2020, Eva Kenny published 'A Fetish for Failure' (*Dublin Review of Books*) and Emilie Morin contributed to *Fail Better* at Wilton's Music Hall (*Poet in the City*), two important critical commentaries with a number of overlapping resonances for this essay. These interventions build upon a body of recent literature that one might categorise as 'failure studies' of Beckett (e.g. Anderton, 2016 and Thomas, 2018), and culture (e.g. Bailes, 2011 and Halberstam, 2011). These scholars have recycled Beckett's failure for generative, critical, and affective purposes, in extended critiques of literature and performance. While this could be considered an act of homage, as a mode of translation or adaptation which warrants further study in its own right, this section will focus upon the phenomenon of failure within Beckettian

aesthetic production and wider ethical implications surrounding the (mis)appropriations of 'fail better' in particular. In 'Samuel Beckett as Director: The Art of Mastering Failure', for example, Anna McMullan draws our attention to Beckett's 'use of the most rigorous systems of theatrical and juridical authority in order to safeguard his carefully crafted patterns of failure' (1994, 206). Elsewhere, S. E. Gontarski has demonstrated the myriad ways in which Beckett's theatre has made use of apparent mishaps, false starts, and creative errors. Firstly, at the level of dramatic representation, through his characters who 'are invariably either committed to systems that fail, that must fail, or haunted by the failure of systems' (2012, 233) as much as they are motivated by 'the failure of love' (244). Furthermore, he documents such productions as the 1984 *Compagnie* in Paris, where Pierre Chabert (director) and Pierre Dux (actor) gave Beckett a private run-through shortly before opening, which was not well-received:

> He recovered, moves to the edge of the stage and stares at the floor. Silence. Finally, hesitantly: perhaps the narrative cannot be staged at all. Four weeks into rehearsals, opening night is a week away. It is my [Beckett's] fault for consenting to the adaptation. It is too complicated, too theatrical. (Gontarski, 2006, 256–7)

Gontarski's case study here is an exemplar of 'failing better' within a theatrical context, that messy place where the aesthetic and the ethical collide: 'Theatre, like politics is an art of compromise, but somehow Beckett has failed to make any and has succeeded none the less. He has somehow resisted the collaborative nature of theatrical production' (257). What follows, in Gontarski's account, is indeed a series of one-sided compromises, a total reworking of the production by the same team: 'in good spirits despite a substantial re-staging a week before opening, the cast and crew withdraw to the dining room for drinks. […] Everyone relaxes. At least they have a show! Beckett buys a second round and leaves' (257). As with other notable examples drawn from the archive (e.g. George Devine's 1964 *Play* at the Old Vic or Ian Rickson's 2006 *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Royal Court), Beckett's theatrical 'collaborators' serve an uncompromising aesthetic vision that makes creative use of failure within rehearsal, through a sustained embodiment of generative restrictions that 'repeat play' with a series of variations, that operate as repetition with a difference, rather than a departure.

McMullan's essay on Beckett's experience of theatre practice as an art of 'mastering failure' was written around the same time as *Arts of Impoverishment* by queer theorist Leo Bersani and his co-author Ulysee Dutoit, in which Beckett's writing is compared to the films

of Renais and the paintings of Rothko. They write: 'Perhaps the most serious reproach we can make against Samuel Beckett is that he has failed to fail' (1993, 11). Maud Ellmann, reviewing the book in an article entitled 'Failing to Fail', notes: 'This impossible edict ['to be an artist is to fail'] (impossible because to succeed in failing is to fail to fail) contradicts the long-standing tradition of our culture that the function of art is to redeem the failures of life' (1995, 84). In *Beckett's Creatures: Art of Failure after the Holocaust* (2016), Joseph Anderton writes: 'Beckett is keen to praise the extent to which artists turn away from pursuing the old achievements of expression and representation, in a gesture he calls the "grand refusal"' (41). By contrast, John Calder states in his essay 'The Failure of Art' that: 'Beckett is doing more than voicing his dissatisfaction of artists with their own limitations. Art for him is not part of life, a human activity, a means of earning a living, of self-expression. It is the act of creation itself' (2001, 83). For Calder, this conception of aesthetic failure is juxtaposed with a portrait of Beckett as a 'successful' master of his chosen form: 'Had he wished to be a painter, a composer, or like Breton, an *animateur* and leader of a school of artists as well as a writer, he would have been at least as successful. His talent was like a precious metal than can be shaped in many different ways' (75). Citing *Three Dialogues*, Calder seems to be arguing for the success of Beckett in transcending the failure of art, or creating nonetheless in spite of such failure.

It has also been argued that Beckett fails to fully engage in the socio-political efficacies of artistic practice in order produce an anti-art that either seeks to fail, or at least is indifferent about its inevitable failure. However, it is important to first address the recirculation of Beckett's rare aesthetic statements about failure as recently discussed by Kenny and Morin, each of whom carefully attend to the ethical problems with taking words out of context. For Kenny, 'the lines that appeared again and again, everywhere, as if in a nightmare, are: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." Taken from the first page of Beckett's late prose work *Worstward Ho*, the phrase was, for a while, Silicon Valley's mantra' (Kenny, 2020). Morin, speaking at the Wilton's Music Hall *Fail Better* event in February 2020, noted that:

> Failure, in his work, is an obsessional motif. It also enabled him to craft a new and very distinctive rhetoric for describing artistic representation; some of his aphorisms on failure are well known. The line from *Worstward Ho* has attracted a great deal of attention over time: it has been emblazoned on mugs, phone covers, postcards, t-shirts, keyrings and tote bags. (Morin, 2020)

Both Kenny and Morin are keen to note the wilful misreading of the phrase in popular culture, and that is something this essay seeks to respond to, rethinking Beckett's creative failures and relocating Beckettian failure within political discourses. However, the phrase still 'means something', despite its comparative overuse in popular culture, in part due to its constant dislocation from its original literary context, where it has acquired a suspicious significance through constant citation and misappropriation. For Kenny: 'His first separately published work, a long poem about Descartes called *Whoroscope*, took its thesis statement from St Augustine: *fallor, ergo sum* […]. In *Three Dialogues*, failure takes the form of an inability to represent' (Kenny, 2020). Ultimately, for Morin: 'Failure remains Beckett's hallmark: indeed few writers have been quite as willing to speculate about the collapse of every sense and every faculty' (2020). She points us to his later works which 'present us with characters who fail to overcome the limitations imposed by their ailing bodies; who struggle to see, hear and speak; who arise dimly from a world in which the imagination falters and threatens to fail altogether'. This bodily failure is exposed most acutely in *What is the Word*, a text performed by Juliet Stevenson on stage at Wilton's: 'an ode to failure: with the tiniest, most delicate brushstrokes, it sketches out a failure to find the word, to see, to articulate, to express' (2020). In order to articulate a *better failure* for Beckett Studies, the next section uses examples from theatre and performance cultures (cf. McMullan and Saunders, 2018) to demonstrate how failure is a necessary part of the cultural practices that sustain his writing and develop new audiences with the passing of each generation.

Fail again.

This section details performative re-embodiments of Beckett's failure on and off stage, defining performance in its broadest sense. In particular, it examines the uses of Beckett's work to make cultural interventions in arts activism including, but not limited to, disability culture and queer studies. This argument is interdisciplinary, bridging between the study of theatre and performance to a wider consideration of social and political embodiments. Drawing upon the citation of Beckett by contemporary bodies, this use of Beckett's failure moves outside of the playhouse and into the public domain, either through performative language or, as we shall see from the first example, by connecting a wider performance issue to an urgent political cause.

In the 2017 production of *Not I* by UK theatre company Tourretteshero, there are a series of societal failures invoked in the words of performer Jess Thom:

> That idea of art and creativity as an act of resistance is something that is at the heart of our practice. How we draw attention to those invisible barriers that exist within our cultural spaces which prevent people accessing ideas… and that's no about making work less intense, it's not about making work cosy, it's about how you support people to access really interesting and different experiences… how you frame it, how your support it… that's what is really exciting about this, there are loads of different ways in which it feels really important and relevant, that is important for Beckett to be relevant going forwards and to be alive in people's minds and that spirit of experimentation, of rebellion, of resistance… (2017)

Thom's performance was variously described as radical, faithful, and playful in its reviews (Heron, 2018). According to Derval Tubridy: 'Thom, who plays Mouth in Beckett's play, has Tourette's Syndrome. She makes involuntary, repetitive movements and vocalisations that are sometimes coprolaliac. Thom's performance of *Not I* embraces her tics' (Tubridy, 2018). These ideas are explored further in an unpublished interview with Thom:

> Jess Thom: I understand myself as disabled within the social model of disability which is that I'm not disabled by my body, but by a failure to consider difference in how society is organised, and I am interested in creating a theatre space that… creates a theatre experience that is really difficult but that doesn't disable people, that doesn't disable the audience, that allows the audience to access that but in a way that is challenging… that speaks about being human, that breaks down some of those rules that aren't the things that prevent people from functioning.
>
> Jonathan Heron: So not just 'failing again' but failing *better*'…?
>
> JT: Yes, exactly.
>
> JH: … that idea of failing in a different way.
>
> JT: Exactly, and that idea of risk, of taking risks, and this feels like a risk, coming out of the other kinds of performance that we've made, but it feels like that risk of failure, but also that risk of opening-up new discourse, avenues, conversations, collections between different types of things… if you don't take those risks, if you don't risk failing, or being ready to fail, to fail better, to fail again, then you are disabling yourself, then you a

limiting yourself, and preventing yourself from functioning as an artist, as a creative being, and as a human. (2017)

When reviewing the Touretteshero *Not I*, Tubridy makes particular reference to staging female embodiment through male writing for those playing Mouth (Tandy, Whitelaw, Dwan and so forth): 'The abject fetishization of the female body in productions of *Not I* has become the norm […]. Thom changes the terms of engagement, focusing on the image required by Beckett's play, while acknowledging the futility, and indeed perversity, of restraining a body that is wired to move' (Tubridy, 2018). Thom transcends this tradition through several innovations that change our understanding of Beckett's play (for example, the light being embedded in Mouth's costume): 'The actor retains agency over the obviation of her body. Thom is alert to the wider sociological implications of these directorial choices since "it says something more broadly that relates to disability and to difference, that is: to achieve the same things and to have equality of opportunity doesn't mean we have to do everything in the same way"' (Tubridy, 2018).

These politics of performance speak to a wider series of social movements at the time of production, from human rights within the social model of disability to the rise of a new feminism as a result of the 'Me Too' campaign. In these contexts, and in Thom's portrayal of Mouth, the play's performances of failure enable an emancipatory opportunity for change: 'at the heart of these debates lie issues of power and the dynamics of social inequality that cut across communities to include longstanding debates concerning gender and ethnicity' (Tubridy, 2018) as well as debates within disability culture (see Levin, 2018, which also makes a significant critical use of 'fail better') and queer studies (see Thomas, 2019: a recent essay that seeks to address Beckett's failure within LGBT/queer contexts).

Trans scholar Jack Halberstam cites Beckett alongside a diverse range of cultural sources from *Finding Nemo* to the Sex Pistols, in *The Queer Art of Failure*:

Failure, of course, goes hand in hand with capitalism. A market economy must have winners and losers, gamblers and risk takers, con men and dupes; capitalism […] requires that everyone live in a system that equates success with profit and links failure to the inability to accumulate wealth even as profit for some means certain losses for others. (2011, 88)

However, Halberstam is telling 'a tale of anti-capitalist, queer struggle… a narrative about anticolonial struggle, the refusal of legibility, and an art of becoming. This is a story of art without markets […]. The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable' (88). Calvin Thomas has since re-read Beckett through Halberstam in his essay 'Beckett's Queer Art of Failure' where: 'he was, so to speak, a non-breeder in more ways than one' (2018, 170). Imagining a future outside of reproductive time, which is a central feature of queer studies, one could argue that failing to reproduce the self remains a valid act of resistance to neo-liberal capital. Joe Parslow, writing in the recent collection *Beyond Failure: New Essays on the Cultural History of Failure in Theatre and Performance* suggests that: 'a queer project of hope is open to fail, and in that failure locate other ways of doing freedom […], other ways of being together and ultimate ways of surviving and, indeed, surviving well' (Fisher and Katsouraki, 2019, 90). In their Introduction to *Beyond Failure*, the editors cite Adorno's reading of Beckett in *Negative Dialectics*: 'the created world is radically evil, and its negation is the chance of another world that is not yet' (Adorno, 1973, 381). For multiple queer scholars, notably José Esteban Muñoz (2009) and those influenced by his work, re-valuing failure is a queer act because queerness itself is utopian, indeterminate and – perhaps – unachievable. Beckett's apparent queerness has been covered elsewhere, but its contingency upon queer failure warrants further study and exploration.

These re-embodiments of Beckett's failure, across disability culture and queer studies, carry some critical baggage with performance studies, as can be exemplified by the case made for the intrinsic value of failure by Tim Etchells and Matthew Goulish. Their performative experiment *Institute of Failure* (2001) sought to study and categorise the different modes of failures as follows (numbered 1–26): 'accident, mistake, weakness, inability, incorrect method, uselessness, incompatibility, embarrassment, confusion, redundancy, obsolescence, incoherence, unrecognizability, absurdity, invisibility, impermanence, decay, instability, forgettability, tardiness, disappearance, catastrophe, uncertainty, doubt, fear, distractibility' (Etchells and Goulish, 2002). They described their output as 'a diverse and growing collection of other materials which take us into a world of broken lifts, personal disasters, historical catastrophes, bridge collapses, absurdist documentation and philosophical arts projects'. Sara Jane Bailes, one of the contributing artist-scholars, went on to write the monograph *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure* arguing, with reference to Beckett, that 'failure challenges the cultural dominance of instrumental rationality and the fictions of continuity that bind the way we imagine and manufacture the world' (2011, 2). For Nicholas Ridout, 'it is precisely in theatre's failure, our discomfort with it, its embeddedness in capitalist leisure, its

status as a bourgeois pastime that its political value is to be found. Theatre is a privileged place for the actual experience of a failure to evade or transcend capital' (2006, 4). This branch of scholarship tends to read theatrical failure, including Beckett's dramaturgy, as an opportunity to rediscover the radical potential of performance. These interlinked understandings of failure therefore emerge as a cultural strategy, combining approaches from live performance, disability culture and queer studies, to examine the plethora of online failures that frequently – and often unknowingly – cite Beckett. As we cast a critical eye over Beckett's failure in digital communities and social movements, the act of 'failing better' increasingly characterises a broad spectrum of cultural activities from performances to protests.

Fail better.

This final section will now turn to political performances of bodies outside of the theatre; there are certain practices in the public domain that might be considered *performative* but that are not characterised as *performance* per se. These include, but are not limited to, rhetorical speech acts, ceremonial or collective rituals, memorialisation, civic actions, mass protest and political discourse (see Kershaw, 1992; Schechner, 2013). In relation to the latter, there were two curious uses of Beckett's phrase in the public domain in 2018: first, from Presidential candidate Hilary Clinton, during an academic ceremony at Trinity College Dublin; and secondly, from British MP Mary Creagh during the Brexit debates in the UK Houses of Parliament. I will consider these events as performative acts in the public domain, and therefore a re-politicisation of Beckett's failure, for better or worse.

In her ceremony speech, Clinton honours the Irish nation, and Trinity students in particular, before alighting upon the alumnus Beckett, 'who summed up his work this way: "Ever tried… Fail better." [Audience laughter] Believe me, those are words to live by, for anyone!' [Audience applause]. (Clinton, 2018). While it is not clear what the audience find so amusing and worthy of applause, there is a double sense of irony here, firstly in relation to Beckett himself being the poster boy of his alma mater, and secondly in relation to Clinton's very public failure to win the presidential race, albeit having secured the popular vote. She performs Beckett's memory in terms of 'the spirit embodied by one of your graduates', positioning those lines from a prose work as an auto-biographical statement which, while deeply flawed, is still somewhat resonant in this context. This raises questions about the

relationship between writing and the publics that re-embody the writer's words as their own. This has subsequently gathered momentum both in relation to Brexit and Black Lives Matter, two contiguous political movements with very different political resolutions.

Notably, in the UK Parliament the Labour Member of Parliament Mary Creagh described the then Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May's political progress as follows:

> The Prime Minister's negotiating strategy seems to be "*Fail again. Fail better.*" It is not going to revive her zombie Brexit deal. Whenever she decides to bring it back to the House – on Christmas eve, Christmas day or Boxing day – it will be voted down. She talks of the will of the people, but the will of the people cannot be undermined by a vote of the people. Is that not what she must now do? (Creagh, 2018)

Creagh invokes Beckett's words in terms of ineptitude and incompetence, which is quite different from Clinton's invocation of resilience and endurance. Returning to Clinton, speaking earlier that year in Dublin, a wider political context is defined: 'In light of new evidence law makers in the UK are investigating whether Russia influenced public opinion before the EU Referendum. We are in the midst of a global struggle between liberal democracy and a rising tide of illiberalism' (2018).

Without interrogating the legitimacy of Clinton's perspective here, it can be reasonably argued that the globe is undergoing multiple transformations at once: political, digital, and environmental. Speaking on a university campus, Clinton focuses the solution to these political problems on young people. She argues that the global youth must engage with politics, but she does not explain how they can access it. She addresses voting rights in the US and the representation of millennials in Congress; she explains how this generation are more likely to consider alternatives to democracy, such as 'strong leaders' and algorithms. She acknowledges: 'we are not making a good enough case for democracy' and she concludes: 'every citizen should vote in every election, even when our side loses; it is a matter of infinite faith […]. Be ready to lose some fights that are worth waging, we will need to *try again, fail again and fail better*, let's get to work!' (2018; my emphasis). Clinton's progressivist stance is worth nothing here, misappropriating Beckett's failure for her own cause: the 'democratisation' of all contemporary societies, and therefore, the world.

It was within this wider political context that *Poet in the City* chose to stage a series of public events in London, under the banner *Fail Better*: 'when is failure a good thing? Poet in the City's programme contemplates failure as a catalyst for change' (*Poet in the City*, 2020).

Their subsequent events focused on Che Guevara and James Baldwin, and within this revolutionary company, Beckett was positioned as a heroic failure (or failed hero) on a panel discussion in the very same venue where anti-fascist protesters had gathered before the Battle of Capel Street in 1936 (see Wilton's Music Hall website). Perhaps Beckett as anti-fascist is an easier case to make than Clinton's neo-liberal argument, but either way, the notion of Beckett as an apolitical author has now been widely debunked (Morin, 2017) and re-appraised in subsequent studies (Davies and Bailey, 2020).

Ros Maprayil, reviewing the *Fail Better* event, extends a wider sense of discomfort: '[Stevenson's] dramatic readings served to underline the fact that Beckett was not writing about failure as a sort of stepping-stone or mere stumbling block on the upward trajectory of success […]. Abrahami's presentation as a director of Beckett's work focused on the idea that failure was a necessary part of the creative process' (Maprayil, 2020). It is this central idea which has been discussed above, especially Beckett's own experiences of failure in rehearsal rooms and theatres, alongside his own struggle to 'vaguen' (Pountney, 1988) or 'undo' (Gontarski, 1985) literary texts. The theatrical studio or laboratory is a space of maximum and deliberate creative failure (Zarrilli, 2002; Heron and Johnson, 2014) within a structure that produces reiterative embodied practice, also discussed above. As Eva Kenny reminds us: '*Fail again. Fail better* is an encapsulation of a lifelong effort to show the tension between wanting to stop and not being able to, failing to stop but giving less to go on with' (2020; my emphasis). Speaking at the *Fail Better* event, Emilie Morin adds: 'There is something radical and something liberating about Beckett's conception of failure, about his idea of doing less with less, his idea of doing without' (2020). Morin's reading of Beckett is especially resonant for this essay, as we consider the political implications of 'doing without', which can be reconsidered in light of contemporary events.

In the very same month as *Fail Better* at Wilton's Music Hall, and shortly before every theatre in the world went 'dark' as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Richard Schechner published the article 'Endgame Earth: Clinging to Optimism' referencing Beckett in relation to the ongoing eco-political crisis and climate emergency:

> There's a lot going on in Beckett's parable from *Endgame*. The world the tailor disparages, the world God made in six days then turned over to human beings, is polluted, its climate warming, deserts expanding, forests chopped down, mineral and liquid resources wantonly extracted, glaciers melting, seas acidifying and rising[…]. But

Beckett speaks also of a second world, those trousers, a world we feel pinched in, needing many revisions, but perfectible. (2020, 11)

Schechner, an architect of performance studies, draws our attention to the textuality of Beckett's tailor who 'worked by stitching textiles – making texts – until he accomplished his perfected endgame pants, then let us wear these trousers to our dances and fiestas, our dramas, farces, and tragedies' (20). In this second world, making texts (or stitching textiles) is a political act, necessarily born out of failure, 'needing many revisions' which recalls another kind of social emergency that took the form of anti-racist uprisings for Black Lives Matter in the USA, and internationally, in May/June 2020.

Speaking on CNN in May 2020, Professor Emeritus Cornel West described the Black Lives Matter protests as a response to: 'Failure when it comes to delivering the needs; the Nation State: failure to protect; Criminal Justice System: failure to be fair, you see. And the only response we have is Samuel Beckett: "*Try again. Fail again. Fail better.*" […], that's the blues line of our Irish brother' (West, 2020; my emphasis). While this essay has focused on Beckett's 'blues line' to recall the creative failures of those performing his work, and the political affordances of 'failing better', the wider implications of his sentence are only beginning to be known through performative re-embodiments and intermedial citations online, on stage, and, as we see with this final example from the USA, on television. Beckett, through the rendering of this 'blues line', recalled an artistic emergency towards the end of his own century which anticipated cultural emergencies at the beginning of the next. Following Schechner, it is now possible to see an alternative future for Beckett's writing beyond 'a world of [his] own conceiving, gestating, rehearsing, and performing' (2020, 11).

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