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Saying Seen Again: Audio-Visual Aspects of Samuel Beckett's *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said,* and *Worstward Ho*

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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ABSTRACT IN ENGLISH

The primary concern of this thesis is to explore the instances of incorporation of media-specific elements extracted and translated from radio and cinema into Samuel Beckett's late prose. The analysis of the texts forming Beckett's *Nohow On* trilogy is based on the investigation of the two modes of perception – the aural and the visual – and is realised through the close reading of *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said*, and *Wostward Ho* in the context of media and film theory and practice. The chief premise is that the formal translations among the print and non-print media in Beckett's work are conditioned by the author's interest in, and theoretical and practical familiarity with, radio, television, and cinematography. The discussion is thus supported by biographical and bibliographical framework, and Beckett's familiarity with the specificities of broadcast media and cinema is considered in their direct relation to the progressive 'technologisation' of his fiction of the 1980s. The thesis outlines the origins and transformations of the motif of voice as one of Beckett's chief fictional concerns, and explores the texts' practical and notional borrowings from the field of cinematography to elucidate the way in which they are designed to simulate perceptual experiences. In doing so, the individual chapters make use of Rudolf Arnheim's early radio theory, and discuss in detail the principles of Soviet montage of the 1920, as well as other purely cinematic devices and their reflections in Beckett's work. Specifically, the thesis critically applies Sergei Eisenstein's discussions of dynamic editing, dialectics of montage, and of superimposition as the chief aesthetic and conceptual principle in cinematography. On the whole, the thesis argues that Beckett's late works epitomise not only an intertextual junction of not only poetry and prose, but also of theatre and radio drama, television, and film, bespeaking Beckett's fascination with technology and with its potential for reinventing non-dramatic writing as such.

Keywords: Samuel Beckett, *Nohow On*, trilogy, prose, voice, Rudolf Arnheim, radio, cinema, Sergei Eisenstein, Soviet montage, superimposition, memory, perception

ABSTRAKT V ČESKÉM JAZYCE

Prvotním záměrem této práce je prozkoumat, jakými způsoby do sebe pozdní próza Samuela Becketta přijímá prvky přejaté z médií rádia a filmu, které jsou pro tato média určující. Rozbor textů tvořících Beckettovu románovou trilogii *Nohow On* je založen na zkoumání dvou způsobů vnímáni, tedy sluchového a zrakového, a uskutečněn pomocí vykladového čtení *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said* a *Worstward Ho* v kontextu teorie a praxe médií a filmu. Hlavním předpokladem je, že formální přechody mezi tištěnými a netištěnými médii v Beckettově díle jsou podmíněny autorovým zájmem o rádio, televizi a kinematografii a jeho teoretickou a praktickou obeznámeností s jejich specifiky. Textový rozbor je tak doplněn o biografický a bibliografický rámec a Beckettova znalost vysílacích médií a kinematografie je kladena do souvislosti s progresivní "technologizací" jeho psaní během 80. let. Práce podává obrys počátků a transformací motivu hlasu coby jednoho z hlavních předmětů Beckettova zájmu a v jeho textech zkoumá výpůjčky, ať už praktické či teoretické, z oblasti kinematografie, aby tak osvětlila jejich simulaci pocitového vnímání. Jednotlivé oddíly vycházejí z rané teorie rádia Rudolfa Arnheima, z podrobného rozboru principů sovětské filmové montáže 20. let, jakož i z dalších čistě filmových postupů a nástrojů, u nichž dále zkoumají jejich použití v Beckettových textech. Konkrétně práce kriticky užívá rozborů Sergeje Ejzenštejna ohledně dynamického střihu, dialektiky montáže a superimpozice coby základního estetického a konceptuálního principu kinematografie. Hlavní tezí celé práce je, že Beckettova pozdní próza představuje intertextové křížení nejen poezie a prózy, ale i divadla a rozhlasového dramatu, televize a filmu, a právě v tomto křížení se odráží Beckettova fascinace technologií a možnostmi, které skýtá pro nové objevy v rámci nedivadelního psaní jako takového.

Klíčová slova: Samuel Beckett, *Nohow On*, trilogie, próza, hlas, Rudolf Arnheim, rádio, film, Sergej Ejzenštein, sovětská montáž, superimpozice, paměť, vnímání

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: “What Seen? What Said?”..1

'Devicing' It All for *Company*: An Audio-Visual Experience “Verbatim”..............................6

“Silence at the Eye of the Scream”: *Ill Seen Ill Said* and Silent Film..................................21

Towards 'Movement-Writing' and *Worstward Ho*...37

Conclusion: “Saying Seen Again”...48

Bibliography..52

Introduction: “What Seen? What Said?”

But it is solely a question of voices, no other image is appropriate.
[Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*]

By the onset of the 1980s, when the so-called *Nohow On*[1] trilogy of novels began taking shape, Samuel Beckett – already in his mid-seventies – had actively explored a variety of areas of writing ranging from literary criticism, verse compositions of “a young man with the itch to make and nothing to say,”[2] through prose, stage drama – 'absurdist'[3] or other – to radio and television plays, and a script for film. Such an exemplary openness to experimentation and novelty is all the more remarkable, given Beckett's utmost loyalty to the ideas, concepts, and imagery formulated already in the early stages of his development as an artist. Throughout the years, his aesthetic preoccupations persisted mostly unchanged, yet the questioning of all expression, and questing for better expression, never ceased. A “continual self-plagiarist,”[4] Beckett is not only an author with an immediately recognisable style, but at the same time one of the most genre-diverse writers of the twentieth century. When in 1969 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature, it was notably “for his writing in new forms for the novel and drama in which the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation.”[5] Apart from the Nobel committee's clichéd acknowledgment of the modern man's “destitution” and the purported “elevation,” the “newness” of Beckett's renovated forms nevertheless stemmed from an imperative to work outside the established conventions of literary genres, exploring instead the specific possibilities and limitations of the media for which and in which he wrote.

Beckett's works frequently exceed the borders of their genre by readily adopting qualities of other means of expression. In Beckett, prose and dramatic dialogue become increasingly melodic and elliptical as they take on the characteristics of poetry; music is

1 Beckett's own preferred title for his late trilogy. Chris Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Works, Life, and Thought* (New York: Grove, 2004) 408.
2 Beckett qtd. in Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970) 305.
3 Martin Esslin's early classification of Beckett as one of the dramatists of the Absurd. See Martin Esslin, *Absurd Drama* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965).
4 John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Routledge, 1976) 63.
5 Ackerley and Gontarski 407.

assigned a 'speaking' role in radio drama; the stage in theatrical works is often left dim and bare, with nearly all action evoked verbally by voices resonating on- and off-stage. Beckett's later theatre works following his direct artistic involvement with the radio medium, namely *Krapp's Last Tape*, *That Time*, *Footfalls*, or *Rockaby*, profit dramatically from the implementation of a pre-taped radio element. As if in defiance to Beckett's austere stage designs, the sourceless voices in these plays effectuate the most visual responses in the audience. Over the years, Beckett's penchant for broadcast media, cinema, and recording devices in general found its many reflections in the diverse body of his writing. The outcomes of this strenuous enquiry into the modes of perception altered by, and acquired with, the advancement of technology, had found direct manifestations in his prose and theatre. Yet, speaking of Beckett's writing as a multitude of artistic endeavours in different media, it is essential to note that the intermedial translations of the patterns of seeing and hearing among the many aesthetic contexts are never quite straightforward.

The question of adaptation and transposition of Beckett's works into other than their originally intended medium was always a complex issue for the author. Although his strict insistence on observing the prescribed 'genre' of his works is as well-known[6] as is his diligent involvement in the staging and recording of his pieces, at later stages of his career, Beckett's work began to elude standard literary classifications. His numerous plays came to be composed *for* a particular medium rather than *in* a distinct genre, and his writing for the page often set out to encompass and re-integrate devices primarily associated with aural and visual art forms. It is nevertheless true that as Beckett grew older, he also became much less adamant about the impossibility of staging some of his prose texts, or filming his plays for the theatre.[7] He took personal interest in a number of such cross-medial adaptations and, as with his last dramatic piece *What Where* and its television version revised specially for

6 Beckett famously refused the permission to stage his radio play, *All That Fall*: “If we can't keep our genres more or less distinct, or extricate them from the confusion that has them where they are, we might as well go home and lie down.” Beckett's letter to Barney Rosset dated 27 August 1957. Qtd. in Ackerley and Gontarski 5.

7 As James Knowlson indicates, Beckett “believed that the text of the author should be respected by a director and that this fidelity should extend to the stage directions, when they are carefully planned as his were” and that “Beckett could appear, and indeed was, inconsistent” as regards his views on the adaptation of his works for different media. He would allow his friend David Warrilow to make a film of his prose text, *The Lost Ones,* which had already been adapted for the stage before that. In a letter to Warrilow dated 5 August 1984, Beckett wrote: “OK for *Lost Ones* film with the stipulations you indicate. No such request from you will ever be refused by me.” He would likewise authorise Frederick Neumann of the Mabou Mines theatre group to produce stage versions of *Company* and *Worstward Ho*. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*: *The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997) 692.

Süddeutscher Rundfunk, he considered the experience of translating his work into a different mode of expression to be beneficial to the initially envisaged text.[8] Thus, throughout his sixty-year vocation as an author, Beckett committed himself to the production of texts for a number of different media, transfiguring and remoulding his most persistent thematic concerns in obedience to the expressive potentialities befitting each medium. On many an occasion his work epitomises an intertextual junction of poetry and prose, but also of theatre and radio drama, television, and film, bespeaking Beckett's fascination with technology and with its potential for reinventing the notion of non-dramatic writing as such.

In the three chapters of this thesis, each of which is dedicated specifically to one of the texts of the *Nohow On* trilogy, the principal concern is to trace the instances of cross-medial transpositions – the degree of 'technologisation' running through the three novels –, and to explore their formal development and thematic functions within Beckett's late prose. The chief premise is that the formal translations among the print and non-print media in Beckett's work are conditioned by the author's interest in, and theoretical and practical familiarity with, radio, television, and cinematography. In an attempt to draft what is 'seen' and 'said' in the trilogy, and especially *by what means* this 'seeing' and 'saying' comes about, the analysis of the individual texts rests upon the discussion of the relevant details of Beckett's life and work, as well as upon close reading of selected passages.

The opening text of the trilogy, *Company* (1980), tests the practicability of cross-medial transpositions through Beckett's initiation of the text's structural 'technologisation', the narrator's 'devicing' of it. Chapter I outlines the origins of Beckett's lifelong interest in human voice and his artistic experience with radio and recording devices, in the context of which it attempts to trace their influence on the author's later work. Following the discussion of the nature and inherent characteristics of the wireless, the chief distinction is made between two contrapuntal techniques comprising Beckett's twofold narrative mode in *Company:* the technical (auditory) and the mechanical (visual). The analysis of the inscribed 'auditory' element concerns itself with the technical descriptions of the narrative

8 In 1985, having revised and directed the play for German television, Beckett returned to the idea of *What Where* as a stage play and produced a text entitled *What Where II* from the annotated photocopy of *Was Wo,* which he now regarded as “more desirable for the theater.” Ackerley and Gontarski suggest that this experience is “a powerful argument for the influence of television on SB's late drama.” Ackerley and Gontarski 642.

condition provided by the extradiegetic part of a multipartite narrative voice. The argument for the 'visual' mode of the narrative follows from the consideration of the radio's ability to prompt highly visual, imaginative responses to the dictated audio element. The resulting 'mechanical' visualisations of the memory sections supplied by the second-person narrative voice position the reader/listener into the role of a 'dramaturgist' in charge of a subjective cinematic projection. The combination of the sounding voice and the unreeling film verbally constructed by it create the impression of instantaneousness and immediate presence of the narrated events, resulting in the misleading sensory substitution of the past for the present.

The main focus of Chapter II lies in the methods of Beckett's execution of the aural and visual aspects within his prose text, and on their role as stimuli for a perception-driven approach to narrative construction. Having established the motif of voice as crucial for Beckett's work in Chapter I, the oral expression is briefly discussed in terms of its characteristic properties and their textual reflections in the novel. In the trilogy's second text, *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981), the importance of the aural aspect is extended to the so-called 'creator–created' polarity represented in Beckett's *oeuvre* through the complete identification of perception, external or internal, with existence. Considerable attention is paid to the discussion of the novel's visual quality, which is approached from a cinematographic perspective and investigated in parallel to Soviet montage theories of the 1920s. Some biographical context is provided, focusing on Beckett's personal interest in cinema and his systematic study of Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and other international cinematographers contributing to the *Close-up* magazine between the years 1927 and 1933.[9] Beckett's prose text reflects and investigates Eisenstein's principles of cutting, dialectic approach to film form, and the dynamics of montage composition. The chapter thus closely examines cinematic borrowings in *Ill Seen Ill Said*, including the monochromatic quality of the visual aspect, filmic renderings of narrative time, detailed camera instructions, as well as the application of diverse montage effects within the narrative.

Chapter III analyses the closing text of the trilogy, *Worstward Ho* (1983), in terms of its (semantic) motion. By coining the term 'movement-writing', the chapter attempts to

9 James Knowlson and John Haynes, *Images of Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 119.

trace the conditions for textual execution of what is regarded as the utmost example of cross-medial transposition in Beckett's three novels. The voice is further explored by means of the notion of 'on-narrators', showing how these progress through a substantial body of Beckett's prose. The critical discussion in this chapter is based on the originally cinematic device of superimposition, which it extensively explores in relation to visual perception, film theory, and linguistics. The analysis again turns to Eisenstein's theories of early film, particularly to his discussion of superimposition as the chief aesthetic and conceptual principle in cinematography, which serves to provide the main framework for deciphering the complexity of multi-meaning language in *Worstward Ho*. The chapter debates the products of this simultaneous signification, both perceptual and verbal, and provides textual examples from the novel to document Beckett's aesthetic assimilation of the cinematic device of superimposition in his prose.

In its analysis of the trilogy's progressive structural 'technologisation', the thesis takes up the challenge of tracing the aspects of the celebrated “new forms” of Samuel Beckett's writing. By demonstrating some of the common features shared by media theory and practice on the one hand and by Beckett's late fiction on the other, the thesis argues that the experience the author had gained in working with the individual media of radio, film, and television profoundly conditioned the transformations of his writing for the page.

'Devicing' It All for *Company*: An Audio-Visual Experience “Verbatim”

Dans un espace pantin
sans voix parmi les voix
enfermées avec moi

[Samuel Beckett, “que ferrais-je sans ce monde”]

The major changes to the socio-cultural context of Beckett's youth and artistic maturing were governed by the rapid technological development of radio and film, affecting immensely not only the lives of individuals, but also the ways in which these lives came to be artistically expressed in both art and literature. Like his early modernist predecessors, Beckett was far from indifferent to the briskly expanding new media that surrounded him and, in the time to come, he would use the opportunity to try his hand at writing for the radio, television, and cinema. He would nevertheless continually return to exploring the medium of prose, the written word on page being the one consistent medium of expression marking the entirety of Beckett's lengthy writing career.[1] His non-dramatic writing of later date especially is profoundly transformed by its reflections of technology, and deserves a more detailed circumstantial survey before the impact of media theory and practice on it can be investigated. In a way anticipating the anatomy of *Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho*, the opening text of Beckett's second trilogy of novels develops a distinctive creative device employed to 'technologise' his writing. It will be argued that this aesthetic mechanism is an innovative transferral of techniques inherent to radio, television, and film over to prose, and serves to foreground auditory and visual modes of perception as their chief concern: by “devising it all for company” (3), the narrator of *Company* in reality also begins the 'devicing' of it all.[2]

1 In 1929, Beckett published his first critical essay, “Dante … Bruno . Vico .. Joyce,” and his first short story entitled “Assumption” in *transition* magazine. Some of his major prose works include e.g. *Murphy* (1939), his first published novel, the 1950s trilogy of novels *Molloy, Malone Dies,* and *The Unnamable*, and the 1980s *Nohow On* trilogy. Beckett's last prose work, *Stirrings Still,* was composed between the years 1983 and 1987, and published only months before his death in 1989. Ackerley and Gontarski 543. For further chronological details see “Table of Dates” in Samuel Beckett, *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho, Stirrings Still,* ed. Dirk Van Hulle (London: Faber and Faber, 2009) xix-xxix.

2 Samuel Beckett, *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho, Stirrings Still,* ed. Dirk Van Hulle (London: Faber and Faber, 2009). All references to the texts of *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho* in this thesis are to this edition, and are given in parentheses in the text.

The decade preceding Beckett's birth in 1906 was marked by some of the major *fin de siècle* inventions in the realms of wireless telegraphy and film technology. In 1895, the year of the first public screening of the Lumière brothers' Cinématographe in Paris, the very first radio signal was successfully communicated, allowing for the first long-distance telegraphic messages to be sent across the Atlantic by 1902.[3] Advancing from the radio communication of Morse code messages, some of the early transmissions of voice, both professional and amateur, were possible as early as 1905.[4] As Brynhildur Boyce indicates, the Christmas Eve of 1906 witnessed a Canadian inventor, Reginald Fessenden, effectuate the very first mixed radio broadcast of voice and music.[5] By the 1920s, the new medium of radio became increasingly popular and widespread, with the notion of readily available transmitted sound speaking powerfully to the public and artists alike.

The swift evolution of the wireless audio technology at the time found its reflections, among other things, in the special treatments of text and language by the developing literary modernity. As James Connor has pointed out, in the beginning of the twentieth century, "radio arguably was a greater influence on cultural change than any other technological development."[6] He further maintains that at the time, radio was "something to which [the modernists] were responding, something that opened their ears, if not also their eyes, to a new way of communicating."[7] Thus partly in response to the expanding, life-altering new technologies, modernist authors would begin to reform the established literary conventions by way of conscious explorations, in their writing, of the subjective sensations of sight and sound. In so doing, they were "making it new," in Paul Tissien's words, "by concentrating on the impressionistic role of the various senses in apprehending experience; to observers as early as 1919 and 1920, [they] seemed at times to be imitating, or parodying, the new media."[8] On that account, Tim Crook points out Joyce's "linguistic experimentation of subtext through phonetic irony in a way which challenged the linear

3 Alex Goody, *Media Technologies and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011) 61.

4 Lewis Coe, *Wireless Radio: A History* (Jefferson, North Carolina: Mcfarland, 2006) 26.

5 Brinhildur Boyce, "The Radio Life and Work of Samuel Beckett," *Nordic Irish Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Samuel Beckett (2009) 47.

6 James A. Connor, "Radio Free Joyce: 'Wake' Language and the Experience of Radio," *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol. 30/31 (Summer – Fall, 1993) 826.

7 Connor 826.

8 Paul Tissien, "From Literary Modernism to the Tantramar Marshes: Anticipating McLuhan in British and Canadian Media Theory and Practice," *Canadian Journal of Communication 18*, no. 4 (1993) 451-68. Qtd. in Tim Crook, *Radio Drama Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999) 13.

framework of the hundreds of years of previous literary expression.”[9] Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, Connor argues, comes curiously close to the state of the wireless at the time in its experiments “with a kind of language that imitate[s] so many of [the radio's] audial characteristics,”[10] and he goes on to show how the “radio experience played an important role in both the form and content of *Finnegans Wake,* in its language and its structure.”[11] Indeed, by the time he was asked to compose a critical review of Joyce's *Work in Progress,* the young Beckett would acknowledge and commend Joyce's aesthetics of assimilation of audio-visual qualities in the structure of the future *Finnegans Wake*. It needs to be remembered that as early as 1929, in his first critical essay titled “Dante … Bruno . Vico .. Joyce,” Beckett wrote:

> Here [in Joyce's text] form *is* content, content *is* form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read — or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself.*[12]

“That something itself,” according to Beckett's reading of his master's text, is thus generative of things audible and visible – a creative condition most customarily associated with the 'blind' medium of radio, and a compositional strategy that Beckett himself would eventually set out to explore in his writing.

All in all, the possibility of mechanically recording and broadcasting human speech was to become one of the twentieth-century's “technological signatures,” according to Ackerley and Gontarski, it being “the first [century] to confront the separation of voice from its sources, then to record it.”[13] Radio, as distinct from the fundamentally visual media of cinema and television, is in Alex Goody's wording “a blind and invisible medium, offering only the physical experience of mechanically produced vibrations; a sound whose origin lies outside the mechanism receiving it as electromagnetic waves and then

9 Crook 13.
10 Connor 830.
11 Connor 833.
12 Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta,* ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983) 27. Emphasis original.
13 Ackerley and Gontarski 608.

transforming it into resonance."[14] Broadcast through Hertzian waves, voices assume the ultimate independence from their substantial origin – the body – and, incorporeal, they populate the air with origin-less words. As a matter of course, this basic technical condition of the wireless provides an opportune milieu for the enactment of Beckett's eerie, voice-haunted 'mindscapes'; the tendency to dehumanise, and to disembody, is a property of the radio that amounts precisely to the Beckettian leitmotif of the voice within.

In terms of radiophonic speech, the utterances, once emitted, cease to belong to a particular speaking subject and, transmitted, they inevitably diffuse into space having no determinate or fixed recipient. Yet, the voice emanating from the loudspeakers creates the impression of being addressed directly to the listener who is in consequence made to creatively and subjectively assign to it the visual and cognitive components as dictated. In this, the wireless is also able to connect, in the very same instance, the knowledge and experience derived from both the empirical observation and cultural memory with the privacy of abstract, imaginary worlds. Writing in 1936, a German-born perceptual psychologist and early media theorist, Rudolf Arnheim, asserts that in the radio "the sounds and voices [are] not bound to that physical world whose presence we first experience through our eye, [… they] soar beyond time and space and unite actual happenings with thoughts and forms independent of anything corporeal."[15] In this sense, the radiophonic expression draws the practice of listening nearer to the imaginative faculty rather than to the mere evocation of the previously perceived visual information, with the active reception of transmitted words compelling "the listener to 'supplement' from his imagination what is 'lacking'" from the blind medium of radio in visual terms.[16] As Crook observes, radio allows "the sighted listener [to bridge] the perception of the real world with existence in imagination and consciousness," in which each listener's subjective "internalised perception compensates for the disadvantage of not depending on [… vision as] the sense we mostly rely on."[17]

In a letter of July 1956, Beckett admitted to Nancy Cunard that he "[n]ever thought about radio play technique but in the dead of t'other night got a nice idea […] which may or

14 Goody 61.
15 Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio* (Faber & Faber, London, 1936) 15.
16 Arnheim 135.
17 Crook 64-5.

may not lead to something."[18] By September he would finish writing "A Play for Radio," *All That Fall,*[19] which, according to Beckett, substantially "depend[ed] on the whole thing's *coming out of the dark.*"[20] He emphasised strongly that it was "a specifically radio play, or rather radio text, for voices, not bodies."[21] A year later, he would produce another one-act radio play, *Embers*. Like *All That Fall*, Beckett conceived of it as a radio text, and was quite outspoken regarding his artistic intentions and the prescribed medium-specificity.[22] Although Boyce notes that during his Trinity years, Beckett's "familiarity with the principles of physics underpinning the [radio] medium [was] certain," it is not altogether evident if Beckett had ever devoted himself systematically to the study of its theory or praxis, as it was indeed the case with cinema.[23] His direct involvement with the medium came only with the writing and recording of his first radio drama and, in the course of the 1960s, Beckett wrote four more plays for the wireless, as well as a translation/adaptation of Robert Pinget's *La Manivelle* (*The Old Tune*). The six-year period during which all of Beckett's radio works were composed and broadcast, with the only exception of *Rough for Radio II*,[24] would naturally habituate the author to writing with the medium's peculiar properties in mind. Indeed, regardless of how much or how little radio theory Beckett actually read, the general influence of broadcast media on his artistic output, Goody maintains, is altogether undeniable: "Beckett's radio drama reflects on the technology of radio itself and the formal implications of radio work. In this, he is working both from his predecessors and from a close contact with radio."[25]

Beckett's explorations of the wireless as a means of expression and his hands-on experience with it made him attuned to the exceptional potential the medium held for the conveyance of one of his greatest concerns: the voice. A matter of lifelong preoccupation for the author, the idea of speech issuing from an untraceable source gets endlessly reworked and elaborated. With time it comes to occupy a rather unique and permanent place in Beckett's writing, and the text of *Company*, which originated from the earlier drafts

18 Samuel Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett 1941-1956,* Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011) 631.
19 Ackerley and Gontarski 11.
20 Qtd. in Clas Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting: A Study of the Works of Samuel Beckett for and in Radio and Television* (ABO Akademi, 1976) 3.
21 Zilliacus 3.
22 "Cendres repose sur une ambiguïté: le personnage a-t-il une hallucination ou est-il en présence de la réalité? La réalisation scénique détruirait l'ambiguïté." Beckett qtd. in Zilliacus, 83.
23 Boyce 48. Beckett's interest in and his involvement with cinema is discussed in detail in Chapter II.
24 The text is dated "anées 60s?" and was first broadcast in English in 1976. Ackerley and Gontarski 489.
25 Goody 74.

entitled “The Voice” or “Verbatim,”[26] is in itself a mature take on the notions of vocalisation and aurality. The characteristics of the human voice that always held a pre-eminent fascination for Beckett, and those that he went on to diligently interweave into a great majority of his works, are above all the uncertainty of its origin and its uncanny capability of 'creating' matter out of thin air. While an abundance of voices resonates already through his earliest – prose and verse – writing, it is precisely the 'air' that will grant the future generations of Beckett's incorporeal protagonists the ability to sound their full potential.

A short verse entitled “que ferrais-je sans ce monde / what would I do without this world,”[27] the French and English versions of which initially appeared in *Transition Forty-Eight*,[28] is a poetic variation on the voice, Beckett's “most profound literary creation.”[29] Like no other early text, it lays the foundations for the motif of the interior voice and, with its overall emphasis on inwardness, it reveals most cogently the constancy of this matter in Beckett's art. In the fifteen lines of the poem the speaker wanders and veers, “eddying” (“virer”) as he “look[s] for another” like himself, “peering” from an isolated “convulsive space” where he is enclosed with voices, himself voiceless (“sans voix parmi les voix / enfermées avec moi”). By expounding the nature of this silent abyss “where the murmurs die” (“gouffre des murmures”), a recurrent metaphor for the mind in his writing, Beckett reveals the major trope of his 1980 prose text. Indeed, *Company* can be summarised in roughly the same words as the poem: in the novel's narrative situation, “[a] voice comes to one” (3) lying on his back “[w]ithin reason” (20) and disperses, purportedly, into a multiplicity of voices differentiated by the grammatical person of their address of the “one on his back in the dark” (3). The hearer is thus positioned within a largely nondescript, boundless setting, a container space of himself, the dark, and in it the voices murmuring in the “same flat tone at all times” (12). The extradiegetic voice speaking in the third-person, “that cankerous other” (4), at times veers into remembrances conveyed in the ostensibly separate second-person voice that is “[d]evising figments to temper his nothingness” (30),

26 Dirk Van Hulle, “Preface,” *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho, Stirrings Still,* ed. Dirk Van Hulle (London: Faber and Faber, 2009) vii-viii. James Knowlson affirms that the “piece [was] initially called 'Verbatim' or the 'Voice'.” Knowlson 651.

27 Originally published in *Transition Fourty-Eight*, no. 2 (June 1948) 96-97. All references are to the English and French versions of the text reprinted in Samuel Beckett, *Collected Poems in English and French* (New York: Grove Press, 1977) 58-59.

28 A post-war successor of the avant-garde magazine *transition* edited by Beckett's friend, Georges Duthuit. *Ackerley and Gontarski* 158.

29 *Ackerley* and Gontarski 607.

itself a "[d]evised deviser devising it all for company" (30). This telescoping effect or the mise-en-abyme structuring of the voices devising other voices and their hearer is a device not unfamiliar in Beckett's writing, and in *Company* its chief purpose is to disguise the fact that the one speaking is, like the narrator of *The Unnamable*, in reality "[a]lone" (42).[30]

In a number of ways, both the 1948 poem and *Company* call to mind Beckett's theatrical piece of 1976, *That Time,* which makes use of a previously recorded tripartite voice as its central dramatic device.[31] Thus, twenty years after his first artistic encounter with the radio medium, and more than a decade after the final of his radiophonic pieces were produced,[32] Beckett reinvested once more in the dramatic possibilities offered by the human voice captured on audiotape. Of course, he had done so previously, and famously, in *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), where the use of a tape recorder was very likely prompted by the actual recording of *All That Fall* for BBC earlier that year.[33] In *That Time*, the visual component is reduced to the image of a head positioned "about 10 feet above stage level midstage off centre," with its "flaring" white hair "as if seen from above outspread"[34] against the absorbing darkness of the stage. Throughout the play, this nearly motionless Listener with his "breath audible"[35] attends to (his own) fragmented life stories as recounted by the voice issuing from three off-stage speakers, telling him of (his own) past. An intermedial parallel between *That Time* and Beckett's prose text suggests itself almost intuitively.

As has been noted by Stan Gontarski, the exceptional performative potential of *Company* is due to its composition "at a time when Beckett seemed to be consciously exploring the common ground of fiction and theatre."[36] The multiplex voice addressing the figure on his back in the novel, sounding "now from one quarter and now from another" (8-

30 "I am of course alone. Alone. [...] And how can one be sure, in such darkness? I shall have company." Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 2009) 286. For a further discussion of Beckett's mise-en-abyme structuring of texts see Chapter III of this thesis.

31 *That Time* was written for the stage between 1974 and 1975, premiering in London in 1976 to celebrate Beckett's 70's birthday. Ackerley and Gontarski 568.

32 *Words and Music* was first broadcast in 1962, followed by *Cascando* premiering on the radio one year later. Ackerley and Gontarski 650, 83.

33 "As the story is told, a recording of *All That Fall* (BBC 3, 13 January 1958) suggested the tape recorder in *KLT,*" according to the Grove Companion. Ackerley and Gontarski 302.

34 Samuel Beckett*, The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006) 388.

35 *Complete Drama* 388.

36 S.E. Gontarski, "*Company* for Company: Androgyny and Theatricality in Samuel Beckett's Prose," *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company*, eds. James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur (London: Macmillan, 1987) 194.

9) with nothing audible "[a]part from the voice and the faint sound of his breath" (4), copies almost precisely the "[m]oments of one and the same voice A B C" that are spoken to the Listener "from both sides and above"[37] in the theatre. As is the case with the head onstage, the hearer's "eyes close as soon as the voice sounds" (33) and we picture the Listener's novelistic counterpart "clear from above [with] his upturned face" (9). *Company*'s hearer, like the Listener's young self in *That Time,* merely "mak[es] [him]self all up again […] talking to [him]self who else out loud," inventing a peculiar company "well on into the night."[38] As Anna McMullan has pointed out in relation to *That Time*, the Listener's "opening and closing of the eyes […] highlights the activity of perception. Yet what the head 'sees' is the spoken text – the process of seeing is transformed into that of hearing, and vice versa."[39] Beckett's equation of the voice and of the associated act of listening with the creativity of invention is also the main "proposition" (3) of *Company*: "A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine" (3).

Curiously enough in *Company*, much like "[i]n wireless," to quote Arnheim, "the natural condition is simply that everything is lacking. It starts from a background of silent void, [… and] existence is created only by acoustic action and the plot."[40] The text of *Company*, in its opening call to "imagine" a voice coming to one lying in the dark, itself echoes Beckett's vision that fundamentally, "[l]a parole sort du noir" [the word comes out of the dark] in a piece intended for the radio medium.[41] While "the plot," at least in its most conventional sense, is difficult to trace with precision in *Company*, what comes closest to it, and also "[w]hat the readers tend to retain," in Ruby Cohn's words, are the fifteen "second-person memory-scenes of the voice."[42] If Beckett's novel is to be at least partially reliant on the conditions of the medium which motivates it and which it thus explores, the existence of 'company' beyond these evocations must then inevitably be permitted by what Arnheim calls the "acoustic action." It is precisely this concept that finds its realisation through the speaking voice in the remaining forty-four paragraphs. In Beckett, this "acoustic action" is frequently epitomised by the characters' urge to speak and endlessly recount stories; not only is it a natural prerequisite of audio drama, but also a generally explored theme running

37 *Complete Drama* 388.
38 *Complete Drama* 390.
39 Anna McMullan, *Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett's Later Drama* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 47.
40 Arnheim 154.
41 Qtd. in Zilliacus 91.
42 Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001) 349-350.

through most of his prose. As in radio, “[t]here are no supers standing gracefully around beguiling the time away before one's eyes; everyone need only exist as long as he acts and speaks,”[43] and thus the evocative vignettes in *Company* have to be separately narrated in order to stand out of the dark and *be*.

Darkness in *Company* is omnipresent. It is a metaphor the text's isolated, generative *mind*-mechanism – a narrative universe consciously infilling itself with its invocations, a trademark Beckettian condition responsible for all devising: “in the dark in that dim mind” (21) there is a “[d]eviser of the voice and of its hearer and of himself. Deviser of himself for company” (16). This self-advertised “devising” happens, illustratively, on two distinct levels in the text: the technical, or auditory, and the mechanical, or visual. The abstract narrative situation itself is described and enacted right from the beginning, the voice outlining the technical nature of “[a] voice [that] comes to one in the dark” (3), seemingly unaware of its ironic self-referentiality. If the “[u]se of the second person marks the voice” (3) that is being described, i.e. the one that is said to speak to the figure of the hearer, then “that of the third [belongs to] that cankerous other” (3-4), to the narrative voice itself. Infectious and poisoning, that “cankerous other” is in fact the one who governs and directs the all-productive darkness at the base of the narrative – his own and, by extension, the reader's mind-stage where all gets voiced and acted out. In an amusingly parodic fashion, the voice is rooted in the traditional omniscient narration; not only does it spread, “cankerous,” into the mind of its creature to freely recount his thoughts in the third-person, but it also undermines its own nature by describing the act of narration in which it involves itself, likewise in the third person: “He speaks of himself as of another. He says speaking of himself, He speaks of himself as of another. Himself he devises too for company” (16).

The mechanical/visual “devising” presumably occurs separately from the technical one, as it is said to belong to the “second person” voice addressing the lying figure directly in its attempt “to achieve its object. To have the hearer have a past and acknowledge it” (22). The choice of the term 'mechanical' for the elucidation of the nature of this second-level narration in *Company* is prompted by its similitude to a kind of cinematic apparatus. As Crook contends, the mind of every radio listener demonstrates “the conditions of both the spectator and listener,” and hence “the confidence in the expression 'the Theatre of the

43 Arnheim 156-7.

Mind.'”[44] He coins the term “imaginative spectacle” to explicate the radio's so-called “fifth dimension,” the imagination of the listener: “It is the video or film camera of the listener which is also a sound recorder and production house and personal movie theatre. This dimension can create anything.”[45] Consequently, “[t]he voice alone is company but not enough. Its effect on the hearer is a necessary complement” (5) in *Company*. Unlike the technical descriptions that largely revolve around the nature of the auditory element and the situation of the figure, this contrastive aspect is composed of remarkably visual evocations of past happenings mostly conveyed in the present tense. All these cherished **'sou-venirs'** that the narrator strives to retain by way of recounting them evoke a markedly filmic representation; surfacing from the darkness of memory, they resemble cinematic 'flashbacks,' and thus in the text they need to be 'deviced' accordingly.

The “acoustic action” is made viable through the narrator's detailed description of the very nature of the vocal element – most evidently a reflection of, and upon, the specificities of radio. By switching between the grammatical persons of its utterances, as well as by shifting the locations of its spatial source, the voice of *Company* aims to recreate and enact the actual auditory perception cutting, like in *That Time*, from one segment of the same voice to another, from one speaker to another. Perfectly auditive and perception-based are the parts of the text where the voice delineates some of its own technical “traits” (9). It is said to variably come to the figure “now from one quarter and now from another. Now faint from afar and now a murmur in his ear. In the course of a single sentence it may change place and tone” (8-9). This instance of radiophonic montage is a clear evidence of Beckett's acute awareness of the medium's technical possibilities, and makes the presumed change of its position almost audible: “Thus for example clear from above his upturned face, You first saw the light at Easter and now. Then a murmur in his ear, You are on your back in the dark. Or of course vice versa” (9).

The voice is likewise endowed with the unusual ability to outline the dark confinement space with the help of acoustics, as it is allegedly able to demarcate its “form and dimensions” (20). Arnheim attests that in radio, “[u]nder certain restricted conditions, distances in space can be heard. The size and form of the space as well as the nature of the

44 Crook 8.
45 Crook 62.

confining walls are expressed more or less distinctly by the kind of resonance.”[46] The voice in *Company* speaks about a very similar experience:

> Imagine closer the place where he lies. [...] Receding afar or there with abrupt saltation or resuming there after pause. From above and from all sides and levels with equal remoteness at its most remote. [...] Suggesting one lying on the floor of hemispherical chamber of generous diameter with ear dead centre. How generous? Given faintness of voice at its least faint some sixty feet should suffice or thirty from ear to any given point of encompassing surface. So much for form and dimensions. (20)

These changes in the voice's location and intensity play a vital part in what facilitates the “acoustic action” in both the radio and Beckett's 'technologised' text. According to Arnheim, “in the aural [art] as distinct from the visual, the perceptions that inform us of change so considerably outnumber those which indicate changeless duration, that [it] can present dramatic action far more exclusively than visual art.”[47] On that account, since in these 'technical' segments the hearer is almost always immobile, it is the voice that is obliged to take over the action and 'move' acoustically.

The narrator often attempts to evoke perceptions that are contradictory in nature by relying precisely on some of the unique characteristics of radio. Prompted to link cognitively the realistically unrelated items of aural information together, the listener is urged to perceive *internally* the non-existent by way of mental ordering of sonic percepts. As Arnheim notes regarding the superimposition of sounds in radio, “[i]t represents a triumph of the mind that it has succeeded in creating new worlds of the senses [...] where the associations of thought of the directing mind decide what – not only in thought but also in the senses – belongs together.”[48] A kind of elicited 'superimposition' of the imagined aural perception over the conventions of the written expression is exemplified in *Company* in the narrator's insistence on the flatness of the voice's tone:

46 Arnheim 25-6.
47 Arnheim, 23.
48 Arnheim 120.

> Another trait the flat tone. No life. Same flat tone at all times. For its affirmations. For its negations. For its interrogations. For its exclamations. For its imperations. Same flat tone. You were once. You were never. Were you ever? Oh never to have been! Be again. Same flat tone. (12)

Essentially, "same flat tone" is required "at all times," regardless of the formal type of the individual sentences, forcing the imaginary perception of an extra sonic element that is divorced not only from the habitual experience of fixed intonation patterns associated with punctuation in writing, but also more generally from the semantic function of the sentences. The meta-textual directive for the flat tone therefore obliges the readers to supplement a great deal of perceptual and semantic information by themselves and, in this, it enacts the sourceless and dehumanised radiophonic voice whose transmitted utterances are necessarily deprived of fixed expressive intentions. Beckett's objective here is to effectuate mental 'superimposition' of specific auditory qualities over the written text by way of challenging the reader's regular experience of intonation related to sentence modality. By means of this, Beckett directs his reader to internally 'hear' the voice's tone as envisaged by him, bringing the process of reading nearer to an actual perceptual experience.

Recording and storing of both the voice and the image most undoubtedly appealed to Beckett due to the underlying possibility of recreating the retained percepts at will and at any time. Captured on tape, the momentary instants of the subjects' auditory or visual existence – their *being* equalling their *being perceived* – would be allowed to exist forever in the eternal present.[49] In their definitive contrast to the human faculty of remembering, sound and image recordings are essentially unchangeable and therefore allow for 'verbatim' recreations of moments bygone. From *Krapp's Last Tape* onwards, Beckett's characters strive to achieve this uncannily mechanical precision for their memory evocations, attempting to trick themselves into the interim impression that the past and the present are interchangeable, which is also the most prominent subject matter in the *Nohow On* trilogy as a whole. While directing the German premiere of *That Time* in September 1976, Beckett remarked that during the moments of silence in the play, the Listener "comes back to the present. While he was listening to his voice he was in the past, […] in the silence he is

49 George Berkeley's dictum *esse es percipi,* a recurring trope in Beckett's writing and the motto of *Film*. For a detailed account, see Ackerley and Gontarski, 49-50.

startled to find himself in the present."[50] The almost hypnotic, perceptually evocative substitutions of past happenings for the present reality call into mind the cinematic illusion of immediacy, with the events unreeling right before the viewer's eyes.

In 1924, James Joyce – himself a film enthusiast and former owner of Dublin's first cinema – wrote: "[W]henever I am obliged to lie with my eyes closed I see a cinematograph going on and on and it brings back to my memory things I had almost forgotten."[51] So does Beckett's narrator in *Company*, addressing himself in the second person: "You lie in the dark with closed eyes and see the scene. As you could not at the time" (24). Not only does he see the *scene* that is being dictated to him by the sounding voice, but what he is presently witnessing in the cinematograph propelled by his own memory and imagination is indeed something he has *seen* before. Out of this process emerges what Crook calls the reader's "dramaturgy": "[b]y giving the [radio] listener the opportunity to create an individual filmic narrative and experience through the imaginative spectacle the listener becomes an active participant and 'dramaturgist' in the process of communication and listening."[52]

The second-person narrative voice indeed approximates the function of an imaginary cinematograph in the sense that it is perfectly capable of summoning up "visions in the dark of light" (39), as by it "a faint light is shed. Dark lightens while it sounds. Deepens when it ebbs" (11). The resulting 'flashbacks' – subjective and anachronistic moments of recollection in film employed to evoke past events in the present – are embedded within the "cankerous other's" technical narration and constitute the most vivid scenes in the trilogy. The sky in *Company* is "blue" (5), the father's "red round face" (11) appears in a childhood recollection, as does the "once green" topcoat and the "once buff block hat" (14) in yet another memory episode, and the remembered "white pasture afrolic with lambs in spring [… is] strewn with red placentae" (23). The colourfulness of these sections is almost unusual for Beckett's late writing and, in its antithetical effect to the all-enclosing darkness of the hearer's present situation, colour is employed to enhance their

50 Walter D. Asmus quoting Beckett. Originally in Walter D. Asmus, "Practical Aspects of Theatre, Radio and Television: Rehearsal Notes for the German Première of Beckett's *That Time* and *Footfalls* at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt, Berlin," trans. Helen Watanabe, *Journal of Beckett Studies*, No. 2 (Summer 1977), 92-94. Qtd. in Virginia Cooke, ed. *Beckett on File* (London, New York: Methuen, 1985) 50.

51 Joyce's letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver dated 27 June 1924, in James Joyce, *Letters of James Joyce,* Vol 1., ed. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Viking Press, 1966) 216.

52 Crook 66.

nature as graphic memory fragments. This tendency is perhaps best exemplified by what comes to stand out as one of the longest flashbacks in the text, the particularly emotional memory of the anticipation and arrival of the narrator's lover in the summerhouse episode. The voice constructs an almost impressionistic visual evocation of the moments “bathed in rainbow light” (25), mentioning “multicoloured lights,” “a rose-red pane […] and all without […] rosy” (25), a “blue” face of his lover and her “violet lips” (26) that turn “ruby” in “that dead still” (27) imprinted in the narrator's memory.

It is thus hardly a coincidence that the vast majority of these 'cinematic' memory sections are conveyed in the present tense: “A small boy you come out of Connolly's Stores holding your mother by the hand” (5); “You are an old man plodding along a narrow country road” (8); “You stand at the tip of the high board” (10). This particular effect of the narrative is magnified by the employment of essentially cinematographic terms and devices as, for instance, in the vignette depicting “you's” encounter with “[a]n old beggar woman [who] *is fumbling* at a big garden gate. Half Blind. […] On the way home from kindergarten on your tiny cycle *you see* the poor old beggar woman *trying to get in*” (9-10; emphasis added). The descriptions of the old woman struggling with the gate evoke point-of-view shots – the camera's showing of a scene as subjectively viewed through the eyes of a character in film – as they are significantly conveyed in the progressive present, thus suggesting the memory as it was originally perceived by “you” on his return home.

Other cinematic techniques are frequently transposed into the text of *Company*, of which the most prominent ones include the voice's insistences on what seems to be directions regarding camera operation: “A single leg appears. *Seen from above*” (27); “*Dissolve* to your father's straining against the unbuttoned waistband” (27). The same voice also at times stipulates the camera's closing up on particular details: “Palm upward *filling the whole field*. The lines. The fingers slowly down” (12; emphasis added). On a similar principle, the scene where “[t]here is of course the eye. Filling the whole field. The hood slowly down” (12) works with an extreme close-up which appears to be an auto-reference to the opening shot of Buster Keaton's eye in Beckett's *Film* of 1965.[53]

The sense of instantaneousness produced by the quasi-filmic rendering of the

53 Beckett's only screenplay written between the years 1963-1964, the final product of which was first shown at the Venice Film Festival in October 1965. Ackerley and Gonstarski 193-4.

narrative marks the central paradox that stands at the core of Beckett's late, 'memory' trilogy, and that is produced by the logical opposition between the imperfectness of the ever-failing human memory and the longed-for faultless reinstitution of past events as they once occurred. Beckett's narrators in all three novels almost obsessively attempt to disprove this inexorable condition of all remembrance imitating, and simulating, the functions of mechanical recording devices of sounds and images. This aspect is an elaborate 'technological' signature of Beckett's late prose that directly involves the reader in the active process of perceptual imagination, with the inherent characteristics of radio and film implemented in prose creating the illusion of a precise mechanical reproduction. Whereas *Company*'s narrator strives to resurrect particular instances of a life 'verbatim,' to which end the inscriptions of the conditions of a radiophonic voice within the text are made, the transposition of techniques from the field of cinematography are given much greater prominence in the two texts to come.

“Silence at the Eye of the Scream”: *Ill Seen Ill Said* and Silent Film

It’s an image, in my helpless head, where all sleeps, all is dead, not yet born, I don’t know, or before my eyes, they see the scene, the lids flicker and it’s in.
[Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing,* V]

The audio-visual qualities of all the three texts of the trilogy owe much not only to Beckett's familiarity with the media of radio and film, but also to his experimentation with the limits of language and the possibilities of the human voice. While the text of *Company* experiments directly with the inscribed technical specificities of the radiophonic voice, in *Ill Seen Ill Said* Beckett already abandons the explicating extradiegetic voice of his first text. He does so in order to explore in greater depth the potentialities for re-creating the visuality of a filmic narrative that already suggested themselves in *Company*'s cinematic vignettes. In the sixty-one short paragraphs of *Ill Seen Ill Said*, an unnamed narrator tells about a shadowy woman who travels across a desolate landscape from her cabin to a distant tomb and back. Quite plausibly, this narrative voice belongs to a director or editor, an authority whose textual presentation of evoked memory fragments achieves a film-like visuality of the early twentieth-century montage cinema. Foreshadowing the structural development in *Worstward Ho*, Beckett's linguistic economy works directly with the reader's perceptive and cognitive processes, with minimum words inducing maximum visual effect. As a result, the reader is urged, in the reading process, to mis-perceive with a new subjectivity the images mis-perceived by the narrator in his memory; by way of “[r]emebrance! When all worse there than when first ill seen” (74), to “see” the once “ill seen” while trying to make sense of the “ill said.”

In a way similar to *Company* and to a considerable number of his other works, *Ill Seen Ill Said* engages one of Beckett's fondest “obsessions”[1] and his first “major fictional innovation”[2] – the voice. Downplaying the prominent auditive specificities of the radio voice that Beckett so thoroughly scrutinised in his 'verbatim' novel, *Ill Seen Ill Said* already

1 Lydie Parisse quoting Ludovic Janvier, Beckett's friend and translator of his works: “Beckett était obsédé par la voix.“ Lydie Parisse, *La “parole trouée”: Beckett, Tardieu, Novarina* (Caen: Lettres modernes Minard, 2008) 12.

2 Stanley Gontarski, “Introduction,” *Nohow On: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho* (New York: Grove Press, 1996) viii.

works with this narrative device on a limited level only. Its narrator is already a fragment of *Company*'s multiplex auditory element, merely the 'mechanical' strand responsible for the conveyance of remembrances. Yet in *Ill Seen Ill Said*, Beckett still retains some of the voice's crucial properties to communicate his recurrent aesthetic objectives in the narrator's poetic, fragmentary monologue. The voice thus finds its realisation in *Ill Seen Ill Said* on the basis of the expressive abilities associated with the human speech, the text being formally constructed so as to generate the impression of the narrative's oral quality, even if not as perceptually expressive as the radiophonic voice in *Company*.

Like many other Beckettian *raconteurs*, the narrator of *Ill Seen Ill Said* finds himself caught in a wordy loop in the creator–created polarity – an existential interplay between the narrators and their linguistically conjured inventions. Here, the narrative voice encourages itself and its listeners to visualise the dictated series of 'moving' images “in order to resume” (51). It needs to make itself perceived in order to exist, if only as an internal voice echoed in the reader's “madhouse of the skull and nowhere else” (53). By the same token, the ghostly woman needs to exist – and be 'perceived' – as a verbally summoned visual image. Thus both the 'being' of the narrator and that of the woman inhabiting the landscape of *Ill Seen Ill Said* becomes equated with their 'being perceived' as the voice narrates the remembered visual fragments which are thus presented to the 'gazing' other, the reader.[3] Beckett's narrator seems aware of the total interdependence of the creator and the created, reporting that “[the woman] shows herself only to her own. But she has no own. Yes yes she has one. And who has her” (49), insinuating his control over her as she is clearly nothing more than a product of an imagining mind. This reciprocal interaction between the “seen,” the “said,” and the related “heard” is further affirmed by the voice's proclamation that “she needs nothing. Nothing utterable. Whereas the other” (51). The woman only needs to materialise before the narrator's inner eye, whereas the narrator's own existence can only be secured by his *voicing* of these imaginings. In order to exist, the voices in Beckett simply need to go on narrating; the sense of ephemerality pertaining to spoken language becomes associated with the fleetingness of the narrator's own existence, and reinforces the creator–created codependence.

3 Berkeley's *esse est percipi*. James Knowlson also notes that Beckett's “preoccupation with the dynamics of looking [...] runs from *Play* and *Film* to *Ill Seen Ill Said*.” Knowlson 618.

The transience of oral expression especially accounts for the text's dynamics since its content is constantly changing, the written constantly undergoing rewriting. Throughout the text, the narrator repeatedly comes back to his previous statements negating, readjusting, and reshaping them with added information or self-addressed semi-rhetorical questions, which further stresses the vocal nature of his account: “Resume the – what is the word? What the wrong word?” (51). Yet, the gap between the narrator's language and the memory he is strenuously trying to evoke cannot ever be bridged: the 'verbatim' recreations are an illusion, the narrator himself being aware of the “wrongness” of his words. Thus, his incessant, and sometimes even contradictory, reformulations generate the desired ambiguity of interpretation and solicit active engagement and cognitive response from the reader. On the one hand, such a disruptive narrative device naturally generates constant uncertainty in the reader, and on the other it results in the incessant need to overcome this uncertainty by attempting to arrive at a final resolution.

This accords with Wolfgang Iser's examination of Beckett's early trilogy of novels. In *The Implied Reader,* he claims that the aesthetic dynamism of those texts lies precisely in the narrators' incessant articulation of contradictory statements that prevent the readers from achieving their cognitive goal of whole-formation.[4] In this way, the reader's own subjectivity becomes analogous in its scope to the subjectivity of the narrative; the voice's elliptical dictate becomes almost entirely dependent on the reader's ability to fill and refill the gaps and ruptures produced by the narrating authority. As Iser points out further, the dynamic reciprocity between the constituent parts of a literary work and the reader's creative imagination triggered and “set in motion” by such process becomes crucial for the work's aesthetic effect.[5] The reader is constantly urged to search for a total, comprehensible meaning within a text, particularly when encountered with the gaps of what remains “unwritten” among the fixed points of authorial guidance.[6] The role of the narrator as voice in Beckett's work is thus primarily to *activate,* and its subjectivity serves as an ironic point of departure precisely because it constantly tests the reader's reliance on this guidance. On that account, Beckett presupposes the reader's familiarity with the characteristics of spoken

4 Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) 177. Although Iser's theory of 'narrative gaps' may not apply to *all* literary texts without exception, it is indeed viable for the purposes of the present reading of *Ill Seen Ill Said* as a montage-narrative.

5 Iser 277.

6 Iser 275.

language to ensure that the voice of his novel is indeed 'perceived' as such. The narrator's formal realisation as a voice, conveying his existence-as-perception, is thus delegated to the reader's own imagination.

The common counterpart of the spoken word in Beckett's work is the visuality of motion, and *Ill Seen Ill Said* in particular is composed of images that are *moving*, both literally and figuratively. The narrative voice often employs techniques and imagery reminiscent of monochrome silent films of the 1920s, Beckett's admiration of which is reflected in many of his works for media and, perhaps most notably, in *Film*. Like the voice in *Company*, the narrator of *Ill Seen Ill Said* refers to cinematographic practices and uses various filmic techniques to project the fragmented story onto the screen of the reader's mind. His account exhibits similarities with a film in the process of its (re)making, and the narrator's guiding voice adopts the characteristics of a director/editor in control of his peculiar 'motion picture.' As in a number of other works, action and speech remain separated, and yet, the two types of perception – textual vocality and filmic visuality – are also in synthesis here, the interaction of their shared qualities accounting for the text's multimedial appeal.

Apart from Beckett's fascination with the human voice, his avid interest in cinematography and montage is well documented, and his later stage and television plays especially have been viewed as informed by an in-depth study of the writings of early twentieth-century film-makers and film theorists including Vsevolod Pudovkin, Rudolf Arnheim, and Sergei Eisenstein.[7] In *Images of Beckett*, Knowlson confirms the influence of these on Beckett's work, noting the author's personal concern with the theories of film form and “especially [… with] montage or 'constructive editing', that was to make an important contribution to his future career […] as a playwright and director.”[8] In 1936, Beckett's enduring passion for cinematography led the then almost thirty-year-old author to compose a letter to Eisenstein with a prospect of becoming his apprentice in Moscow. He stressed that

I have no experience of studio work and it is naturally in the scenario and editing

7 See Knowlson 226 and Knowlson and Haynes 119.

8 Knowlson and Haynes 119.

> end of the subject that I am most interested. It is because I realise that the script is function of its means of realization that I am anxious to make contact with your mastery of these, and beg you to consider me a serious cinéaste worthy of admission to your school.[9]

Although the letter remained unanswered by the Soviet director, Beckett retained, as any “serious cinéaste” would, his affinity for Eisenstein’s philosophy of editing and film aesthetics which came to resonate most compellingly in his own fiction of the 1980s.

As Knowlson has pointed out, Beckett would display great enthusiasm for Pudovkin's “discussions of 'rhythmic composition'.”[10] However, he would not concur with Pudovkin's “emphasis on realism in both stage and film acting […], as well as [with] its didactic, propagandist perspective.”[11] It may be also assumed, from Beckett's unwillingness to submit to the idea of an uninterrupted and objectively 'realistic' plot, that he would reject the filmmaker's insistence on the “essential” narrative continuity and “that unity, which conditions the value of any work of art.”[12] Rather, Eisenstein's films and theories of montage based on the notions of conflict and opposition become strongly felt in Beckett's work decades later: very much like the matters of aurality and human voice, they find their way not only into his television scripts and his one short cinematic project, but also into his multifaceted prose.

Eisenstein's view on the poetics of montage is perhaps most adequately characterised by the juxtaposition of two contrastive images that would, in their dynamic clash, eventually give rise to a synthesised image of an unforeseen “third something,” a concept shaped into its wholeness by the viewer's cognitive processes.[13] In Eisensteinian terms, “to achieve its result, a work of art directs all the refinement of its methods to the *process*. A work of art, understood dynamically, is just this process of arranging images in

9 Beckett's letter to Sergei Eisenstein, dated March 2, 1936. Published in Jay Leyda, ed. *Eisenstein 2: A Premature Celebration of Eisenstein’s Centenary* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1985) 59.
10 Knowlson and Haynes 119.
11 Knowlson and Haynes 119.
12 Vsevolod Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting,* ed. and trans. Ivor Montagu (New York: Grove Press, 1976) 32.
13 Sergei Eisenstein, “The Film Sense,” *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory, And The Film Sense,* ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Meridian Books, 1958) 10.

the feelings and minds of the spectator."[14] Eisenstein would argue, as his vision of the objective of all artistic creation may suggest, that "the desired image is *not fixed or ready-made, but arises – is born"* dynamically out of the combination of the author's creative input and the viewer's or the reader's perceptual and cognitive analysis of it[15]. Consequently, Eisenstein's understanding presupposes the eventual formation of a concrete whole, however unpredictable, which is based on the dynamics of the work and the individual viewer's subjective comprehension of it.

Rather than employing montage techniques for didactic goals, as it would frequently be the case with Soviet cinema, Beckett draws inspiration from it for aesthetic purposes. This method both mirrors the text's minimalism and allows Beckett to question the conceptions of reliability of knowledge, memory and 'objective' reality. The images created by the voice in *Ill Seen Ill Said*, however punctilious their evocation may seem to be, can never be brought fully to life as the novel's overall imagery of "never having been" (73) tends to suggest.[16] The cyclical game that Beckett plays with his readers is based precisely on the interaction between the changeability of the text and the readers' cognitive urge to fill in the gaps produced by it. The voice's guidance through the darkness of the narrative constantly fails since its unreliability as a narrator merges with its performative power not only to create, but also to destroy and recreate differently. Indeed, everything in *Ill Seen Ill Said* emerges out of the darkness only in order to be consumed by this darkness again before it can ever be "properly born."[17]

The imagery of the novel is called forth in such a way as to reflect the unusual, monochromatic quality of the visual aspect, a feature typical of many of Beckett's later theatrical pieces and the majority of his works for television. The contrast between light and darkness serves, according to Eisenstein, to stress the work's intensity and dynamics by the

14 "Film Sense" 17. Emphasis original.

15 "Film Sense" 31. Emphasis original.

16 A rather common motif in Beckett, the theme is evoked throughout the whole text of *Ill Seen Ill Said*. For instance, the notion of "the odd crocus" (47) born right into a "[w]inter evening. […] When not night. Winter night" (68), or of a lamb "reared for slaughter like the others" (63). Also, the voice wishing "[d]ead the whole brood no sooner hatched. Long before. In the egg" (64), and the "[d]ay no sooner risen fallen" (72) as it speaks about "[a]ll the fond trash. Destined before being to be no more than that" (76), "[o]f what was never" (77), right before the "pip for end beg[ins]. First last moment" (78).

17 A Jungian notion that proves to be a recurrent motif running through many of Beckett's works. Knowlson 616.

contraposition of two conflicting parts within a structure.[18] The almost impressionistic arrangement of blacks and whites in the text is reflected in its direct employment of the words themselves, and also indirectly by the incorporation of specifically coloured objects within the narrative. Thus for instance, while "all is black" (45), there are still "[c]halkstones of striking effect in the light of the moon" and the reader is called to imagine "[h]ow whiter and whiter as it climbs it whitens more and more the stones" (46). The "chalky soil. Innumerable white scabs all shapes and sizes" is complemented "[a]fter long hesitation" by "ovines" because, as the voice assures itself, "they are white and make do with little" (47), and soon enough the narrator starts regretting not having created "[l]ambs for their whiteness [… w]hite splotches in the grass" (48). As the ghostly woman travels from her cabin to the tomb, "[o]n the snow her long shadow keeps her company" (50).

The antithesis of black and white, darkness and light, is present throughout the text and its metaphorical use becomes even more apparent in the passage where the voice first considers the idea of "[letting] her vanish. And the rest. For good" (60). Such a moment, in its step-by-step nature, recalls the inverse process of creation as depicted in the biblical Genesis narrative. After the voice has erased the woman and "the rest," it continues to rid itself of "the sun. Last rays. And the moon. And Venus. Nothing left but black sky. White earth. Or inversely. No more sky or earth. [...] Nothing but black and white. Everywhere no matter where. But black. Void. Nothing else" (60). The ideas of overwhelming blackness and wordless void are yet again contrasted in Beckett and, in this case, tied closely with the creator–created polarity. In his endeavour to "breathe that void" (78) by ceasing to speak, the narrator has to free himself of the objects haunting his imagination and of his existential need to create. As long as the objects can still be perceived they exist – and this is precisely the reason why Beckett's narrator urges himself once again to "[c]ontemplate" them (60). The word "contemplate" here suggests both imagining the total destruction as outlined by the narrator in a moment of panic, and re-considering the possible consequences before he resumes his narrative. Paradoxically enough, although the narrative voice possesses the ultimate ability to create as well as to destroy, it can never achieve a complete undoing by

18 Sergei Eisenstein, "Film Form," *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory, And The Film Sense*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda, (New York: Meridian Books, 1958) 38-9. For instance, Eisenstein discusses "conflicts" between close shots and long shots, "an object and its dimension," and "an event and its duration" achieved by "stop-motion or slow-motion." A great number of these conflicts is explored in Beckett's novel.

means of language: as far as the apocalyptic narrative is recorded in words and thus perceived, it still has to go on existing – and so does the narrator himself.

In addition to the monochromatic visual aspect, the text uses other specifically filmic notions. These include distinct ways of handling narrative time, textual dynamics arising from various “unexpected conflicts” between the individual articulated “shots”[19] and also, more importantly, the use of 'cuts' and 'montage' effects. All these techniques are employed as to fit the general theme of the novel: the narrator's effort to evoke and re-create in the present the subjective images of objects as they might have been once perceived.

In the imagining mind, time is experienced as constantly altering its pace and is adjusted to the narrator's artistic conduct in a manner that implies a markedly filmic representation of the time passing. Straight from the beginning, the narrator establishes the tense for his verbal devising: “[a]ll this in the present as had she the misfortune to be still of this world” (45). This proclamation points to the voice's supremacy over the narrative it conjures up equally by means of words and by their omission. The transience of speech mirrors the rapidly transmitted 'film frames' that the voice sets into motion, thus making the fleetingness of form echo the elusive nature of the text's content. Particularly in its utilization of the present tense, the voice's account is brought closer to cinematic representation: because the reader is lured straight into the fragmentary action and instructed to experience it immediately, the temporal aspect of the text calls for its imagined execution in film terms.

For instance, the narrator's examination of the “[c]lose-up of a dial” confirms this unusual rendering of narrative time: the hand “[l]eaps from dot to dot with so lightening a leap that but for its new position it had not stirred. Whole nights may pass as may but a fraction of a second or any intermediate lapse of time soever before it flings itself from one degree to the next” (69). On other occasions, the narrator forces its own and the reader's imagination to shift “quick to the other window” (46), to “quick seize her” (50), to imagine the curtain “[s]uddenly open. A flash. The suddenness of all!” (52-53) and the woman “[s]uddenly still and as suddenly on her way again” (55), with the night reluctant to fall while she makes for her cabin because “the time slows all this while. Suits its speed to

19 “Film Form” 39.

hers” (56). The narrator in turns slows and hastens the time flow, which makes the contrasts in speed between the individual fragments patently perceivable, while all action nevertheless remains tied to the immediate present of the evoked cinematic representation. This accords with the previously discussed characteristics of spoken language, as well as with the instantaneous nature of actions presented on screen. In Jonathan Bignell's words, the “tense in film and television is always present (because the image is present on the screen to the spectator) [… and] is based on the denotation that derives from the photographic basis of the film and television media.”[20]

The narrator's effort to bring into life the image of the ghostly woman, to “reinvoke or resurrect a lost and beloved person,” as it is said to often be the case with Beckett's television plays,[21] acquires its powerful effect chiefly by virtue of filmic qualities incorporated in the text. It is not easily distinguishable from the voice's chaotic account whether the woman is a dream, a memory or a fantasy. All that is known about her is that she is far from being a “pure figment” (53) in the narrator's confusion of “[t]hings and imaginings” (53), “[t]hat old tandem” (65). However, his obsessive attempts to imagine the woman again and again result in the gradual disintegration of the image, which reveals, after all, her connection with the process of remembering and re-invoking: “Remembrance! When all worse there than when first ill seen […] Worse than ever. Unchanged for the worse” (74). If the individual narrated scenes are metaphorically viewed as photographs or single film frames, they unquestionably act as a means of preservation of one particular moment when the time is always 'that time'. If the sequenced stills representing past actions are brought to motion, the result would inevitably be the impression of them coming alive and 'being' in the present. Such a mechanism explains the narrator's obsessive need to gather all the images together in his memory: he strives to evoke each of the 'frames' with most detailed precision, re-assembles them in a seemingly correct order, and sets them into motion. The effect of nostalgia and the woman's relation to former times is crucially supported by the novel's monochromatic aspect as noted earlier. Beckett himself confirmed that the black and white rendering of the transmitted images “seemed to belong to a more distant fictional time than the implied present of the action seen in colour” – a statement based on the observation and comparison of *Quad I* and *II*, produced in both full colour and

20 Jonathan Bignell, *Beckett on Screen: The Television Plays* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009) 27-8.
21 Bignell 28.

monochrome, respectively.[22]

The alteration in speed of the verbally evoked actions also contributes to the sense of conflict arising from the juxtaposition of individual 'shots', and enhances the dynamics of the 'film' thus created. If Eisenstein's method of analysing poetry as singular consecutive camera shots is adopted and applied to the opening sentences of *Ill Seen Ill Said*, some curious observations can be made regarding the filmic quality of its visual aspect. The first three sentences are constructed as follows: “From where she lies she sees Venus rise. On. From where she lies when the skies are clear she sees Venus rise followed by the sun” (45). Avoiding the separation of this section into lines of poetry and examining it instead in terms of the individual evoked images, the Eisensteinian “shooting script”[23] arises as follows:

From where she lies	(P)
She sees Venus rise.	(A)
On.	(x)
From where she lies	(P)
When the skies are clear	(P)
She sees Venus rise	(A)
Followed by the sun.	(A)

It is observable how the two longer sentences may be divided into two and four images or, for our purposes, 'camera shots', respectively.[24] The letters (P) and (A) have been added to mark the passive/active nature of each 'shot': in the passive ones no motion is registered, while the active ones show objects in movement. The third 'shot', “On” (x), does not transfer any particular image and functions purely as a divide or a pause, and may be

22 Bignell 28.
23 “Film Sense” 49.
24 In *The Complete Film Dictionary,* Ira Konigsberg proposes to differentiate between the terms “take” and “shot”: “The term is sometimes defined as (1) the single uninterrupted operation of the camera that results in a continual action we see on the screen and sometimes as (2) the continuous action on the screen resulting from what appears to be a single run of the camera. Since the film resulting from a single run of the camera, however, might itself be edited before appearing as a continuous action on screen or perhaps even broken up into two segments by means of an insert, it is best to refer to (1) as a “take” and only (2) as a “shot” to preserve the sense of continuity and completeness we associate with the term.” Ira Konigsberg, *The Complete Film Dictionary* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997) 358. Because Beckett's visual fragments indeed appear to be 'edited' before they are 'played', this chapter employs the term “shot” throughout.

apprehended as, for instance, a freeze frame: an effect achieved by a repeated duplication of a single film frame to give the illusion, when the sequence is projected on the screen, of an image frozen in time. Such 'frozen tableaux' often reappear in Beckett's theatrical works and can ensure, on the one hand, a perceivable fragmentation of action, and lay additional dramatic emphasis on it on the other.[25] It would be possible to regard "On" merely as a signal for a 'cut' between the two parts, but such an identification would deprive it of its temporal function expressing a pause that the narrator requires before he can proceed with his narrative. The alternation between active and passive takes, the novel's "[s]low systole diastole" (60), as well as between long and short sentences, follows rather meticulously the concept of Eisenstein's conflicting montage: "Rhythm constructed with successive long phrases and phrases as short as a single word, introduces a dynamic characteristic to the image of the montage construction."[26]

The choice of words in the opening sentences of *Ill Seen Ill Said* further elicits an effect comparable to that of time-lapse cinematography, a technique commonly allowing the filmmaker to capture processes occurring over elongated periods of time so that, when projected upon the screen, the action seems to be considerably and unusually accelerated. As early as mid-1920s, filmmakers and film theoreticians, such as Germaine Dulac and Jean Epstein celebrated the unique possibilities of the time-lapse technique. In 1925, Dulac especially stressed the transformation of film into "a sort of microscope" that made the "slow-motion study" of flowers perceivable to human eye: with great excitement she talks about "[f]lowers […] whose […] birth, blooming, death, and whose infinitesimal development, whose movements equivalent to suffering and joy are unknown to us, appear before us in cinema in the fullness of their existence."[27] Epstein likewise praises the "[a]stonishing abridgements in [the] temporal perspective […] permitted by the cinema – notably in those amazing glimpses into the lives of plants and crystals."[28] *Ill Seen Ill Said*

25 Cf. Knowlson's discussion of "frozen tableaux" and Rudolf Arnheim's legacy in Beckett in Knowlson and Haynes 123-4.

26 "Film Sense" 48.

27 Germaine Dulac, "L'Essence du cinéma: L'Idée visuelle," *Les Cahiers du mois 16-17* (1925) 64-5. Translated by Robert Lamberton and reprinted as "The Essence of the Cinema: The Visual Idea" in *Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies,* Vol. 1, eds. Philip Simpson, Andrew Utterson and K. J. Shepherdson (London: Routledge, 2004) 60.

28 Jean Epstein, "De quelques conditions de la photogénie," *Ciné-Cinéa pour tous 19* (August 1924) 6-8. Translated by Tom Milne and reprinted as "On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie" in *Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies,* Vol. 1, eds. Philip Simpson, Andrew Utterson and K. J. Shepherdson (London: Routledge, 2004) 54.

abounds in vivid examples of a similar cinematic device suggesting Beckett's attempt at exploring this visual experience on a textual level. While the verbs “lies” and “rise” in the opening passage evoke processes of lengthy temporal duration – the movement of celestial bodies in particular – their counterposition in a sentence with the verb “sees,” which on the contrary suggests an immediate and brief action, does indeed create an impression of a film being played in fast-forward. The excerpt is positioned between the sentences depicting the stillness and passivity on the woman's part, while the 'point-of-view shots' of the planet, the sun, and other natural processes display a great degree of activity, which further supports the effect of time lapse: “Rigid upright on her old chair she watches for the radiant one. […] She sits on erect and rigid in the deepening gloom” (49). The action depicted in the following sentence, “[i]t emerges from out the last rays and sinking even brighter is engulfed in its turn” (49), would normally take a longer period of time and also appears to be notably accelerated and condensed.

For Eisenstein, montage is naturally “inherent in all art” and is “the mightiest means for remoulding nature.”[29] His dialectic approach to film form quite deliberately works to disturb the continuity of a logical storyline: the viewer is presented with a series of discordant, colliding shots, whose “'dramatic' principle”[30] is effected mainly through rhythmic intercutting between them. In this, Eisenstein opposes Pudovkin's “'epic' principle” of “unrolling” an idea within the narrative structure,[31] the continuity of which Pudovkin would perceive as “essential”: “[w]ith the loss of continuity, we lose the unity of the work – its style and, with that, its effect.”[32] Nevertheless, Eisenstein's films would rarely lose their effect and would instead profit immensely from the principles of diversity, collision, and the “dynamics of montage” that would “serve as impulses driving forward a total film.”[33] Not even in the case of Beckett's novel does the disruption of continuity bring about the loss of its effectiveness as a work of art; Beckett's idiosyncratic way of constructing his narrative in *Ill Seen Ill Said* is indeed montage-like and theoretically Eisensteinian. To borrow terminology directly from the field of cinematography, the instantly visible 'cuts' in the novel divide the whole text formally into paragraphs of varying

29 “Film Form” 5.
30 “Film Form” 49.
31 “Film Form” 49.
32 Pudovkin 32.
33 “Film Form” 38.

lengths, while others operate within the paragraphs themselves.

The effect produced by the text's division into many individual sections is striking particularly due to the rapid shifts in their subject matter. However, the paragraphs are interconnected with both the preceding and the following chunks of narrative by slightly varying, yet recurring imagery patterns. These define the voice's account as an endless attempt to grasp a fleeting memory which is always already a subjective fantasy. The cognitive 'gaps' arising between the final lines of each of the paragraphs and the opening lines of the successive ones are reminiscent of Eisenstein's approach to film editing. Any major change in the subject of these passages, as well their juxtaposition, elicit an intellectual response from the reader/viewer as he or she attempts to logically link the objects together: “All this in the present as had *she* the misfortune to be still of this world. [End of paragraph. Cut] The *cabin.* Its situation” (45); “Rigid with face and hands against the pane *she* stands and marvels long. [End of paragraph. Cut] *The two zones* form a roughly circular whole” (46, emphases added). The effect of abrupt, cinematic cuts is sometimes accentuated by the narrator's self-addressed commentaries and questions marking both the digressions of his wandering imagination and his enforced attempts at a flawless reconstruction of the narrative he pursues. These commentaries are frequently positioned at the boundaries of individual paragraphs and, similarly to the urging “On” discussed earlier, they cannot merely indicate a 'cut'. Rather, they precede these 'cuts' by suggesting a specific kind of shot similar to a freeze frame, for instance: “Are they always the same? Do they see her? Enough. [End of paragraph. Cut] A moor would have better met the case” (47), “If only all could be pure figment. Neither be nor been nor by any shift to be. Gently gently. On. Careful. [End of paragraph. Cut] Here to the rescue two lights. Two small skylights” (53).

A more notable instance of the employment of 'cuts' and the conflicts they induce can be found within the individual paragraphs themselves. Here again a close examination of the opening section will be illustrative. The voice constructs the initial sequence of five related scenes which are interlocked not only by the objects it evokes, but also by the employment of a technique similar to the cinematic 'jump cut' or 'stop motion'. The former is an editorial device that works with an observable interruption to the action within the same shot by accelerating the time flow and abruptly cutting to a later action. The latter

produces an effect similar to the earlier discussed 'time lapse': individual still images are photographed of manually manipulated objects, forging an impression of their independent movement when the frames are projected in a sequence. The effect of 'jump cuts' in Beckett's text is thus mostly accomplished by “switching suddenly from one action to another,” “cutting from one time to another or from one place to another with the same camera angle or lens,” and by “cutting from a long or medium shot to a close-up of the same character or action.”[34] Thus, the major 'cuts' occur with each alteration of the woman's position, as if the camera remained stationary while recording a long shot of the room:

> From where she *lies* she sees Venus rise. […] At evenings when the skies are clear she savours its star's revenge. [Cut] At the other window. *Rigid upright on her old chair* she watches for the radiant one. […] She *sits* on erect and rigid in the deepening gloom. [Cut] Such helplessness *to move* she cannot help. *Heading on foot* for a particular point often she freezes on the way. […] [Cut] *Down on her knees* especially she finds it hard not to remain so forever. Hand resting on hand on some convenient support. […] And on them her head. [Cut] There then she *sits* as though turned to stone face to the night. (45; Note that only the major 'jump cuts' of the woman's varying positions are indicated. Cuts to close-ups and point-of-view shots are not marked above. Emphasis added.)

With each word, the 'camera shots' can also alter, although most unobtrusively to the reader/viewer: “Hand resting on hand” indicates a sudden “close-up” to the woman's folded hands, which is instantly followed by a slightly broader one, “on some convenient support,” and zooming out further to “[a]nd on them her head.” By providing additional information about its subject, the narrator verbally simulates the movement of the imagined camera without explicitly stating the changes to its position and angle: “Seated on the stones she is seen from behind. From the waist up” (58).

Other unquestionably technical descriptions are frequently featured in the text and speak of Beckett's close familiarity with cinematography. At times, the narrator/director/editor employs specific techniques and uses specifically cinematic terms

34 Konigsberg 200.

rather unequivocally: “Close-up then. In which in defiance of reason the nail prevails. Long this image till suddenly it blurs. She is there. Again. Let the eye from its vigil be distracted a moment” (52). The voice often insists on the imagery of its narration being evoked through precisely delineated series of camera movements and angles: “Quick enlarge and devour before night falls” (55); “Just time to begin to glimpse a fringe of black veil. The face must wait” (50); “Wooed from below the face consents at last. […] The lids occult the longed-for eyes. […] Skipping the nose at the call of lips these no sooner broached are withdrawn” (56); “The hands. Seen from above” (60), “Quick the chair before she reappears. At length. Every angle” (73).

Associated is the narrator's insistence on specific lighting, the sources of which are spatially defined by their connection to cardinal directions and the position of objects in relation to those. Therefore, the woman seen from behind has her “[f]ace to the north” and is, in the “[e]ndless evening,” when the sun naturally sets on the west, “lit aslant by the last rays” (59). Similarly, the narrator uses the position of the sun to indicate the cinematic effects of lighting elsewhere in the text, emphasizing its striking visuality and the almost Eisensteinian conflict between “pieces of graphically varied directions, […] pieces of darkness and pieces of lightness”[35]: “When from their source in the west-south-west the last rays rake its averse face” (68), “[l]it aslant by the latest rays they cast to the east-north-east their parallel shadows” (68).

The synergy of the vocal and visual aspects of *Ill Seen Ill Said* provides a fertile ground for Beckett's exploration of mechanisms of expression and perception. The inherent qualities of both entrap the reader in a cyclical loop which merely equates their perception with mis-comprehension: the narrator's “ill seen” is “ill said” in such a way that the result is an evocation of the actual processes of visual perception. The narrator's attempts to evoke a 'living' image of the woman are paradoxical: even though the narrative is construed so as to make the most of the possibilities offered by the film form in terms of its closeness to perceptual experience, and of its miraculous ability to temporarily 'create' objects and 'revive' people, such enterprise is still doomed straightaway simply because memory and perception are not equatable. Not only does the narrator seem to desire the unattainable, he himself makes it altogether impossible: the infinite, meticulous rewritings of the individual

35 “Film Form” 39.

memory fragments rupture and 'cut' the action further, rather than create an uninterrupted and solid whole of realistic representation.

“So, montage is conflict,” Eisenstein famously proclaims in *Film Form*.[36] Indeed, everything in Beckett's text, including the text itself, is born out of constant conflict, fragmentation and contradiction rather than undisturbed harmony. To prove his point that perception, memory, and communication are essentially unreliable, Beckett makes his readers 'see' for themselves. *Ill Seen Ill Said* reworks the reader's sense of familiarity. The reader's awareness of the characteristics of spoken language and film are as crucial for the novel's 'being' as their habitual experience of reading and comprehending literary texts. Both are challenged by Beckett's work as it ceaselessly tests our senses: “All five. All six. And the rest. All. All to blame. All” (61).

36 “Film Form” 38.

Towards 'Movement-Writing' and *Worstward Ho*

Words and images run riot in my head, pursuing, flying, clashing, merging, endlessly.
[Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies*]

The title of Samuel Beckett's 1983 prose text and the closing novel of the *Nohow On* trilogy speaks movement. *Worstward Ho* embarks, as do many of its textual predecessors in Beckett's *oeuvre*, on a quest for a "better worse" (81) expression, stirring towards the unreachable ideal of the 'worst word'.[1] Both the relative stasis of *Company*'s "one on his back in the dark" (3) enclosed with a light-shedding voice, and the cognitively induced montage-like movement of images in *Ill Seen Ill Said* increasingly anticipate the cinematography – literally 'movement-writing' – of *Worstward Ho.* In its formal complexity, the text sets out to undermine the conventional constancy of the written expression by way of re-producing visual stimuli through its experimentation with language in the process of ever negating and lessening itself. The prose of *Worstward Ho* relies powerfully on the idea of (semantic) motion, which is accomplished chiefly by way of amassing verbal reconstructions of theoretical and technical properties of superimposition, a device typical of cinematography.

Reviewing Beckett's *Film* as early as the 1960s, Raymond Federman observed that Beckett's first and only cinematic endeavour makes a return "to the most basic forms of expression, to the primary sources of [an] artistic medium" that is, "in the case of the cinema [...] the moving image itself and its silent origin."[2] Such an artistic anachronism is an evidence of Beckett's trademark loyalty to the ideas and concepts he adopted early in his life, and to which he kept returning ever since. Thus, more than thirty years into his varied writing career, Federman notes, Beckett managed to "transpose," rather freely and above all innovatively, "same themes and devices he has been exploiting over and over again [...] to a new medium."[3] Given that "all Beckett's work [...] develops in the reader or spectator an

1 As Dirk Van Hulle indicates in the preface to Faber and Faber's 2009 edition of the three texts, *Better Worse* was the "provisional title" of the emerging prose work. Dirk Van Hulle xiii.
2 Raymond Federman, "Film," *Film Quarterly* (Winter 1966-7), reprinted in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, eds Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) 277.
3 Federman 276.

extra sense of perception," this supplementary perception in *Worstward Ho* is an effect of what I aim to theorise here as Beckett's 'movement-writing', which seamlessly merges together mechanisms derived from the heterogeneous expressive contexts of cinematography and prose fiction.[4]

The minimal imagery of *Worstward Ho* is altogether (re)constructed by a series of (re)formulations and perpetual adjustments revolving around three "shades" – the enigmatic mental images that haunt the "dim void" (83) of Beckett's scarce narrative. The faint shadows of the kneeling figure, of the "plodding twain" (88) holding hands, and of the head with "[c]lenched staring eyes" (89), all emerge from the narrator's disorderly elliptical testimony only to be, before long, verbally reduced to their "meremost minimum" (82). Although the narrator spares no effort to edit out all of the images he previously created, one residual "pinhole" still prevails "[i]n dimmost dim. At bounds of boundless void. Whence no farther" (103). At one point in the text, the narrator even tries to imaginarily "worsen. *Itself*. The dim. The void" (90; emphasis added). And since in the end "[v]oid cannot go. Save dim go. Then all go" (87), the "so-said void. So-missaid" (91) acts as a kind of screen upon which all the shadows are cast, the narrative turned into a peculiar *camera obscura*, a metaphor for the human mind and the direct historical predecessor of the present-day cinematic camera: "Where then but there see now –" (84).

As the novel opens, the narrative voice initiates the text's movement "worstward" by struggling to envisage matter where there is "[n]o matter" (81). It mentally conceives "a body. Where none" and "[a] place. Where none. For the body" both *because* of the now existing body, and a necessary arrangement *for* it "[t]o be in. Move in. [...] Only in" (81). The narrator thus builds an imagined, rotunda-like confinement space later to be infused with void and shades that grow variably fainter and lighter, sharper and blurrier, upon his voiced command. By devising such a space, as it were mentally zooming out and reflecting upon his own imaginative processes, the narrator of *Worstward Ho* also constructs a meta-narrative that directly comments on the actual experience of reading the text he is creating. The motif of the hollow space reappears a number of times in the text mirroring, according to the principle of isomorphism, the attributes of other imagined shades – that of a staring skull in particular – endowing the text with a mise-en-abyme structure. The "dim" of this

4 Federman 280.

“[s]hade-ridden void” (91) is outlined as “[f]ar and wide the same. High and low” (86), and within it a cavernous “grot or a gulf” (86) is later imagined. Indeed, crypts, chambers, and vaults are as essential for the idiosyncratic nature of the text as is the cryptic language that constructs them. Notions of the external and the internal eventually become intertwined, and so do the narrator and the reader, cast in the roles of co-creative agents processing the telescopic reproduction of the narrated/read events concurrently.

There seems to exist a *there* in the primary abyss of void, and this *there* is in turn generative of other shades and *theres*: “the head said seat of all. Germ of all. All? If of all of it too. Where if not there it too? There in the sunken head the sunken head” (87). Thus, the sunken head first imagined by the narrator contains a copy of itself, and mirrors exactly the sunken heads that the reader is compelled to project within the immeasurable void of his or her own imagination. The “[c]lenched staring eyes” of the narrator’s inner vision are “clamped to” another pair of “clenched staring eyes” belonging to the skull-trope, as he longs to “*[b]e* that shade again. *In* that shade again. With the other shades. […] In the dim void” (89; emphasis added). As the narrator proceeds with the “worsening” of the head, he gradually arrives at the point where “[i]n the skull all save the skull gone. [...] In the skull the skull alone to be seen” (91), thus ultimately relating the mind to a kind of inner theatre, with the skull being the “[s]cene [...] of all” (90).

The texts of *Compagnie/Company* and *Mal vu mal dit/Ill Seen Ill Said* were composed roughly at the same time in both languages, with their French and English versions edited and reworked with reference to each other.[5] *Worstward Ho,* on the contrary, was written solely in English and Beckett’s inability to translate the novel into French has become notorious. In his biography of Beckett, James Knowlson recalls the outspoken reluctance, on Beckett’s part, to provide a French translation of *Worstward Ho*: “How, he asked me, do you translate even the first words of the book 'On. Say on.' – without losing its force?”[6] Undeniably, the remarkable potential of the reiterated word “on” in *Worstward Ho* is precisely what hinders an accurate translation. And yet, paradoxically, the French

5 *Company* was initially written in English in July 1979 and translated into French in less than a month's time. The French translation was, however, the first one to be published in January 1980, and was followed by the revised English text later in the same year. Beckett began translating the French original of *Mal vu mal dit* into English in the middle of its composition and revision; the French text's publication in 1981 was followed by that of *Ill Seen Ill Said* a year after. Van Hulle viii-x.

6 Knowlson 685.

word "on" bears in fact an interesting potential as regards a translation, or perhaps transposition, of the text into French.

Grammatically, the French "on" functions as a gender-neutral indefinite subject pronoun referring to one or multiple persons, and is more or less comparable to the English pronouns "one," "you," "we," or "they," and their syntheses. It is often employed to signify a person whose identity is unknown, an unspecified *human* agent. For this reason, such a polyvalent, hybrid-use pronoun can simultaneously exclude and include the speaker and the listener, the narrator functioning as both, and likewise the reader – a notable reinforcement of the previously discussed mise-en-abyme structure. The word "on" acquires additional significance in reference to Beckett's text when its etymology is considered. Originally denoting "man" or "human being," the French "on" is a lexical remnant of the Latin word "homo," and may refer metaphorically to a number of Beckett's disembodied voices-as-narrators, voices in the head, the human residua.[7]

The enigmatic narrator of *The Unnamable* (1953) announces, and "it must not be forgotten," that "all is a question of voices,"[8] "of voices to keep going,"[9] and that really "no other image is appropriate."[10] This "on-going" preoccupation with vocality is the domain, especially apparent in Beckett's prosaic texts, of what I propose to call the "on-narrators" – the impersonal "they" who appear already in *Texts pour rien* and the *Trilogy*, and whose voices continue to resonate throughout much of Beckett's late prose.[11] In the fifth "Text for Nothing," the narrator with "eyes staring behind the lids" listens for "a voice not from without," or "a kind of consciousness," admitting that "[i]t's *they* murmur my name, speak to me of me, speak of a me […]. *Theirs* all these voices, like a rattling of chains in my head, rattling to me that I have a head."[12] They are *Molloy*'s murmuring "kind of consciousness" (82) too, and become, in *The Unnamable,* an elaborated grouping of voices "conveyed […]

7 "Étymologie De 'On'," *Centre National de Ressources Textuelles and Lexicales,* 2012 <http://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/on> 27 Jan 2014.

8 *Three Novels* 339.

9 *Three Novels* 329.

10 *Three Novels* 341. The year indicated is that of the first French publication of the novel.

11 *Textes pour rien/Texts for Nothing* were composed in French between 1950 and 1951. The trilogy of novels *Molloy, Malone meurt/Malone Dies,* and *L'innommable/The Unnamable* was also first written in French, and published individually between 1951 and 1953. Cf. "Preface" and "Table of Dates" in Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing and Other Shorter Prose,* ed. Mark Nixon (London: Faber and Faber, 2010) vii-xxxv.

12 Samuel Beckett, "Texts for Nothing," *The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989,* ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995) 117-121. Emphasis added.

by the same channel as that used by Malone and Co." (330); they are the "troop of lunatics" (302), "vice-exister[s]" (308), "tormentors" (341), "[t]he dirty pack of fake maniacs" (361) and "their miscreated puppets" (319). Finally, in *Worstward Ho,* they reappear as audible "[w]orsening words whose unknown. […] Dim void shades all they. Nothing save what they say. […] Whosesoever whencesoever say" (93). No less than Beckett's other narrators, the "on-narrator" of *Worstward Ho* is a medley of incorporeal voices and a confusion of pronominal persons trapped in the narrative machinery of which they are both active creators and passive creations. By *saying* "on" at the text's very beginning, the voice is always also *said* "on" to begin with: "On. Say on. Be said on" (81). The narrative voice of *Worstward Ho* becomes simultaneously "they" and "one," but also "we" and "you"; the narrator of the text interconnected not only with the voice that dictates his visual experiences, but also with the reader, who becomes "placed into abyss" where all the "say[ing] seen again" (97) occurs.

This simultaneous signification, thwarting the possibility of identifying only one meaning as paramount, is a major trope running (through) *Worstward Ho* that also shares certain attributes with the originally cinematic device of superimposition. It is an indispensable facet of Beckett's "movement-writing" whose choice, fixed arrangement of words launches the imaginary permutational apparatus of constantly emerging new lexical and syntactic links. Let us briefly return to Beckett's fascination with the monochromatic silent films of the 1920s, and to Sergei Eisenstein's ideas on film editing as a useful framework for a subsequent reading of *Worstward Ho* in cinematographic terms.

To elucidate the mechanisms behind montage, Eisenstein explores in his 1939 essay "Word and Image," with reference to Gestalt psychology or to "the field of behaviour" as he terms it, the innate tendency to make "definite and obvious deductive generalization when any separate objects are placed before us side by side."[13] Gestalt psychology commonly understands the workings of human perception as a tendency to organize visual information into patterns forming a coherent whole to which its constituent parts are intrinsic. The objects become grouped together on the basis of reciprocal cooperation between the perceived parts and the surfacing whole in a dynamic fashion, creating a

13 Sergei Eisenstein, "Word and Image," in Eisenstein*, The Film Sense,* ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber, 1986) 14-17.

cognitively structured composite further superimposed with subjective layers of added signification. This whole is non-existent and illusory, yet it is a present concept which is imagined "on top" of the individually perceived objects. Similarly, when separate images or shots are provided in film, their creative synthesis is, according to Eisenstein, left entirely to the viewers themselves: "it is precisely the *montage* principle, as distinguished from that o f *representation*, which obliges spectators themselves to *create*."[14] Delineating the attributes of the montage principle ten years earlier, in "The Dramaturgy of Film Form (The Dialectical Approach to Film Form)" (1929), Eisenstein explains how "each sequential element is arrayed, not *next* to the one it follows, but on *top* of it," with the key idea of superimposition operating on both the visual and the conceptual levels.[15] The former can be explained generally on the "phenomenon of movement" produced by film, in which the individual photographed stills of objects in motion "blend into movement" as they become superimposed on the spectator's retina if shown in a rapid succession.[16] The latter, conceptual level is demonstrated on the example of Japanese ideograms that synthesize two diverse and independent significations into a new meaning when juxtaposed: "concrete word (denotation) set against concrete word produces abstract concept."[17] In both cases, the outcome is always a purely imagined construct mentally superimposed over information that is primarily given.

The tendency to organize, connect, and group pieces of information in comprehensible patterns, it has been said, is the key principle underlying Gestalt psychology. Discussing this "natural phenomenon, a part of our common perception," Eisenstein notes that human understanding tends to "automatically combine the juxtaposed elements and reduce them to a unity."[18] Specifically, this is the case with deliberately ambiguous linguistic constructions relying on multiple possibilities of interpretation, such as those found in riddles.[19] However, the utmost example of such a unifying impetus for

14 "Word and Image" 37. Emphasis original.

15 Sergei Eisenstein, "The Dramaturgy of Film Form (The Dialectical Approach to Film Form)," *S.M. Eisenstein: Writings, 1922-34,* ed. Richard Taylor (London: British Film Institute, 1988) 164.

16 *Writings* 164.

17 *Writings* 164.

18 "Word and Image" 15-6.

19 Eisenstein selects a simple riddle "from international folk-lore" to support his theory: "The raven flew, while a dog sat on its tail. How can this be? [...] [W]e understand the query as though the dog were sitting on the tail of the raven, while actually, the riddle contains two unrelated actions: the raven flies, while the dog sits on its own tail." "Word and Image" 15.

Eisenstein is the portmanteau word, a powerful instance of montage in itself: "The charm of this 'portmanteau' effect is built upon the sensation of duality residing in the arbitrarily formed single word."[20] Eisenstein points to how portmanteaux draw their potential from the simultaneous perception of the distinct parts of the newly created neologism, as well as the new meaning arising from their juxtaposition. Therefore, the effect of superimposition is understood as the layering of one or multiple diverse shots *on top* of another, so that a joint image would emerge from two or more separate ones while also retaining their individual qualities.

A common device employed in film and television since their earliest stages, Beckett was not unfamiliar with the technique of superimposition and the implications it offers. He worked directly with superimposition several times before the composition of *Worstward Ho*, perhaps most notably in the broadcast versions of his television plays *...but the clouds...* (1977) and *Nacht und Träume* (1983).[21] Although the technique is not explicitly indicated in the published scripts, and is referred to as "dissolve to" or "fade," both plays utilise its effects to suggest an evocation of a dream, a memory, or a segment of imagination.[22] Beckett does, however, mention superimposition specifically in his screenplay for *Film* (1963) as a technical option to avoid while expressing the desirably varying degrees of perception of E and O.[23] Despite all possible "technical ignorance" that Beckett rather modestly admits, the meticulous notes and sketches display his great concern with the film's practical execution, as well as his detailed knowledge of technical discourse.[24]

A striking instance of Beckett's employment of cinematic superimposition in a prose text can be documented on *Ill Seen Ill Said*, a direct fictional predecessor of *Worstward Ho*'s elaborated 'movement-writing.' Here, on a purely textual level, the narrative voice uses superimposition in a way similar to a cinematographer who, by editing his film together, makes a figure of a woman appear gradually over a fixed background image. Not unlike Eisenstein in his films, Beckett first constructs an environment in which

20 "Word and Image" 15.
21 Years of the plays's first broadcasts are indicated. Ackerley and Gontarski 77, 398.
22 *Complete Drama* 419, 465.
23 *Complete Drama* 331. *Film* was written in April 1963, and first shown in 1965. Ackerley and Gonstarski 193-4.
24 *Complete Drama* 331.

the figure is said to be absent, then superimposes it with increasing clarity over the environment which is further secured as a background image with the use of additional textual emphasis:

> There was a time when she did not appear *in the zone of stones*. Was not therefore to be seen going out or coming in. [...] But *little by little* she began to appear. *In the zone of stones*. First darkly. Then more and more plain. Till in detail she could be seen [...]. (49)

Whereas the example suggests the novel's tendency to employ superimposition as a filmic technique transcribed directly into its own genre, in *Worstward Ho* Beckett already works with a more implicit, conceptual characteristics of this device. It encourages an exceptionally active participation on the part of its readers by way of constant re-imagining of concepts based not only on the forced cognitive re-grouping of information provided by the ever self-negating narrative voice, but also on the polysemous nature of language it employs. Thus, the readers become active inventors and directors of their own experience as the dialectics of montage elevate their role from mere consumers to that of co-creators.

Worstward Ho is constructed in a way that ostensibly concurs with the principles of Gestalt psychology and generative mechanics of superimposition as Beckett's late prose specially makes use of the innate cognitive processes of organization and ordering, a major factor that it both powerfully induces and purposely denies. One of the key techniques that disallows the ability to orientate oneself within the realm of the text's obscure imagery has its conceptual roots in cinematic superimposition. The images have first to be created with the use of words, and then "dimmed" by the self-same quality of these words: "Stare by words dimmed. Shades dimmed [...] Till blank again. No words again. Then all undimmed. Stare undimmed. That words had dimmed" (99). Having invoked, in spite of themselves, an image, the words proceed to overlay this almost photographic still with "little worse" (96) detail each time, causing it to move, blur, and become dimmer, but never to recede: "Worse words for worser still" (100). The puzzling chaos produced by Beckett's (meta)narratives demands a great degree of attentiveness and creativity on the part of the reader, with the texts relying on the strong need for systematic arrangement as an inherent component of all

human understanding. However, any finite mental unification of either the narrative or its constitutive images is purposely prevented, to which end the information supplied by the text has to exist in a constant semantic movement: “on.”

In *Worstward Ho*, Beckett takes montage as advocated by Eisenstein onto the textual level and even further, creating a dynamic profusion of constantly emerging meanings. The do-it-yourself experience for the reader is aided particularly by the employment of the device of superimposition as the primal driving force of the text. The multiplicity of linguistic and poetic uses of the individual words forming the text, and their specific positioning within phrases, unpunctuated sentences, and even larger wholes is precisely what constitutes Beckett’s “movement-writing” in *Worstward Ho*. The indeterminacy of the written expression is reliant to a great extent on portmanteau-like coinages and “nego-logisms” signifying the language’s struggle to achieve its utmost minimum. These are not exactly what Eisenstein understands as portmanteau constructions, since they are usually not amalgams of two unrelated lexical or “concrete” words, but rather innovative morphological (prefixal and suffixal) composites that merge and create new meanings on the basis shared with the device of superimposition: “Beyondless. Thenceless there. Thitherless there. Thenceless thitherless there” (83). This mechanism allows Beckett to ostensibly “lessen” his shades with the language negating itself grammatically. The evoked figures of an old man, a child, or a woman can only kneel on “unseen knees” among other shades with the help of such visual technique as superimposition: “Try better worse kneeling. Legs gone say better worse kneeling [...] Vast void apart old man and child dim shades on unseen knees” (102). The reader, having retained the memory of all the preceding stages of the shade’s undoing, is now encouraged to imagine the act of kneeling supported by the images of legs and knees, which are subsequently superimposed with the notion of their absence. In the end, nothing is really lost from the narrative, and the act of its diminishing is but an accumulating of images. In one of the last instances of their seeming “unsaying,” the old man and the child are depicted as “[t]opless baseless hindtrunks. Legless plodding on. Left right unreceding on” (101). Top, base, and legs of the “hindtrunks” are linguistically outlined yet virtually not present, with the superimposed images of their absence supplemented by the -less suffix at the end of each word.

The effect of the constant “unsaying” of “worsening words” is therefore merely a

saying anew; a layering of the “said” images on top of each other so that they become blurry and dim, which causes them to move, exist and resist the very act of undoing. The word “dim” itself signifies a dual quality and colour of the images: it variably makes them both “grey” and “bleak,” as well as “blurry,” with all meanings present at once. So does the word “faint” which has, like many other images in Beckett, a strange internal-external condition: it emphasizes the shades’s being “not bright,” but also “feeble,” “about to lose consciousness,” and “lacking courage.”

The most significant instance of semantic layering in *Worstward Ho* is achieved through the variability of word classes and word order, the use of ellipses, a marked omission of punctuation, and by foregrounding abundant homonymy and polysemy. All of these are perhaps the most fruitful devices utilized by Beckett in *Worstward Ho*, and the ones that are the most generative of the text’s overall movement. Take, for instance, the following passage and its possible interpretations: “Head sunk on crippled hands. Clenched staring eyes. At in the dim void shades. One astand at rest” (84). Apart from the vagueness of meaning produced by deliberate elliptical omissions – “One [shade] astand [staring] at [the] rest” or “One [shade is] astand [and] at rest” – the words “at rest” can variably signal something in a state of repose, asleep, motionless, or even dead.

Additional layers of meaning are then gained by the consideration of the text’s intrinsic aural quality as a signifying device, including homophony, verbal emphasis necessitated by the lack of punctuation, and the surfacing textual rhythm. In terms of homophony, to mention but a few, the “seen” of Beckett’s text may well become “scene” (90), and “knowing” becomes equated with the persistent dull pain suggested by the word “gnawing” (100). In the sentence “Preying since first said on foresaid remains” (86), the word “preying” analogously coincides with its homophonous “praying,” and therefore affects the meaning of “remains” that can thus be understood as either “bones” or limbs on which a figure is “praying,” or indeed something “preying” on the “remains” of a carcass. Furthermore, the word “remains” can also be comprehended as a verb, resulting in yet another meaning of the sentence: “Preying, since first said, on [the] foresaid remains.” In such a case, an emphasis is required on the words “preying” and “foresaid,” in order to compensate for the absence of punctuation and to determine a fixed meaning. The outcome is a kind of multiple superimposition, where all the above – and indeed any other – possible

meanings unite in a kind of multilayered overall meaning, without the necessity of selecting one as the only "correct" option. Further uses of metaphorical or symbolic language ("dome" and "temple" (96) in describing the skull), allusion (concerning both the title and the text's more general reference to *King Lear*), alliteration ("The boots. Better worse bootless. Bare heels" [90]), rhymes ("Now for to say as worst they may only they only they" [93]) and other poetic devices lend Beckett's enigmatic narrative yet another dimension of possible significations.[25]

The near infinity of viable semantic permutations generated by *Worstward Ho* produces a powerful effect of superimposition. Once a written passage becomes subjectively reproduced in the reading process, it immediately results in an appropriate visual image which becomes superimposed with another as soon as a new distinct meaning is registered. In this sense, individual mental images layered on top of each other, with differences in their contours ranging from slight to considerable, produce a complexity of concurrently existing symbioses of meanings, resulting in Beckett's 'movement-writing'. The effect of the constant "unsaying" of "worsening words" is merely a saying anew; a layering of the "said" images on top of each other so that they become blurry and dim, which causes them to move, exist and resist the very act of undoing. The arising dynamics is precisely what develops in the reader the kind of Eisensteinian, cinematic perception which defies closure and singularity of meaning. Beckett's novel moves. It proceeds from the opening "on" to another opening "on" at the text's end, and on its endless journey worstward it urges the reader to participate: "Say on. Be said on" (81).

25 The allusion in the title is to Webster and Dekker's *Westward Hoe!* (1607), Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* (1885). The reference Beckett makes to Edgar's lines in Shakespeare's *King Lear* ("the worst is not, / So long as we can say 'This is the worst'") is also widely acknowledged. Ackerley and Gontarski 652.

Conclusion: “Saying Seen Again”

All I say cancels out, I’ll have said nothing.
[Samuel Beckett, “The Calmative”]

Advancing in the direction towards minimal verbal expression, the convoluted formal structures and subject matter of *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said,* and *Worstward Ho* signal the progressive disintegration of text and image. While the narrative and plot grow more and more elusive and obscure, these texts become increasingly perceptual and time-oriented – a compensation achieved via the aesthetic transposition of expressive devices from non-print media. The gradual deterioration of conventional structures of literary narrative is at least partially substituted for by the illusion of *ad hoc* perceptual representations eliciting an active response from the reader becoming listener becoming dramaturgist. Beckett's work is so constructed as to place the reader or viewer in the midst of the situation lived by his characters, by way of which the events recounted become experienced identically by both. Since everything in the trilogy is (re)produced by a mind, said within a mind, and seen with a mind's eye, the texts come close to functioning as impaired simulacra of recording/reproducing devices, allowing Beckett to explore from yet another perspective the mechanisms of expression and perception. The apparatus is in any case the ultimately unreliable *language*, which remains unreliable despite its aim to construct the illusion of momentary presence. All three texts of the late trilogy are linked by a shared thematic concern with the revival of the past in the present, with the evoked ideas of objects fallaciously attempting to substitute for the once existent objects themselves. This illusory substitution is in each case pursued through the crafted dictations of these memory fragments by the voice of an insubstantial narrator, and is designed to be internally visualised in a particular way.

In *Company*, the optimal condition for attentive listening is achieved through a partial perceptual isolation and the suppression of sight in the figure lying in the dark, a situation resembling the metaphorical blindness experienced by the radio listener. *Company*'s jumble of disconnected life narratives is thus equally aimed at Beckett's

immobile character and the reader, and the conjured-up visualisations are conspicuously cinematographic in their purported immediacy and colourfulness. This paradoxical sense of instantaneousness produced by the narrative's filmic rendering is emblematic of the entirety of Beckett's three texts, juxtaposing the naturally deficient human memory with the aimed-at factual reinstatement of past events exactly as they took place. Whereas, in *Company,* the narrator strives to restore the once lived moments 'verbatim,' thereby inscribing the conditions pertaining to a radiophonic voice into the text, it is in the following two novels that the techniques from the field of cinematography are more innovatively transposed into the material of Beckett's prose.

In *Ill Seen Ill Said*, Beckett already abandons the explicating voice to the benefit of an *in medias res* cinematic narrative that induces more clearly the impression of a monochromatic silent film in the making. The voice of the text is already identifiable merely on the basis of its prominent vocal qualities as it verbally directs, cuts, and pieces together the 'moving pictures' of a ghostly woman figure. Here, Beckett explores the mechanisms of expression and perception within the symbiotic coexistence of the voice and its visual counterpart. The “ill seen” fragments of memory as “ill said” by the narrator/director are in reality an inconspicuous simulation of the actual processes of (ill-)perception: the evasive qualities of both the oral and the visual aspects of the text induce the readers to equate their perception with mis-comprehension. The narrator's continual self-defeating reformulations of the remembered events fracture, disrupt, and 'cut' the action, instead of constructing an unimpaired whole of a realistic representation that would permit the desired resurrection of the past.

The language of *Worstward Ho* is already transformed into a kind of kinematic/cinematic medium as it directly absorbs into its structure the vocal and the visual elements, resulting in the development of Beckett's elaborated 'movement-writing'. The semantic superimposition of a multitude of verbal and syntactic meanings produced by Beckett's multivalent text demands an ever-attentive cognitive response from the reader which is directly responsible for its 'motion'. With every instance of a subjective reading of a particular section of *Worstward Ho* – whether a single word, a phrase, a paragraph, or the whole novel – an appropriate initial image is instantly visualised, and is in turn superimposed with another one as soon as a new distinct meaning of the section is

registered. Thus, the individual 'read' images become mentally layered on top of each other, by which the complexity of concurrently existing symbioses of unfixed meanings is achieved. The reader's effort to impose a meaningful order on the perpetually altered permutations of words and images generated by the text causes the almost indeterminable shade-relics of several ancient memories to move and blur in defiance to any fixed meaning or closure. As the narrator attempts to “unsay” the said images with the use of language, what he achieves instead is merely a saying afresh, causing them to move, persist, and exist.

This thesis, whose major focus has been the transposition of media-specific elements derived from the expressive contexts of radio and cinema into prose, has attempted to provide a brief overview of Beckett's interest in, and involvement with, these two media. In doing so, it aimed to demonstrate how some of Beckett's most complex writing was, both despite and because of the great degree of its fragmentariness, enriched by his implementation of textual devices forging audio-visual perceptions. In its pursuit of the proposed “newness” of Beckett's “forms for the novel and drama,” the thesis suggested new critical vocabulary directly based on the structures of Beckett's trilogy texts in order to elucidate their individual new narrative techniques. In *Company*, the act of narrating was metaphorically described as 'devicing,' thus denoting the outsets of Beckett's strategy of incorporating intermedial translations into his prose. *Ill Seen Ill Said* was analysed, in concordance with its goal of imitating a filmic representation, as a series of consecutive camera 'shots' in an imaginary montage. In *Worstward Ho,* the notion of the 'on-narrator' was coined in order to describe the process by which Beckett's meta-narrative comes to mirror the concurrent processes of hearing, saying, and reading; the narrator's direct identification not only with the sounding voices that dictate his internal visual perceptions, but also with the reader. In this and other instances of simultaneous signification and accumulation of superimposed meanings the general narrative strategy was equated with 'cinemato-graphy', Beckett's literal 'movement-writing'.

In following the development within the trilogy, the thesis has attempted to outline the progression from the use of intermediality as a theme and expressly 'deviced' narrative technique in *Company*, as a mode of narration mediating the cinematic reality in *Ill Seen Ill Said* and, finally, the treatment of writing and language as themselves medially multiplex,

combining visuality, aurality, and meaning as material in *Worstward Ho.* Taken together, the multiplicity of these “new forms” and techniques employed in Beckett's *Nohow On* trilogy serves the impossible task of reinstitution of the past in the present, of “say[ing] seen again” (97).

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