

Articulations of voice and medium in Beckett's screen work

Book or Report Section

Accepted Version

Bignell, J. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4874-1601>
(2021) Articulations of voice and medium in Beckett's screen
work. In: De Vos, L., Hori Tanaka, M. and Johnson, N. (eds.)
Beckett's Voices / Voicing Beckett. Themes in Theatre, 12.
Brill, Leiden, pp. 280-294. ISBN 9789004468382 doi:
10.1163/9789004468382_021 Available at
<https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/97887/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the
work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

To link to this article DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004468382_021

Publisher: Brill

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law,
including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other
copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in
the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

Articulations of Voice and Medium in Beckett's Screen Work

Jonathan Bignell

Abstract

This chapter approaches the topic of voice in three distinct but interrelated ways, adopting the term articulation to bring together analyses of the role of voice and the issue of linkage between media forms in Beckett's media work. The first section addresses how Beckett came to have a voice in radio and television in the 1950s and 1960s in Britain, through dependencies on gatekeepers who could grant or deny access to media institutions for him and his fellow cultural producers. Beckett was given a voice because he was recognised as a writer whose work was worthy of broadcast to a national audience, and onto whom a constellation of meanings and expectations was projected by those who facilitated it at the BBC. However, the significance of voice is complicated by the reflexivity about sound in Beckett's first original work for broadcast, the radio drama *All That Fall* (1957). It already questions the notion of voice as speech authorised by its origins in living things located in real places. The chapter shows how, in subsequent work, this occlusion of voice as a marker of presence develops further at the same time as Beckett's dramatic motifs and interests remain consistent and include relationships between body and voice, voice and place, and voice and time (McMullan). However, because of Beckett's refusal to talk publicly about himself as an artist or about his work, his own voice did not provide a parallel discourse that would explicate them. Beckett's lack of speech did not prevent the development of his authorial voice, however, and indeed made his work seem all the more articulate to others so that, for example, when given the Nobel Prize the awarding committee's press release could summarise his contribution to civilisation in a brief formal citation (Ackerley and Gontarski, 407). Beckett could be easily spoken about even if he did not speak.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the relationship between image and sound in Beckett's work on film, in the cinema project *Film* (1964) and the filmed adaptation of the theatre piece *Play* as *Comédie* (1966). In each of them, though in different ways, voice is dissociated from the performance of the actors on screen. The two film projects explored relationships between image and the spoken word, and the chapter develops this by discussing the dramas Beckett wrote for the television screen, in which a voice addresses or discusses the

characters. Those voices have close, if also ambivalent, relationships with camera point of view. Voice and image are joined by music in some of Beckett's screen dramas, and in each case music also has implied relationships, but uncertain ones, with voice and camera. This issue of how voice is related to other audio-visual components develops the concept of articulation further, by expanding on its implication of linkage but also the maintenance of separation between one element and another to which it is joined.

The chapter ends by arguing that Beckett's work gave voice to potentialities in the audio-visual media that questioned ideas of technical progress and development. The circumstances of production of Beckett's television work require an account of its use of studio settings and restricted spaces, because they are so insistently atavistic (Bignell, 2021). Beckett's work speaks about the history of the medium. While Beckett himself was interested in the material practices and technologies of production in each medium because he was keen to understand and use their aesthetic possibilities, as Gaby Hartel (2010) has shown, for example, his screen work consciously returned to aesthetic forms that appeared out of date. The separation of voice from on-screen performance in the television plays is the most prominent of these, alongside decisions like shooting almost all of his work in black and white rather than colour and using very long duration shots (long takes) with little editing. Working in the studio in these ways was anomalous even at the start of Beckett's career in television, though it paralleled styles of non-commercial filmmaking at the time and especially in French radical cinema. The dissociation of voice from bodily presence was both a throwback to early silent cinema but also a gesture towards the self-consciously contemporary *nouvelle vague*, thus making an articulated relationship with cinema past and present, linking and joining again.

1. The Artist's Voice

Access to the channels of distribution is a precondition for the creative work of any artist to find a public and establish a reputation (Williams, 53). Because they are large, complex, collaborative industrial enterprises, television, radio broadcasting and cinema are controlled by gatekeepers who make the decisions about commissioning, adapting and documenting artists' work. The gatekeepers may not always be employees of the institutions that record and broadcast programmes or make and distribute films, since other figures like authors' and actors' agents exercise some of the same kinds of control. But where national organisations invest significant resources in facilities and staff, institutional hierarchies and networks of power form

a web of decision-making that combines relatively impersonal policy and planning with the interests and prejudices of individuals. In Britain the BBC radio arts and culture channel had a commitment to giving Beckett a voice on radio from the 1950s onwards because of key BBC staff's respect for his work. The Third Programme (later named Radio 3), had tiny audiences ever since its launch in 1946 but it had a disproportionately large role in British culture (Carpenter) because of its support for contemporary writers, including Beckett. As well as adapting material originally created for the stage or for print publication, the Third Programme's producers commissioned new work and sought out emerging talent. To belong to the informal networks associated with the Third Programme meant inclusion in an elite culture with international reach, and recognition for writers, music composers and intellectuals like Beckett who had interests in experimentation (Whitehead, 16).

However, in Beckett's case, his presence on BBC radio was despite the fact that Val Gielgud, Head of Drama from 1934 to 1963, was prone to take an intense dislike to some members of the avant-garde, including Beckett. As Pim Verhulst explains, Gielgud maintained a policy established in the Second World War that broadcasting should preserve and disseminate a canon of important theatre and literature of the past, with a very selective approach to new, experimental work for the radio or television media. Because he was aware of his own narrowness in relation to new writers, Gielgud appointed a deputy in 1953, the theatre director Donald McWhinnie who subsequently worked on many of Beckett's dramas for BBC radio and television. The BBC producer Michael Bakewell, and the senior script editor Barbara Bray, were also supporters of emerging writers including Beckett and were aware of experimental theatre in France. At the suggestion of Cecelia Reeves, the BBC's Paris liaison and a Francophile who had seen the first theatre production of *En attendant Godot* there, the Controller of the Third Programme, John Morris, went to see Beckett in Paris in 1956 about a possible radio drama commission. This was the year after the London premiere of *Waiting for Godot*, and by this time Beckett had found a place as an emerging voice alongside writers like Eugene Ionesco and Harold Pinter (Bignell, 2020). The presence of Beckett's radio voices was dependent on a network of supporting advocates.

So far, this chapter has used the term voice in a metaphorical sense to mean that Beckett was recognised as a creative figure with a distinctive literary and theatrical style, aesthetic and world-view. This distinctiveness might also be termed his unique vision, but voice is especially apposite because it was on spoken word radio that BBC had found a place for his work, in drama and readings of his prose (Van Hulle). BBC commissioned radio dramas from Beckett:

All That Fall, *Embers* (1959), *Words and Music* (1962), *Cascando* (1964) and *Rough for Radio 2* (1976). They were complemented by readings of extracts from his prose piece *From An Abandoned Work* (1957), from his novels *Malone Dies* (1958) and *The Unnamable* (1959), and Beckett's theatre plays *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* were both adapted for radio, in 1960 and 1962 respectively. When BBC television first took an interest in Beckett, he was already established as a literary figure featured on radio, a radio dramatist and a theatre dramatist. This provenance had established him as a significant literary voice through broadcast forms that relied on the possibilities of voice and experimented with the medium of sound (Campbell).

It is not only voice and its broadcast possibilities that interested Beckett and his collaborators, but also non-vocal sound and music. Indeed, as Catherine Laws (2010) shows, there is a complex interplay across Beckett's oeuvre between speech, sound, music and silence in which each does not simply contrast with, replace or exclude the others. In Beckett's work it often seems as if speech aims to run out into silence, while also the extinguishing of speech is feared because what ensues is the endless silence of death. An over-emphasis on voice as speech, rather than as one of a number of kinds of sound, threatens to bring with it a fetishisation of communication. A radical theoretical challenge is posed to the audio-visual media once voice is no longer naturalised as being the speech of a human body present in a particular time and space. Drawing on work by Jacques Derrida, deconstructive theories of film, for example, question the conventions of the medium by addressing work in which image and sound do not coincide to guarantee each other and re-present univocal subjectivities (Brunette and Wills). Although voice most often calls up a metaphysics of presence, and a living relation to an interlocutor, Beckett's media work deconstructs this convention rather than supports it. Beckett was probably aware of the approach to radio developed by Rudolf Arnheim in the 1930s, which attributed an enlivening vitality to sound radio as an artistic medium, in comparison to the exhaustion apparent in literature (Hartel). But for Arnheim, the vitality of radio was not anchored to its referential relationship with voice or human communication, but to the possibilities it offered for exploring the materiality of sound as an artistic medium.

For example, from the beginning of Beckett's work for sound broadcasting with *All That Fall*, speech is put next to other kinds of sound. There are passages of animal noises that remark on the play's rural setting in a stylised way, rather than representing plausible surroundings, as the director McWhinnie explained in his memoir (133-51). Moreover, as it continues, the play introduces further sounds that are all effects, signalling objects and events but in a punctual, declarative tone. There is a loud bicycle bell, a car and a steam train, and

later animal noises recur in the form of squawking chickens. Sound becomes a material resource, a token that indicates a source for the sound and marks the presence of that object or creature as part of the fictional world (Frost, 367). But each sound has an independent, functional role to signal the presence of what generates it; each sound is processed, manipulated and distanced from its referent. Thus, sounds become aural quotations from a repository of sounds like one of the BBC's proprietary sound effects compilations, from which, indeed, they derived. Sounds, including voices regarded as one among the many possible kinds of sound, become disarticulated from the persons, things, places and times from where they might seem to originate.

The aural and the visual counterpoint each other in a similar way in Beckett's screen work, especially in relation to voice because the dramas dissociate voice from the presence of a speaker. The conceptual, social and technological mechanism for relaying Beckett's literary and theatrical voice was broadcasting (Bignell, 2010), whose structural form has separation, articulation and the play of presence and absence at its heart. The throwing of seeds by a farmer from a bag across a prepared soil, aiming to scatter the seed with even spacing, is the root of the term broadcasting. It was adopted to mean the transmission of radio and television signals because of the idea of sending out from a central source, such as a transmission aerial, and the awareness that the direction of sending could only be one-way. Dissemination of signals could only be from a broadcaster to an audience, with no return path, and moreover the broadcaster would be unable to determine exactly where the signal would be received nor what effect it might have. Moreover, because of its emergence out of the technologies of telegraphy and telephony (Winston, 67-87), the content of broadcasting was assumed to be voice (though of course music and other sounds were also transmitted). Just as casting seed would be necessarily inexact, and some seeds would germinate while others would not, so broadcast signals would be beamed across a wide area rather than to specific homes, and audiences might respond in a variety of ways to the signals, or not attend to them at all.

It is easy to see how this metaphor can readily adapt when the signals in question are voices, and the broadcaster becomes a speaker to a widely dispersed and differentiated public. The philosopher and media theorist John Durham Peters (210-11) described broadcasting as 'an idealised configuration among speakers and audiences. It conjures visions of the agora, the town meeting, or the "public sphere"'. Radio and television are like public speaking, that might take the form, at their most conservative, of proclamation or announcement, but also, at their best, the form of conversation, discussion and consensus-building (Smith). In media cultures

dominated by commercialism the speaker might be thought of as a salesperson and the audience as a market, but in the nations of Western Europe where broadcasting was conceived as a public good during Beckett's lifetime, it was assumed that there should be a plurality of voices, literally and metaphorically, and thus that there would be a place for artistic voices offering innovative ideas, challenging forms and unexpected subjects.

In Germany, the other key national context for Beckett's media work alongside Britain, broadcasting was conceived as a conduit to a mass audience rather than as an art in itself. Since a television production of *Eh Joe* there in 1966, the West German regional broadcaster Süddeutscher Rundfunk (SDR) in Stuttgart repeatedly welcomed Beckett (Hartel et al, 2009). He directed versions of his own original television work commissioned for BBC, and *Nacht und Träume* (1982), his last television play, was commissioned by Reinhart Müller-Freienfels, SDR's head of television broadcasting, who also produced the SDR premiere of Beckett's *Quadrat 1 + 2 (Quad)* (1981). At SDR there was little exploration of the specificities of television as a medium for drama (as opposed to a medium for adapting works created for theatre) until the 1990s after his death, because of debates in Germany about the social function of television. Despite the enthusiasm of Müller-Freienfels, the medium was widely assumed to be a lightweight amusement, aiming to entertain, in which case Beckett's work would be foreign and unpalatable fare that did not belong there (Voigts-Virchow). Starting from the same position however, some critics argued for the seriousness of television as a medium for the dissemination of art, as a counter to television's vapidty. Beckett could take such a role, offering complex literary and philosophical material that could be showcased on television and might raise the cultural standards of the television audience. In Germany, as in Britain, television was conceived as a medium for Beckett's artistic voice, as a relay mechanism, although opinion was divided about how effective this could ever be. Cultural pessimism did not prevent SDR's investment in Beckett over two decades, however. Unfortunately, Beckett's death and the deregulation and commercialisation of German media in the 1980s coincided to marginalise his work's continuing impact.

The three plays by Beckett that were screened in the BBC's 'Shades' episode of *The Lively Arts* culture documentary in 1977 were disconnected from the living voice of their author. *The Lively Arts* was so called not only because of the programme's engagement with the current scene in literature, visual art and theatre – its vitality – but also because it used interviews with the living contemporary creators whose work it featured. The interview material framed and documented the artwork made by that week's subject, so that the artist's

living voice would guarantee, authorise or underpin his or her work. There was no Beckett voice in 'Shades', no interview with him, and no explication of the commissioning of the two original plays presented alongside a filmed version of *Not I* (1975), namely *Ghost Trio* (1977) and ... *but the clouds* ... (1977). Instead, Martin Esslin and the programme's host, Melvyn Bragg, gave an account of Beckett's life and explained his concerns. Beckett was absent, and the partial, spectral embodiments of identity hinted at by the dramas' titles (ghosts, clouds, and a speaker who is emphatically 'not' an 'I') reinforce the aesthetic of non-appearance. Even the darkly shadowed, black and white images of the plays and the emptiness of the spaces where the action takes place seem designed to create such an impression. 'Shades' has an ambivalent, if not paradoxical, relationship with the meanings of voice so far discussed; this episode of *The Lively Arts* showcased a living author who was absent, documenting and presenting Beckett's work as the product of a distinctive and important artistic voice that was located elsewhere.

2. On Film

Ideas about vision, voice and presence had been explored in Beckett's audio-visual work that preceded his television plays. He had written and shot *Film*, made partly in a studio and partly on location in New York in the summer of 1964. The key structural motif of the production, which even at the time seemed aesthetically unsatisfactory to Beckett and his collaborators, is the separation of points of view between a fleeing man, O, and his pursuer E. Location shots demonstrate E's power to traverse space in pursuit of O, despite the loss of an intended opening sequence in the street that would have embedded the action further into a realistic milieu. There is a sense of tension in the film, created by O's anxiety about exposure in this exterior space and E's freedom of movement through the space. While O is in exterior space, the initially silent film suddenly proclaims the presence of its own soundtrack when two passers-by in the street are confronted by the hurrying O and one of them bids him to be silent with a gesture and the sibilant 'Shhh!' The sound is synchronous with the diegetic action shot by the camera, but the fact that it is the sole sound, and one that asks for silence, undercuts its significance as a voiced sound at the same time as drawing attention to its presence. This use of voice in *Film* is highly rhetorical, deliberate and prominent. It is also somewhat comic, in that it invites the spectator to join in with a joke that references the long-past experience of silent cinema while refuting that this film belongs to that past or aims to reproduce it (Bignell, 2009, 133-8). The second part of the film is shot in a studio set, representing the apartment where O

unsuccessfully seeks refuge from E. The move into this artificial space ought to offer the chance to control visible space more effectively but the film's lighting, from an overhead suspended rig, produces oddly mottled shadows and light on the walls, and the props such as a photograph of an ancient mask, and a pet dog, cat, goldfish and parrot seem to intrude on this artificial space rather than belonging in it. *Film* is in many ways a flawed experiment, but its dissociations offered resources that were taken up in Beckett's next screen project.

In 1966, Beckett worked on a filmed studio version of a French theatre production of *Play*. Beckett and his collaborators were able to control the studio space much more effectively than in *Film* and did not use exteriors at all. They focused their attention on manipulating voice and questioning the camera's point of view. *Comédie*'s three figures in funerary urns are lit when speaking but merge into the unlit, black surroundings when silent. The single camera's relationship with the space is frontal, matching the orientation of a theatre audience, but Beckett and the director Marin Karmitz also experimented with close-up and extensive cutting between camera shots. Camera point of view does not reproduce the spectator position of a theatre audience, but because of the disorienting cuts and leaps from close-ups to long shots, neither does it use point of view to create a comprehensible cinematic world. The studio was used very differently from *Film*, as a fully abstract space that repudiated a link with theatrical staging and also strained the cinematic technique of montage (Foster). The voices in Beckett and Karmitz's production of *Comédie* are synchronous with the mouths of speakers seen by the camera, but vision and voice are both highly manipulated in order to distance the film from being a representation of dialogue in its conventional sense. Very rapid cutting of the image track, and electronic compression of vocal sounds on the soundtrack, work together to defamiliarise the speakers' dialogue and the articulation of image and voice.

As recent work by Anthony Paraskeva (36) has shown, the disarticulation of image and voice in these film works is in dialogue with experimental (especially French) cinema that Beckett was aware of in the 1950s and 1960s. French *nouvelle vague* directors and writers were going back and revaluing silent cinema in the critical journals associated with European Modernism in the mid-twentieth century (Bignell, 2009, 128-38), when Beckett was casting silent film actor Buster Keaton in *Film* and working with Soviet experimental film-maker Dziga Vertov's brother on the production. Moreover, Paraskeva (34) emphasises Beckett's knowledge of the radio and theatre work of Marguerite Duras, both directly and via the influence of his lover Barbara Bray, who translated Duras' texts into English. Like Beckett, Duras explored intermedial forms that drew on, and deconstructed, the conventions of theatre,

film and novel for representing action, character and setting. Duras, like Beckett, directed her own work, the first such foray being the film *Nuit noire, Calcutta* (1964) which she made in collaboration with Marin Karmitz who worked with Beckett on *Comédie*. In her extraordinary *India Song* (1975), which she described as ‘texte théâtre film’, voice and image are separated and ambivalently articulated with each other, and Beckett developed variants of this technique in his television plays and also in his theatre plays after *Krapp’s Last Tape*. Soundtracks became an independent channel of information rather than a subordinate explanatory or accompanying element alongside the visual.

Throughout his audio-visual work, Beckett explored the audio-visual resources that radio, then film and television offered in terms of the dual meanings of articulation; the creation of a unity founded on the interdependence between two or more distinct components. The production of Beckett’s screen work in studios, sound stages (and, in the early days, in *Film*) on location works with and against the opportunities and constraints of technologies and aesthetic conventions in which voice can play quite different roles. Television, radio, theatre and cinema develop Beckett’s awareness of each medium’s history and specificity.

3. Studio Voices: Conjuring Rooms

All of Beckett’s plays for television were shot in studios, with no location shooting, and television studios have their own aesthetic and cultural significance as production spaces. When Beckett was making television dramas, from 1966-88, the television studio was increasingly and pejoratively associated with the linguistic emphasis of scripted drama rather than with a drama of physical dynamism, action and movement (Macmurrough-Kavanagh and Lacey). For audiences and some reviewers, this made Beckett’s dramas seem like voices from a superseded past, coming from elsewhere and potentially irrelevant to the emergent aesthetics of contemporary television at the time (Bignell, 2009, 164-201). The use of studio space and its technologies had impacts on specific aspects of the plays’ aesthetics, including performance style, the degree of emphasis on close-up, and on sets and lighting. Beckett’s television plays use the intimacy of the studio and exploit the primacy of acted performance, negotiating with conventions for literary, theatrical drama in relation to voice and image.

The champion of the script-focused, studio-bound technique in Britain was the director Don Taylor (38), who sought to characterise it as the essence of drama for television, whereas shooting on film on location seemed to him like making low-budget cinema; an inevitably

inferior achievement: 'True television drama has a quite different aesthetic from film-making. It tolerates, in fact it relishes imaginative, argumentative and even poetic writing in a way the film camera does not.' Taylor's reference to 'writing' is to script-writing, and especially dialogue. Television drama offered the chance to craft language that would be spoken by highly trained performers, acting in specially designed settings built in the studio, thus creating an imaginative fictional world in which all elements of the drama could be aesthetically harmonious and controlled. The result would be 'long, developing scenes, where the actors can work without interference from the director's camera', and television drama would be what Taylor described as 'a writers' and actors' medium' (38). Voice is a key component of this ensemble of creative means, and Taylor argues for the affective charge generated thereby, emerging as 'passion that comes from deep wells of feeling plumbed by good words'. What is odd about Beckett's television plays, though, is that the characters on set do not speak any words. Beckett's television dramas do not feature a well-wrought interplay between characters' voices, realising a fictional world through well-delineated personae, places and temporal settings.

The room, and home in general, have connotations of privacy, family and the reproduction of social relations that are associated with theatre naturalism. Raymond Williams (1990, 56) described television drama as 'the ultimate realisation of the original naturalist convention: the drama of the small enclosed room, in which a few characters lived out their private experience of an unseen public world.' However, the public world remains unseen in all of Beckett's screen work after *Film*; in *Eh Joe* the exterior beyond the disproportionate and thus visually emphatic windows and doors is never given concrete or representational form because it is never seen by the camera. The room in *Eh Joe* might seem to be a refuge but it is also a bare, unhomely environment. There is voice but no conversation, as the camera closes up on Joe's face, and the female voice whose speaker we never see proclaims her power to enter the space and confront him, via her association with a camera that moves only when she speaks. Dissociated voice and vision, in a setting that references domestic space but is clearly a constructed studio set, destabilises conventions of psychological interiority, social context and the referentiality that television drama can claim.

Voice in *Ghost Trio* is a mediator between the drama and the viewer, and in the first part of the play she establishes the difference and similarity between the represented room on-screen and an actual room such as the domestic viewer's own space. There are still shots of segments of the walls and floor, for example, but they are grey panels such as are used to

construct theatre flats for stage sets; they signify a space rather than showing one. Voice's command that the viewer should not raise the volume on the television set is another recognition of the drama as an artifice of the camera and sound recording. Voice conducts the audience, leading the viewer's eye to designated parts of the space. Despite an opening wide shot that takes in the room setting and the Figure sitting within it, much as in *Eh Joe*, Voice's comments about the space make the audience consider the means of staging itself, and the construction of this fictional space. Rather than focusing attention on the visible performer and the beginning of a narrative centred on the character, attention is focused on the apparatus of television representation and its rendering on the two-dimensional screen. Moreover, it is not the presumed central character who Voice introduces first, but instead the material comprising the set: walls, floor, pallet and door. Figure is the last to engage Voice's and the camera's attention. Figure is also immobile and at some distance from the camera when first observed. Voice has a pedagogic role, as Linda Ben-Zvi (35) has noted, thus acquiring an authorial and interpretive agency that intervenes between the viewer and Beckett's authorial voice, and asserts the control by Voice of the camera and the Figure. In *Ghost Trio* the voice has directorial authority, linked to the camera's agency to visualise the action and thus addresses the relationship between voice and power.

The importance of music to *Ghost Trio* adds another dimension to the role of speech in the drama. Catherine Laws (2003) has analysed the music in *Ghost Trio*, arguing that it draws on the conventions of German Romanticism and might thus offer a kind of lyrical consolation to the on-stage figure who seems to hear it. But in fact, she sees the music as one among the other elements that Beckett introduces in order to deconstruct their conventional significance. Through an extended analysis of the use of Beethoven's music, Laws shows that its role is ambiguous. The relationship between the starting and stopping of music and the movements of the figure, F, holding a box that might be a cassette recorder, do not allow us to be sure that F is playing music that we, the audience are able to hear with him. In relation to Voice, V, the Beethoven never begins at her command, V appears not to control the volume of the music on the soundtrack, and the camera movements that she seems to control for most of the drama do not have a straightforward correspondence with the volume of the music as the camera dollies towards or further away from F. The music seems to come from a source outside the figure and the objects onstage, yet it does not derive from the voice who oversees this space, and moreover it does not function as separate commentary or emotional guideline for the action. Just as image and voice have been separated and recombined in ways that allude to, but question, their

priority over each other, music too becomes an ambiguous component that deconstructs its conventional diegetic and non-diegetic functions.

Beckett develops his investigation of off-screen space further in ... *but the clouds* ..., whose narrator describes his movements in his house and then his walks outside, while thinking of an absent lover. There is an almost immobile male figure at the start of the drama and a static female figure in the closing moments, and the narrator conjures a representation of himself walking into and out of a spotlit area surrounded by empty darkness. Voice calls these personae into existence, it seems, in order that they will carry out the simple actions being described (like the man getting up in his nightclothes, dressing, then leaving the house in order to walk the surrounding roads). Voice and image are separated while remaining connected by the activity of narration, and the only space that the voice makes present for the camera is a small lighted area in which these micro-dramas of leaving and returning are demonstrated. Neither the room in which the figure sits, nor the interior or exterior spaces that he talks about traversing, are shown at all. Again, there is a hint of a distinction, associated with the role of voice in relation to action, between the room and public space in the outside world, but these spatial demarcations are not made present representationally.

Whereas in ... *but the clouds* ... the figure and the space were claimed for control by Voice, in *Quad* (1982) there is no voice at all. However, as in *Ghost Trio*, there is music that could be understood either as accompaniment or as a prescriptive soundtrack determining the figures' movement. Moreover, there are no faces and minimal expressive gestures. With few faces visible in Beckett's later television plays, following the emphasis on the face in *Eh Joe*, expressivity is further restrained just as voice gives way to music. The viewer is invited to look at the screen as a composition and a surface, more than as a window through which expressive performance is perceived. The whole drama in *Quad* takes place in two long takes, one in colour and the other in black and white. Four shrouded figures of indeterminate sex enter a space seen from above by a fixed camera, and they each shuffle around the vertices of a square demarcated area in the centre of the frame, approaching but walking around a central point. This continues the emphasis on framing produced in *Ghost Trio* by the rectangles of the floor, wall and F's pallet, which each mirror the square television screen. The unlit and off-screen space is not identifiable, as in ... *but the clouds* ..., and the even, unchanging lighting in each of the play's two sections makes no reference to the directionality or changing orientation of daylight, nor the highlighting of specific characters or passages of action that lighting does in theatre or dance performance.

In his last play for television, Beckett developed this use of music and also returned to questions of communication by focusing on gesture. *Nacht und Träume* is set in a room, dimly lit and with a single male figure seated at a table. Since the figure seems to be asleep with his head and arms resting on the table, when a wipe effect is used to replace the image of the apparently 'real' space of the room by another space, almost identical to the first, the second seems to be a dreamt image. Beckett's screenplay refers to the identical images of the figure as A and his dreamt self, B. There is no voice in the drama, but as in passages from *Ghost Trio*, it is not clear whether the music represents what A dreams he hears, or whether it is from an external agency that supplies the music as an accompaniment to the action. But the similarity highlights the difference between the two scenes, since A is enveloped in darkness while B is surrounded by light. It is also significant that the visual space of the dream is in some respects parallel to the space of the television screen itself, because of its vignette shape. The manipulation of the visual field to produce window-like effects questions the television screen as a revelatory 'window' and suggests that it might purvey dreams or other kinds of illusory representations.

There is voice in Beckett's television plays, but the voices are not, it seems, uttered by the figures seen by the camera. The questions that the dramas pose for viewers, therefore, are how, or even whether, the voice is synchronous with the physical action in a shot, and the related issue of whether voice has an agency that might cause, describe or be affected by the action. What is in question is the relationship between embodiment and articulation. Embodiment denotes the fact that there can be no voice without a body to utter it. Yet the embodied personae on screen, who are not the speakers of the voices the audience hears, have an implied relation to voices because the voices are present at the same time as the figures on screen. There is a link between the seen and the spoken, so that they comprise an articulation. Voice and body join as two things that yet remain distinct. Questions of relationship, causality, and temporal and spatial presence are raised but also complicated and deferred in ways that work on the medial conventions with which dramatists, actors, directors and viewers must negotiate.

Works Cited

Ackerley, C. J. and S. E. Gontarski (2006), *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett*, London: Faber and Faber.

- Arnheim, Rudolf (1936), *Radio*, London: Faber and Faber.
- Ben-Zvi, Linda (1985), 'Samuel Beckett's media plays', *Modern Drama*, 28: 1, pp. 22–37.
- Bignell, Jonathan (2009), *Beckett on Screen: The Television Plays*, Manchester: Manchester UP.
- (2010), 'Into the void: Beckett's television plays and the idea of broadcasting', in D. Caselli (ed.), *Beckett and Nothing: Trying to Understand Beckett*, Manchester: Manchester UP, pp. 125–42.
- (2020), "'Random dottiness': Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter in 1958", in Nicholas Johnson, Anita Rakoczy and Mariko Hori Tanaka (eds.), *Beckett Influencing/Influencing Beckett*, Budapest and Paris: Károli Gáspár UP / L'Harmattan, pp. 61–74
- (2021), 'Screen and stage space in Beckett's theatre plays on television', in Amanda Wrigley and John Wyver (eds), *Theatre Plays on British Television*, Manchester: Manchester UP.
- Brunette, Peter and David Wills (1989), *Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory*, Princeton: Princeton UP.
- Campbell, Julie (2012), 'Beckett and the BBC Third Programme', in *SBT/A, 24: Early Modern Beckett: Beckett et le début de l'ère modern, Beckett Between/Beckett entre deux*, pp. 109–22.
- Carpenter, Humphrey (1997), *The Envy of the World: Fifty Years of the BBC Third Programme and Radio 3*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Chignell, Hugh (2017), 'British radio drama and the avant-garde in the 1950s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 37: 4, pp. 649–64.
- Foster, David (2012), 'Spatial aesthetics in the film adaptation of Beckett's *Comédie*', *Screen*, 53: 2, pp. 105–17.
- Frost, Everett (1991), 'Fundamental sounds: recording Samuel Beckett's radio plays', *Theatre Journal*, 43: 3, pp. 361–76.
- Hartel, Gaby (2010), 'Emerging out of a silent void: some reverberations of Rudolf Arnheim's radio theory in Beckett's radio pieces', *JoBS*, 19: 2, pp. 218–27.
- , Kraus Völker and Thomas Irmer (2009), 'The reception of Beckett's theatre and television pieces in West and East Germany', in Mark Nixon and Matthew Feldman (eds), *The International Reception of Samuel Beckett*, London: Continuum, pp. 75–96.
- Herren, Graley (2009), 'Different Music: Karmitz and Beckett's Film Adaptation of *Comédie*',

- JoBS*, 18: 1-2, pp. 10–31.
- Laws, Catherine (2003), 'Beethoven's haunting of Beckett's *Ghost Trio*', in Linda Ben-Zvi (ed.), *Drawing on Beckett: Portraits, Performances, and Cultural Contexts*, Tel Aviv: Assaph, pp. 197–214.
- (2010), 'Beckett and unheard sound', in Daniela Caselli (ed.), *Beckett and Nothing: Trying to Understand Beckett*, Manchester: Manchester UP, pp. 176–91.
- Macmurrough-Kavanagh, Madelene and Stephen Lacey (1999), 'Who framed theatre?: The "moment of change" in British TV drama', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 57, pp. 58–74.
- McMullan, Anna (2010), *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, London: Routledge.
- McWhinnie, Donald (1959), *The Art of Radio*, London: Faber.
- Paraskeva, Anthony (2017), *Samuel Beckett and Cinema*, London: Bloomsbury.
- Peters, John Durham (1999), *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*, Chicago: U of Chicago P.
- Smith, Anthony (1998), 'Television as a public service medium', in Smith (ed.), *Television: An International History*, Oxford: Oxford UP, pp. 38–54.
- Taylor, Don (1998), 'Pure imagination, poetry's lyricism, Titian's colours: Whatever happened to the single play on British TV?', *New Statesman*, 6 March, pp. 38–9.
- Van Hulle, Dirk (2017), 'The BBC and Beckett's non-radiogenic plays in the 1950s', in D. Addyman, Matthew Feldman and Erik Tønning (eds.), *Samuel Beckett and BBC Radio: A Reassessment*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 43–58.
- Verhulst, Pim (2017), 'The BBC as commissioner of Beckett's work for radio', in David Addyman, Matthew Feldman, Erik Tønning (eds.), *Samuel Beckett and BBC Radio: A Reassessment*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 81–102.
- Voigts-Virchow, Eckart (1998), 'Exhausted cameras: Beckett in the TV-zoo', in Jennifer Jeffers (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: A Casebook*, New York: Garland, pp. 225–49.
- Whitehead, Kate (1989), *The Third Programme, A Literary History*, Oxford: Clarendon.
- Williams, Raymond (1981), *Culture*, London: Fontana.
- (1990), *Television, Technology and Cultural Form*, London: Fontana.
- Winston, Brian (1998), *Media, Technology and Society: A History. From the Telegraph to the Internet*, London: Routledge.