

## Beckett's intermedial bodies: Remediating theatre through radio

*Pim Verhulst*

When Billie Whitelaw was rehearsing *Footfalls* in 1976, she asked Beckett: 'Am I dead?', to which he replied cryptically: 'Let's just say you're not quite there' (Whitelaw, 1995, 143). This equivocal presence of the body in the play recalls a precedent from twenty years before, namely the character Miss Fitt in the radio play *All That Fall*, who tells Maddy Rooney: 'I suppose the truth is I am not there, Mrs Rooney, just not really there at all' (Beckett, 2009a, 14). Though written two decades apart, both instances refer to the Jung lecture that Beckett attended at the London Tavistock Clinic in 1935, about a girl not having been 'properly born' (Knowlson, 1996, 176). In addition to this inter/intratextual link relating to a psychological disorder, the notion of 'not being there' also connects *Footfalls* and *All That Fall* in relation to the respective media for which they were devised. When Beckett started writing for the radio, he clearly distinguished it from theatre: the one was for voices, the other for bodies. However, a convergence soon began taking place in which the body of Beckett's theatre became gradually reconceptualised under the 'disembodying' influence of the radio medium. Notwithstanding his earlier disavowal, the body is a near continuous presence in the early radio drama, though a complicated and ambiguous one at that. Starting with *All That Fall*, then moving on to *Embers* and, briefly, to the other radio plays, this chapter argues that Beckett's experience with the medium in the late 1950s and the early 1960s 'remediated' his approach to the body in his late theatre, with *Footfalls*, written in the mid-1970s, acting as the culmination point.

### Remediation, intermediality and embodiment

Originally, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin coined the term 'remediation' to counteract the dominant 'modernist myth of the new' (1998, back cover),

according to which digital technologies in particular were thought to break free from older media by setting new aesthetic and cultural principles. Yet, as Bolter and Grusin have shown, using a wide selection of examples from computer games to digital photography, film, television, virtual reality and the World Wide Web, such ‘new’ media actually incorporate and repurpose older ones. Radio is conspicuously absent from their discussion, so there is all the more reason to foreground it here. In spite of early theorists like Rudolf Arnheim, who saw in radio the potential to create a new aesthetic experience for its reliance on sound alone, a large share of its artistic output remained heavily indebted to the conventions of theatre, while at the same time the medium was remarkably receptive to prose and poetry. As such, the ‘new’ medium of radio did not break free from theatre, or its sister genres, but rather assimilated them to a certain extent. This is not to say, however, that ‘remediation’ is a one-way process or dynamic. On the contrary, older and more established media change under the influence of new ones as well, which is what Bolter and Grusin call ‘retrograde remediation’ (1999, 147). In fact, as Julian Murphet – in *Multimedia Modernism* (2009) – and David Trotter – in *Literature in the First Media Age* (2013) – have argued, it is precisely this responsiveness to the cultural codes of new technologies that determines the robustness as well as the longevity of a given medium. Murphet and Trotter apply this logic to literature produced in the period of high modernism, when it was forced to establish itself as a medium under pressure from telegraphy, telephony, photography, cinema, radio broadcasting, and so on, but the same holds true – perhaps even more so – for literature of the post-war period, when authors such as Beckett became increasingly multimedial.

Whereas a term like ‘remediation’ operates on the generic level of media, to state for example that post-war theatre was remediated by radio (as this chapter aims to do), a more appropriate term to study the process on the level of individual authors and their work would be ‘intermediality’, which comes in many forms and guises. In Irina O. Rajewsky’s literary definition of the term, ‘the given media-product’ not merely ‘thematizes’ or ‘evokes’, but more specifically ‘imitates elements or structures of another, conventionally distinct medium through the use of its own media-specific means’ (Rajewsky, 2005, 53). While these ‘elements’ need not be structural, Rajewsky’s interpretation does seem to be a primarily formal one. In this sense, Werner Wolf’s definition is more inclusive: ‘Intermediality [...] applies in its broadest sense to any transgression of boundaries between media and thus is concerned with “heteromedial” relations between different semiotic complexes or between different parts of a semiotic complex’ (Wolf, 2008, 252). Chiel Kattenbelt, working specifically in theatre and performance, importantly emphasises the innovative potential of intermediality when he describes it as encapsulating ‘those co-relations between different media that

result in a *redefinition* of the media that are influencing each other, which in turn leads to a *refreshed perception*' (Kattenbelt, 2008, 25; emphasis added). While in theory, at least, most definitions allow for a broad application, in practice intermedial research in literary studies is often confined to visual manifestations of artists' expression as opposed to acoustic ones, and much the same holds true for the field of Beckett studies.

A notable exception is Ulrika Maude's *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (2009), which devotes a chapter to 'Hearing Beckett', but Anna McMullan's monumental study, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (2010), in particular, deserves special mention here. For McMullan, 'the bodies of Beckett's late drama are intermedial', because 'Beckett uses characteristic properties of presenting or projecting the body in one medium, and uses them to refigure the possibilities and properties of another' (McMullan, 2010, 56). 'In the radiophonic medium', McMullan points out, 'the body is not defined by the visual body image, but is evoked through language, the voice, music and sound effects, and it therefore depends on the imagination of the listener to come into existence' (67–8). McMullan goes so far as to state that 'Beckett's experiences of radio undoubtedly affected his later presentation of the body in the visual media and on stage', in that 'the organic body is dispersed' (69). As such, Beckett's radio plays could be seen as 'an experimental laboratory' to explore different configurations of corporeality (77), which invites the conclusion that 'his experience with radio may have encouraged Beckett to test the boundaries of embodiment in the theatre' (107). I fully agree with this claim, but whereas McMullan dedicates separate insightful chapters to embodiment in theatre, mime, television, radio and film, the connections between these different genres and media are left for the reader to infer. To fully grasp the intermedial nature of Beckett's work, and understand how his theatre became remediated by radio, a more integrative approach is needed, which this chapter aims to provide.

### *All That Fall*

On 27 August 1957, when Beckett heard about a planned staging of *All That Fall*, he insisted in a letter to his American publisher, Barney Rosset, that it was 'specifically a radio play, or rather radio text, for voices, not bodies'. He strictly separated it from stage drama, adding that *All That Fall*

is no more theatre than End-Game [*sic*] is radio and to 'act' it is to kill it. Even the reduced visual dimension it will receive from the simplest and most static of readings [...] will be destructive of whatever quality it may have and which depends on the whole thing's coming out of the dark. (Beckett, 2014, 63; emphasis in original)

In the same letter, he also expressed a mutually exclusive view on theatre and television when he declined a filmed version of *Act Without Words I*, insisting that ‘this last extremity of human meat – or bones – be there, thinking and stumbling and sweating, under our noses’, not at the remove of a screen. Beckett’s aim, at this point, was clearly to ‘keep our genres more or less distinct, or extricate them from the confusion that has them where they are’, and if we could not manage that, ‘we might as well go home and lie down’ (Beckett, 2014, 63–4). While this comment is often construed as definitive proof that Beckett was opposed to intermediality and adaptation, it is better served by being interpreted in its historical context, made at a moment just before he started experimenting with different genres or media on an unprecedented scale, and learned a great deal from those experiences. Beckett’s remark about *Act Without Words I* already shows that he associated not just radio but also television with a loss of physicality, though not quite with complete disembodiment.

One could be forgiven for wanting to stage *All That Fall*, since of all Beckett’s radio plays it is still closest in kind to theatre. Beckett seems to admit as much when he describes his second script for the medium, *Embers*, to Rosset as an ‘attempt to write for radio and not merely exploit its technical possibilities’ (23 November 1958; 2014, 181). The body has an essential, though somewhat complicated, role in it – despite Beckett’s claim to the contrary. The main character, Maddy Rooney, is anything but bodiless, famously and unflatteringly described as ‘[t]wo hundred pounds of unhealthy fat’ (Beckett, 2009a, 23), and a ‘hysterical old hag ... destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and churchgoing and fat and rheumatism’ (5). Her weight makes her move in a slow shuffling and panting manner, so her bodily condition provides a constant source of sound throughout the radio play. As she tells the station master, Mr Barrell, Maddy herself would much prefer to lie stretched out in bed, ‘wasting slowly, painlessly away, [...] till in the end you wouldn’t see me under the blankets any more than a board’ (12). One way of describing her would thus be as a woman trapped in a body, desiring to be pure voice, or, as Maddy herself puts it ruefully: ‘oh to be in atoms, in atoms! [*Frenziedly.*] ATOMS!’ (8) This is a good approach to the radiophonic body’s fate, partialised and broadcast over the airwaves as a disembodied voice, only to be reassembled and reconstituted in the imagination of the listener. Maddy’s body is not a conventional one, stably anchored in a tangible physical reality. Instead, it is constantly abstracted into different shapes, forms and fragments that are to be envisioned acoustically.

At first, Miss Fitt perceives her as ‘a big pale blur’ (14) – ‘une espèce de grosse tache pâle’ in Beckett’s translation, *Tous ceux qui tombent*, which he made together with Robert Pinget (Beckett, 1957, 34). In French, Maddy

even refers to herself as ‘une balle de son’ (23) when Mr Slocum wants to know how he should go about hoisting her into his limousine – ‘As if I were a bale, Mr Slocum’ (Beckett, 2009a, 9), she answers. While the phrase is certainly an accurate and idiomatic equivalent of ‘bale’ (hay, wheat, grain, etc.), literally ‘balle de son’ sounds the same as ‘ball of sound’ in French. Also in that language, the pun takes on an added meaning when Jerry returns to Dan an item he supposedly lost in the train or on the platform: ‘On dirait comme une petite balle. (*Un temps.*) Et cependant ce n’est pas une balle’ (Beckett, 1957, 75). Like Dan’s mysterious object, Maddy occasionally manifests herself in the acoustic storyworld of the radio play as a ‘ball(e)’, emitting sound, and yet she is not quite a ‘ball(e)’, also retaining the fragmented remnants of a physical body. This metaphorical pun puts Maddy in direct kinship with the narrator of *The Unnamable*, who refers to itself as ‘a big talking ball’ (Beckett, 2010, 16) – ‘une grande boule parlante’ in Beckett’s self-translation (1953, 37) – as just one of the many forms it takes.

Maddy’s complex embodiment in *All That Fall* partly stems from the fact that she is not only being perceived but also acts as a perceiver, which requires her to have some kind of material or physical manifestation other than her voice, however rudimentary. In what may be construed as an aside to the listener, she points out:

The entire scene, the hills, the plain, the racecourse with its miles and miles of white rails and three red stands, the pretty little wayside station, even you yourselves, yes, I mean it, and over all the clouding blue, I see it all, I stand here and see it all with eyes ... [*The voice breaks.*] ... through eyes ... (Beckett, 2009a, 17)

Listeners can only experience the storyworld of *All That Fall* because Maddy provides them with visual information about it. In this sense, she is the focalising entity or ‘eye’ of the radio play. After getting knocked over by a passing van, she even compares herself to a sticky, and now smudged or occluded, eyeball: ‘a big fat jelly’ flopping ‘out of a bowl’, ‘a great big slop thick with grit and dust and flies’ that needs to be ‘scooped up with a shovel’ (5), later to be compounded with Dan’s comment that she is ‘quivering like a blancmange’ (21) – a wobbly kind of gelatinous dessert.

In addition to an eyeball, Maddy is also described as an ear, for which we need to turn to the French translation of the radio play again. When Dan complains that his wife does not listen to him, Maddy refutes ‘No, no, I am agog, tell me all’ (2009a, 26), rendered as ‘Non non, je suis tout ouïe’ (Beckett, 1957, 64) in French – i.e., ‘I am all ears’, another pun like ‘balle de son’/‘ball of sound’. As much as she is the focaliser of the radio play, channelling visual information, she also functions as what Bartosz Lutostański

calls an ‘auricularizer’ (2016, 120–1), that is, the instance responsible for perceiving and mediating acoustic information to the listener. Due to Maddy’s double status as audiovisual perceiver and perceived in the medium of radio, her embodiment in *All That Fall* is variable, constantly shifting from a blur, a ball of sound and an eyeball to an ear. However fragmented she may appear at times, Maddy always maintains a rudiment of physicality and therefore does not fully epitomise Beckett’s claim about radio being a medium for voices, not bodies.

The only character in *All That Fall* who does embody Beckett’s take on the medium is Miss Fitt, who, as opposed to the corpulent Maddy, is described as ‘just a bag of bones’ in need of ‘building up’ (Beckett, 2009a, 15). As an ethereal character made up almost entirely of mere voice, emphasised by her high-pitched tone in the BBC recording, Miss Fitt approximates Beckett’s view of radiophonic characters as voices emerging from the darkness much more closely, a status that is consolidated through her epithet ‘the dark Miss Fitt’ (14, 16). She explains her peculiar condition to Maddy as follows:

I see, hear, smell, and so on, I go through the usual motions, but my heart is not in it, Mrs Rooney, my heart is in none of it. Left to myself, with no one to check me, I would soon be flown ... home. (14)

This is exactly what happens to Miss Fitt in the radio play. Left to her own devices by the other characters waiting on the platform and being no longer invested in their conversation, she suddenly disappears from the soundscape, without making an audible exit. Even more so than Maddy Rooney, it is the character of Miss Fitt who challenges theatrical performance of *All That Fall*. She would need to be shown leaving the stage in some form or other, while she simply dissolves into thin air on the radio. Because Miss Fitt is a relatively minor character, this obstacle did not deter theatre practitioners from wanting to stage the radio play, as appears from the dozens of permission requests preserved in the archive of Les Éditions de Minuit at IMEC and the Grove Press Records at Syracuse University, which Beckett nearly always declined, unless it was to be a public reading. To actively counter such requests, he placed the body centre stage in his next script for the medium, exploiting the affordances of radio in such a way that theatre adaptation would be nearly impossible.

### *Embers*

*Embers* revolves entirely around the question of what is real and what is not, with a character similar to Miss Fitt now having a much more vital role to play. Henry’s wife, Ada, is supposedly sitting next to him on the

strand, near the water's edge, but the text as well as the recording provide conflicting information as to whether she is really there. The drafts of the radio play clearly show Beckett was struggling to convey Ada's ontological state, so that (re)writing truly becomes a means of coming to grips with the medium's particulars. In the manuscript, upon joining Henry, she says: 'I have brought the rug' (Beckett, 2022, EM, 09r). Beckett crossed out the sentence and replaced it with another one – 'Raise yourself up till I slip it <sup>my shawl</sup> under you', which is also how it appears in the published text (2009a, 39) – but the manuscript also contained a realistic background story for the shawl, which Beckett again cancelled: 'Is that the old scarf I brought back that time from Lucerne?' (Beckett, 2022, EM, 12r) Even though the item of clothing is eventually retained and Ada is apparently able to slip it under Henry's bottom, devising a real-life alibi for its provenance would have anchored it – and by extension its carrier, Ada – more firmly in the physical world of Henry. A straight-up confirmation of her presence would have been the line 'I'm glad I put on my jaegers', which Beckett deleted and immediately rephrased as 'I hope you put on yr. jaegers' (EM, 09r; 2009a, 39), thus reassigning corporeality from Ada to Henry. The passage was further altered in the second typescript with two additions: the direction 'No sound as she sits' and the comment 'Chilly enough I imagine' (ET2, 03r; 2009a, 39). Ada seating herself noiselessly, as opposed to Henry's getting up to the chafing sound of moving pebbles, and the fact that she needs to guess at the temperature, place her in a different performative space from that of her husband's.

Other genetic variants illustrate Beckett's doubt about where to situate her and how to convey this acoustically on the radio. Ada's original reactions to Addie's music and riding lessons, as imagined by Henry, were: 'You are silent today' and 'What are you thinking of?' (Beckett, 2022, ET1, 05r). Beckett cancelled them on the second typescript, trying 'Poor Addie' (ET2, 05r) instead, only to reinstate the original responses on the third typescript (ET3, 06r). Ada's different replies invite conflicting interpretations: in the first, she is with Henry on the beach, not privy to his thoughts; in the second, she is located inside his head, able to witness the scenes as they play out in Henry's imagination and sympathise with the plight of their daughter. That Beckett ultimately wished to keep such hints subtle is evident from his revision to the line spoken by Ada when Henry returns from the edge of the water to her side: 'Don't stand there ~~looking at me~~ <sup>staring</sup>' (ET2, 05r). When she repeats the sentence after Henry's second trip to the surf, Beckett also revised it, this time on the third typescript of the radio play: 'Don't stand there gaping. Sit down' (ET3, 07r). Regardless of whether he is staring or gaping, Henry no longer makes eye contact with Ada directly, thus further complicating her presence.

As with *All That Fall*, revision continues in the French translation, *Cendres*, where Ada literally tells Henry to stop looking at his ghosts: ‘Ne reste pas là à voir tes fantômes. Assis’ (Beckett, 1960, 57). While Beckett preserves the ambiguity of the sentence, in that it could refer to any figment of Henry’s imagination – be it the Addie lessons or Ada herself – it hints more openly at the possibility that his wife might be a spectral apparition. As if to sharpen the polarity with her husband, Beckett modifies other sentences in the translation that emphasise Henry’s corporeality, for example when the reason for his frequent walks to the water – ‘Stretch my old bones’ (2009a, 42) – becomes ‘Remuer ma vieille viande’ (1960, 57). Henry is thus associated with living flesh, his wife with death. Such revisions are completely in line with Beckett’s characterisation of Ada on the third typescript of *Embers*, which contains a number of handwritten additions that were used in the BBC production but have never been included in any published text of the radio play. For example, he gave her a ‘low remote <sup>expressionless</sup> voice throughout’ and he also lengthened her verb forms from ‘they’re’ to ‘they are’ or ‘didn’t’ to ‘did not’ (Beckett, 2022, ET3, 04r, 07r). Beckett’s decision to make her voice sound dull and drawn out lends a post-mortem feel to it, as if speaking from beyond the grave, whereas Henry’s has a more typically conversational and vivid quality.

Eventually, most of the textual – in the published version – and acoustic evidence – in the recording – reinforce the impression that Ada is not a real person but a ghost, imagined by Henry. Still, Beckett regarded this ambiguity as essential to the radio play’s experience, more so in the broadcast than on the page. As he explained in an interview with the magazine *L’Avant-Scène*: ‘La parole sort du noir ... *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’ (qtd. in Mignon, 1964, 8). Even when his trusted director, Roger Blin, proposed a theatre adaptation of *Embers*, Beckett refused permission for the same reason: ‘when you listen, you don’t know if Ada exists or not, whether she only exists in the imagination of the character Henry’ (qtd. in Blin, 1994, 310). Nonetheless, Blin had devised a cunning strategy to deal with this problem visually:

I think I would have had a kind of pebble beach. Cork pebbles, or something light, but all the pebbles mounted on a pivot. And at a particular moment, as Ada comes in, the pebbles would have turned, would have shown a dark underside, like a kind of shadow that spreads out and lays down beside the man. (310)

Yet despite Blin’s efforts, and those of others who suggested working with screens or even in the dark, Beckett maintained adamantly that the ambiguity of radiophonic embodiment, and its blurring of boundaries between the



spectral and the physical, was impossible to achieve adequately on the stage, with any attempt at showing eventually revealing or disambiguating.

Judging from the examples of *All That Fall* and *Embers*, in his first two radio plays at least, Beckett fell back on somewhat clichéd representations of the body and the voice that historically trace back to the Victorian ghost story tradition and early-day recordings on wax cylinders or gramophone records, as well as to the first radio transmissions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Kittler, 1999, 12–13; Sterne, 2003, 8; Sterne, 2004, 303–8). As radio, film and sound historians have shown, ‘the disembodied voice has long had the potential to discomfit listeners because it foregrounds the unnatural separation of the voice from the body’ (McCracken, 2002, 184) – an effect also known as ‘acousmatics’, that is, when the source of a sound cannot be visually determined (Chion, 1994; Schaeffer, 2017).<sup>1</sup> Whereas the more suspenseful programmes thankfully capitalised on this effect, ‘radio producers worked hard in the 1920s and 1930s to naturalise radio’s voices through publicity that sought to embody stars in photos and personal stories’, by making use of the period’s thriving magazine and film culture (McCracken, 2002, 184). By the late 1950s, it had become typical for radio dramatists like Beckett – but also for Dylan Thomas in *Under Milk Wood* (1954), and Harold Pinter in *A Slight Ache* (1958) – to creatively repurpose a decades-old cliché of sound recording, and use it to create a gripping listening experience that replicated the epistemological and ontological uncertainties of modernist and postmodernist literature. Today, such disembodied and ghostly evocations on the radio are mostly confined to period or genre pieces such as *The Haunting of M. R. James* (BBC Radio 4, 2018), which is based on the life of a Victorian writer of ghost stories and is set in the nineteenth century. Beckett, too, gradually abandoned it towards the late 1950s and the early 1960s.

Beckett slowly but surely diminished the physicality of his radio plays, concentrating ever more on non-somatic elements such as voice and music. The culmination of this process was *Cascando*, which Clas Zilliacus has called ‘a sequel to *Esquisse [radiophonique]* in the sense that it cuts all ties with the external world’ and conveys ‘pure, mental matter without spatial dimensions and associations’ (Zilliacus, 1976, 122). It thus seems as if Beckett had succeeded in writing the body out of his radio drama completely by the early 1960s, making it a matter of voices entirely. However, as Llewellyn Brown points out, ‘in the context of radio, if the body is evacuated in the sense of an imaginary existence, it persists in its enigmatic connection to the voice’ (Brown, 2016, 278). Still, with *Cascando*, Beckett had gone as far as he could in his reduction of the body to a voice, thereby exhausting the affordances of the medium in this regard. While the body would never be quite expelled from his theatrical work, it would undergo a process of

radical change in the decades that followed, in which its relationship to the voice came to play a part as well.

### *Happy Days, Play and Eh Joe*

Critics have long noted how the tape recorder in *Krapp's Last Tape* was inspired by Beckett's visits to the BBC studios in Paris and his meeting with Donald McWhinnie (Knowlson, 1996, 444). In the context of the present argument, however, more important than this intermedial crossover between theatre and radio is that *Krapp* continues Beckett's experimentation with immobilised, static or malfunctioning bodies from before in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. Like Hamm, Krapp spends most of the play seated at a dimly lit table, virtually chained to a piece of technology that has become an extension of his body and mind.

While less obviously technological at first glance, Beckett's next play, *Happy Days*, is more radical in this respect, famously interring its protagonist in the sand from the waist down in the first act, and from the neck down in the second, forcing her to face the blistering heat of the sun head-on. This position significantly limits Winnie's freedom of movement, causing her to gesture in the measured, puppet-like angles of an automaton peeping out of a music box or some similar contraption. That puppetry and mechanics were on Beckett's mind while writing the play is clear from his letter to Barbara Bray of 10 October 1960:

I put the tip of my little finger into the imbedded female solo machine, to the extent of writing a few stage directions and a scrap of dialogue [...]. Mais le coeur n'y est pas, seul le bout du petit doigt [But the heart is not in it, only the tip of my little finger]. (Beckett, 2014, 365)

It thus seems that, under the technological influence of radio, *Happy Days*, as the play unfolds, becomes less and less about the body, which disappears underground, and more and more about the voice, the source of which – Winnie's protruding head – is still discernible on stage. If the transition from a theatrical body to a more radiophonic one is to be pinpointed anywhere in Beckett's drama, then *Happy Days* perhaps best represents that moment. This is not to say that the body becomes superfluous, however. After all, theatre is a visual medium, spectacle being crucial to its experience. Accordingly, in 1968, when the BBC's Head of Drama, Martin Esslin, asked Beckett for permission to broadcast the play, his request was denied: 'To my sorrow I have to say no to Happy Days on radio. I won't weary you with my reasons. You know them well. I am absolutely convinced of their cogency. I have not the right to renege on my work' (Beckett, 2016, 108).

Despite Beckett's refusal, it is interesting to note his changing conception of Winnie over time. In 1962, he wrote to director George Devine: 'I don't think yellow is right for Winnie's bodice, with so much of it about'. Instead, he suggested: 'The best colour here is the one that makes her most visible and enhances her fleshiness, perhaps pink' (Beckett, 2014, 499). In 1983, commenting to Nancy Illig about a recent Italian production of the play at the Teatro Mercadante in Naples, Winnie becomes almost ethereal:

Don't much like the hat. Too solid. Winnie is birdlike. Ihr Reich ist in der Luft. If she were not held in this way she would simply float up into the blue. She is all fragility, flimsiness, delicacy. This should be suggested (discreetly) whenever possible – costume, gesture, speech. This weightlessness. In the production I directed in London I established a recurrent Haltung of the arms (e.g. when she turns to the bag) suggesting wings. She poises over the bag. Hat is [in] keeping. Flimsy, lacy, feathery. (Beckett, 2016, 608; emphasis in original)

As these contrasting remarks about the same character confirm, over the course of twenty years, Beckett's image of Winnie had evolved from a corpulent one similar to Maddy, who condemns the 'cursed corset' she is wearing and feels she is 'seething out of my dirty old pelt' (Beckett, 2009a, 8), to one more in line with the insubstantiality of Miss Fitt, who 'would soon be flown ... home' when not kept in check (14). It is widely known that Beckett revised his early plays in light of his later minimalist aesthetics, for example by pruning the lines or by adding formal patterns, so it could be that *Happy Days* is affected by that same revisionist tendency. But the influence of the radiophonic body on its later reconceptualisation in the theatre may also account for the shift in Winnie's stage presence, as outlined here.

*Play*, one of Beckett's most intermedial works for theatre, continues his exploration of dramatic embodiment. In conceptual terms, it follows almost logically from *Happy Days*, limiting corporeal representation to just the heads of two women and one man, who in turn appear ghostly because of the urn-like vases from which they emerge: '*Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of the urns*' (Beckett, 2009b, 53). Whereas this stage image appears to derive from the visual arts rather than radio, it does build on the aforementioned process of disembodiment. Beckett also accelerates the pace of delivery, reducing the characters from real-life beings to mechanical mouthpieces for the conveyance of speech – an effect he first tried out in the French recording of *Cascando*, so it is again mediated by radio technology.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the voice becomes even more foregrounded in *Play* than it was in *Happy Days*, to the detriment of the body, but the speech and the source from which it emerges are not yet dissociated. Before Beckett explored this next step on the stage, he first experimented with it in the television play

*Eh Joe*, which is not surprising if we keep in mind his strict separation of theatre from television in the earlier mentioned letter to Rosset.

As opposed to the theatre, which Beckett associated with corporeality, the televisual medium, like radio, immediately acquires a spectral quality as well. The voice of the woman, '[l]ow, distinct, remote, little colour, absolutely steady rhythm, slightly slower than normal' (Beckett, 2009a, 114), which Beckett further described in a letter to Alan Schneider as '[a] dead voice in his [Joe's] head' that should be 'whispered' (Beckett, 2016, 22), recycles Ada's 'expressionless' and deathlike intonation from *Embers*, while Henry's 'listening look' – again Beckett in correspondence with Schneider (Beckett, 1998, 203) – emulates the intentness of Krapp's auditory regard. The voice in *Krapp's Last Tape* was obviously a recorded one, historically originating from Krapp but presently played back from the tape, yet the voice in *Eh Joe* does not have a visually discernible source, at least not at first. It gradually appears to emerge from Joe's imagination, though clearly it is not his proper voice. So, after being disembodied, it is then re-embodied by Joe in a process that turns the physical human frame into a radiophonic and magnetophonic medium, capable of both relaying as well as replaying voices from a different and remote – even deceased – source. As a result, the voice, though 'Other', is also his.

After focusing on prose in the late 1960s, except for the 'dramaticule' *Come and Go*, Beckett would continue to investigate the theatrical potential of his intermedial findings in the early 1970s, with a series of plays that is often considered to be another 'trilogy': *Not I*, *That Time* and *Footfalls*.

### *Not I, That Time and Footfalls*

The first, *Not I*, builds on the stage images of *Happy Days* and *Play* in that it further diminishes corporeality from a trunk and severed heads to merely a mouth, but the voice and the body, however fragmented, are still conjoined, suggesting that the physical presence of a Mouth is needed for there to be a voice in the theatre. By letting Mouth persistently deny that she is the provenance of the monologue, Beckett subverts in language what to spectators must seem visually incontrovertible. The second figure present with her on stage does not seem to emanate the sound either. Instead, it assumes the radiophonic listening function of Krapp and Henry, possibly as part of Mouth's split psyche, which is suggested by the name Auditor. On the one hand, *That Time* appears to take a step back from *Not I* by reintroducing a face suspended in mid-air; on the other hand, it represents the first time that Beckett dislodges or dissociates the voice from the body in his theatre, later to be repeated in *Rockaby*. As the opening stage directions of *That*

*Time* make clear, 'voices A B C are his own', but instead of originating from him directly they are 'coming to him from both sides and above' (Beckett, 2009b, 99). In what is a noteworthy difference from *Eh Joe*, the voice belongs to the protagonist himself, not a woman assailing him with '[m]ental thuggee' (115). As a result, *That Time* feels slightly less disembodied than *Eh Joe*, although we may well read the female voice as originating in the mind of Joe, who is physically present on the screen, so Beckett is clearly trying out different, though related, constellations across various media. Another novel feature, both a televisual and a radiophonic one, is that Beckett allows the use of pre-recorded audio tracks. According to the 'Note' about the three voices that precedes the text of *That Time*, 'the switch from one to another must be clearly faintly perceptible', but when the 'threefold source and context prove insufficient to produce this effect it should be assisted mechanically (e.g. threefold pitch)' (97).

Perhaps the most innovative example in this regard is presented by *Footfalls*. As with *Embers* and Ada's presence, the main ambiguity of the play hinges on the question whether the woman pacing up and down the stage while talking to herself and her mother is real. Is she physically present and the mother a figment of her imagination, or is it the other way around, as suggested by John Calder, who pithily summarised *Footfalls* as 'a play about an old woman about to die and be forgotten and who persuades herself that her aborted daughter has grown to middle age and will live to remember her' (qtd. in Campbell, 1998, 97). Who, indeed, is the ghost in the play? If it is the invisible mother, her physicality is only manifested through her voice, which, as we have learned from *Embers* and *Eh Joe*, does not suffice to corroborate embodiment – at least not on radio and television. By disconnecting the voice from her body, Beckett picks up where he left off with *Eh Joe*, but he also goes one step further by ambiguating the mother's presence, whereas the woman in the television play was clearly dead. Amy, by contrast, is visible, but this does not guarantee her physicality. The lighting of the play, 'dim, strongest at floor level, less on body, least on head' (Beckett, 2009b, 109), obscures her bodily presence to the extent that she almost disappears or fades into the dark background – a visual representation which is not that different from the solution proposed by Blin for the staging of *Embers*, which Beckett found unsatisfactory at the time.

Most interesting, at least in connection to radio, is the play's use of sound. As Beckett stipulates in the stage directions, there should be a 'clearly audible rhythmic tread' (Beckett, 2009b, 109) to May's pacing. She listens to her footsteps and counts them; she 'must hear the feet, however faint they fall', because 'the motion alone is not enough' (111). The sound of her steps confirms May's existence to herself, but it is not an objective marker of corporeality for the audience, who might be privy to the imagination of the

girl or that of her mother, and hear the steps as filtered through their subjective perceptions. While making sound still functioned as a certain marker of physical presence in *Embers*, distinguishing Henry from Ada, it no longer does so unambiguously in *Footfalls* – and neither does being visible. The senses, being exposed to different forms of materiality and ephemerality that blend into each other, are no longer to be trusted, and this ambiguity is nicely reflected in the different visual representations of May/Amy in various performances: a wraith-like crone in the original 1976 Royal Court Theatre production (Billie Whitelaw), a grey-haired woman of middle age in the 2001 Gate Theatre/RTÉ version for *Beckett on Film* (Susan Fitzgerald), and a faintly spectral girl, dressed in white, for the 2015 revival of the play at the Royal Court Theatre (Lisa Dwan).

It thus seems that, twenty years after Beckett distinguished theatre from radio in terms of embodiment and vocality, he proved his younger self wrong and reneged on that division with *Footfalls* in the mid-1970s, a theatrical play that accumulated his past experience with technological media. Whereas he previously held spectral embodiment to be the exclusive prerogative of radio (and television), destroyed by any attempt at performance, in *Footfalls* we see him experimenting with it on the stage and thereby pushing the boundaries of his own theatrical preconceptions. It is perhaps *the* play where Beckett's rethinking of theatre through the incorporeal influence of radio comes full circle and achieves its most powerful dramatic expression – Miss Fitt, by way of Ada, having intermedially metamorphosed into Amy/May. Though not completely disembodied, Beckett's late theatre is 're-embodied' in the process, as Anna McMullan calls it (2010, 4). From a relatively straightforward and conventional representation of physicality in the early plays, we move on from a metaphorical kind of embodiment in the radio drama, where sound and voice serve as acoustic proxies, to arrive at the 'metonymic embodiment' that McMullan identifies in the late plays (111). It is almost impossible to separate the real from the ideal, the physical from the immaterial, or as Erik Tønning observes: 'In *Not I, That Time* and *Footfalls*, a fundamentally static image became a focus of Protean redefinitions: the spectators are constantly being challenged in these plays to reconsider what it is we think we see' (Tønning, 2007, 166). Except for *Breath*, perhaps, which for that reason Sozita Goudouna singles out in her study of *Anti-Theatricality and the Visual Arts* (2018), Beckett never completely abandons the physical body on stage. As such, even 'the late plays exploit the specificity of theatre' (McMullan, 2010, 107), although that specificity is constantly interrogated in the light of other dramatic media such as radio. The result of this intermedial dynamic is Beckett's radical remediation of the theatrical body, after its being shattered and dissolved over the airwaves.

## Notes

- 1 The term ‘acousmatics’ was first used by Pierre Schaeffer in the context of electro-acoustic music or *musique concrète* (*Traité des objets musicaux*, 1966), and then further developed by Michel Chion in relation to film sound (*Le son au cinéma*, 1985).
- 2 For a more detailed study of *Play*’s indebtedness to the visual arts, in particular sculpture, see Beloborodova and Verhulst (2019); for more information on the intermedial relationship between *Cascando* and *Play*, see Beloborodova and Verhulst (2020). See also Nicholas Johnson, Chapter 11 in this volume, on the author’s experimental reinterpretations of *Play*.

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