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GWOT: A WAR ON DEMOCRACY
Reports From Egypt, El Salvador, the Philippines, Pakistan and Thailand

A TREE TILTS IN MoMA
Arthur C. Danto



GARY YOUNGE
THE OBAMA EFFECT

HAVE THE DREAMS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT BEEN REALIZED OR DEFERRED?



DECEMBER 31, 2007
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muscle and strategic jockeying. In response to public feedback, ISA will appoint the prime minister as commander of the ISOC and position the army head as ISOC deputy commander, instead of its head, as stipulated in the original ISA draft. But in a country where coup generals are beginning to resign from the military to assume top-level positions in the interim civilian government, critics are not hopeful that ISA will protect civil liberties—or be implemented by a commander who will.

Waiting for Godot In a Wasteland

by BILLY SOTHERN

But isn't this play rather pessimistic, I've been asked. Meaning, wasn't it depressing for an audience in Sarajevo; meaning, wasn't it pretentious or insensitive to stage Godot there?... The condescending, philistine question makes me realize that those who ask it don't understand at all what it's like in Sarajevo now, any more than they really care about literature and theatre.

—Susan Sontag, "Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo"

Signs on corrugated plastic—A COUNTRY ROAD/A TREE/EVENING—had been fixed to wooden telephone polls all over town with roofing nails and zip ties. Who knew what the hell they meant, or even noticed them next to the CLARKSON FOR CITY COUNCIL, ROOF REPAIR and other political and commercial signs that litter our neutral grounds and cityscape in postdiluvial New Orleans? But as it turns out, those first signs, looking every bit as much the disposable junk as the others, were genuine contemporary art, made by Paul Chan, a New York art star. They gave notice to the city, however obliquely, using the opening stage directions of the play—Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*—that he was to stage on two consecutive weekends in two of the most devastated neighborhoods in America.

The ambiguity of the signs did not inhibit a packed house for each of the five nights the play was performed for free in New Orleans. Indeed, it was only planned for four nights—two in the Lower Ninth Ward and two in Gentilly. But Chan, the Classical Theater of Harlem—which staged the play here and in New York—and Creative Time, a New York nonprofit dedicated to public art, which produced and funded the visionary endeavor, added a fifth night after turning back hundreds of people from the performances in the abandoned Lower Ninth Ward.

After the lucky few hundred folks who made it in the first night ate gumbo and were then drawn to bleachers a couple of blocks away by a brass band and dancers from The Big Nine

Billy Sothern, a New Orleans anti-death penalty lawyer, is a frequent contributor to The Nation and the author of Down in New Orleans: Reflections From a Drowned City (California).

To its critics, ISA is just the latest manifestation of growing authoritarianism in Thailand. "We're living under a coercive democracy," says Surachart Bamrungasuk, a political science professor at Chulalongkorn University. "This is just the latest sign that we are living in a dark age."

Noy Thrupkaew, a writer based in Thailand, is a senior correspondent at The American Prospect.



DOWN YOUNG, COURTESY CREATIVE TIME

Social Aid and Pleasure Club, a de rigueur homage to the city's vernacular culture, people took their seats. The stage, an abandoned intersection, was in the midst of several wasted city blocks where aggressive local flora had begun reclaiming the neighborhood as a backswamp, now that bulldozers had cleared most of the homes destroyed following Hurricane Katrina. The play was framed in the distance, like the curtain at the back of a stage, against a newly built concrete flood wall, whose earlier incarnations—in 2005 during Katrina and in 1965 during Hurricane Betsy—had failed to keep the water at bay.

The Rev. Charles Duplessis introduced the premiere and invoked the lost lives specific to this "charming spot" on "this bitch of an earth," as Beckett's characters later said. "Where you are sitting is where someone's home was.... People lost their lives right in this area," Duplessis explained with great solemnity, clearing the air momentarily of the joyful music that still rang in our ears.

And then the familiar, repetitive, morally ambiguous play began. Two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, talking, waiting for Godot, trying to pass the time, despairing. Pozzo and Lucky appearing, then disappearing. The boy coming to tell the tramps that Godot would not be coming today, "but surely tomorrow." Roughly the same thing occurring in the second act.

The play is dark, written after the world spiraled into uncontrolled horror and barbarity by an Irishman who saw it

