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From *Film* to literature: theoretical debates and the critical erasure of Beckett's cinema

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In an age in which belief in metanarratives and the stark oppositions upon which they tend to rely is thought to be dwindling in postmodern societies, and identities are increasingly perceived as constructed, heterogeneous and porous, it is no wonder that contemporary theory no longer forcefully opposes word and image as two radically distinct entities. The study of the relations between literature and film, for instance, no longer seeks to find new ways of contrasting these two media, but rather to 'rethink' the interrelation and to highlight the 'complex word and image engagements both within and between the two media'.¹ Another token of the evolution is the credo coined by W. J. T. Mitchell that 'all media are mixed media'.² It is clear, however, that this way of envisaging the relations between word and image is inscribed against and feeds upon a weighty and age-old tradition of opposing words and images that still exerts its influence. The separation and opposition of artistic media, a strong tendency in the modernist era, was particularly marked in the literature–film debate. Cinema indeed often sought to define itself as an artistic medium of the moving image governed by principles seen as being radically different from those of verbal language, a constant refrain from Arnheim to certain strands of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, while literature often reacted to this new medium by considering it as at most ancillary to its own art. In an analysis of this mutual animosity, Kristeva's concept of the abject may prove useful: when they chose to distance themselves from the 'opposing' field, filmmakers, writers and theoreticians tended to present the 'other' as so radically different that any contact and mingling would lead to the deformation or extinction of the art they championed.

Beckett's *Film* was written (1963, Paris) and filmed (1964, New York) at what is often considered to be the tail end of the modernist period, yet it draws on the idea of cinema as an art that is not verbal, and, as I will attempt to show, its fate has been largely determined by the strained relations between film and literature. Manifestly envisaged as a cinematic work by its scriptwriter, it was nevertheless often fiercely rejected by the field of cinema, and would subsequently be appropriated by the literary camp. As cinema, *Film* came to nothing; from its very first screenings, and for a long time afterwards, it was excoriated for occupying that zone in which cinema perishes owing to the fatal influence of the word and of literature. In the history of cinema, many films have of course been criticised for embodying a supposed literary ascendancy or affiliation; *Film*, however, seems to be an extreme case because of the apparent success of concurrent attempts to annihilate the project as a piece of cinema, in spite of the vigorous efforts it makes to avoid any exclusive affiliation to the literary field.

Film is a provocative title for an established literary author and playwright to choose on entering the minefield of cinema/literature relations, since it suggests a strong cinematic orientation. Indeed, the script contains no speech and it thematises the act of looking as much as the image itself; it moreover seems to enter into a very pointed dialogue with a particular strand of cinema criticism.³ *Film* can be regarded as engaging with elements of early cinema theory (which Beckett had read in the 1930s), referring to the debate surrounding silent film, colour and, to some extent, close-ups. *Film* thus plays on the oppositions created between the verbal and the visual, which both the script and the film help to revive. Yet, as will be shown, it was subsequently rejected by the world of cinema, barred from the halls of film as a result of this same antagonism between word and image.

Newspapers and magazines: Venice and *Cahiers du Cinéma*

First we will consider the way in which cinema critics approached *Film* in newspapers and magazines (some of them specialist).⁴ The critics who wrote these reviews had not necessarily seen the script of the film, and in some cases it had simply not yet been published. This corpus of articles, although international in scope, is not very large, since *Film* was only rarely screened in (commercial)

theatres. However, it was shown at various international festivals in the two years following its production. The Venice film festival of 1965 was one of the first – and the critics from *Cahiers du Cinéma* were on hand.

Although it was more than ten years since the first article-manifestos of the *nouvelle vague* had appeared in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, it was to be expected that the idea of commissioning a literary author to produce a script would be viewed with scepticism in a publication which had led a ferocious campaign for the independence of film from the written word and literature. Yet its treatment of *Film* is revealing. In a seven-page supplement covering the 1965 Venice festival, Jean-André Fieschi and André Téchiné comment upon the films shown that year and (briefly) discuss the short film shot in New York. 'Beckett is a scribbler who never goes to the cinema' ('Beckett est un littérateur qui ne va jamais au cinéma'),⁵ is the programmatic opening sentence of these few lines, which were amongst the first to be written on *Film* following its release. The dense text which follows this first sentence is not especially easy to grasp, not least because the authors, who clearly possess a very good knowledge of Beckett's oeuvre, embark upon a rapid comparison of the working processes of literature and cinema. Indeed, somewhat begrudgingly perhaps, the authors do appreciate that *Film* possesses a 'real effectiveness' ('efficacité réelle') that the article does not take the time to explore further. It is stated, however, that this cinematic effectiveness 'can only be acknowledged through reference to a previously defined, circumscribed, familiar approach, on the basis of semiological relationships that are radically foreign, external, other'. The foreign, external, 'other' entity that the critic rejects in this rhythmic tricolon is literature. Beckett's general literary approach, as the author remarks perspicaciously, is to aim at the self-destruction of discourse: 'Beckett does not speak in order to break silence but rather to deliver it to us intact, and in all his novels, up until *Comment c'est*, every sentence contains the negation of the statement which follows it.' Here, then, is an argument which would much later be propounded in literary Beckett studies, already being sketched out in cinema criticism. However, in order to transpose this literary process, which the article calls a 'mechanism for disintegrating the sign that is specific to the literary system' into the 'autonomous language' of the cinema, one must, according to *Cahiers du Cinéma*, be a filmmaker. Yet the authors of

the article announce from the outset that *Film* has been made 'in the absence of any conscious knowledge of the methods it employs' and concludes his short review by returning to the alleged ignorance of the cinema shown by *Film*: 'cinema is a form of expression rooted in resistance, a form entirely foreign to Beckett, who no more controls it than he ever really discovers it'.

Thus, for *Cahiers du Cinéma*, cinema resists this attempt by literature to colonise its autonomous space. It should be noted that not one shot from *Film* is discussed in the article, nor is any mention whatsoever made of the participation of such personalities from the film world as Buster Keaton or Boris Kaufman,⁶ who directed the cinematography, or of the short film's particular cinematic features, such as the absence of colour and, more particularly, sound. In these critics' view, then, *Film* – that is to say, the film of that name – is a work of literature. By 1965, auteur theory was already well established in European cinema, and Beckett, as a literary figure, was not exactly the sort of auteur that those who called for directors who 'wrote with a camera' (as Alexandre Astuc, one of the first defenders of auteur theory, put it evocatively but also somewhat ambiguously) had in mind.

Newspapers and magazines: the man with a movie camera, a pen or a hat?

When one considers the corpus of articles in its entirety, it becomes apparent that the critics seem to skirt around the issue of authorship. Who actually made *Film*? In one of the first references in the press to *Film* after its shooting, the magazine *Movie* mentioned in its April 1965 edition (thus prior to the film's release) that 'There was some publicity recently concerning a Becket [sic] film starring Buster Keaton'.⁷ 'A Beckett film': clearly, then, the film was not presented as the work of its director, as one would expect in a cinema review, following usual practice, but as that of the writer of its script. The same thing happens in *Sight & Sound*, whose critic briefly mentions Barney Rosset's project,⁸ before adding that 'So far, only the Beckett section is completed'.⁹ In the world of cinema, then, *Film* is referred to primarily as the work of its scriptwriter: the man with a pen.

While this manner of presenting the short film would change somewhat following its release, it would continue to diverge from

normal practice. The section in *Cahiers du Cinéma* on the 1965 Venice festival presents a number of films, but Schneider's is the only one to receive a subtitle featuring two names instead of one: 'Film de Samuel Beckett et Alan Schneider (U.S.A.)'.¹⁰ Almost one year later, the same journal would publish, in an article on the Tours festival, a few short remarks on 'Film d'Alan Schneider et Samuel Beckett'.¹¹ In the meantime, this habit had begun to catch on in the United States, with the *New York Times* publishing a review of the short film 'which Alan Schneider has directed and for which Samuel Beckett, the absurdist, wrote the script'.¹² And, when the same newspaper would comment almost three years later upon the brief reappearance of *Film* on the big screen in New York, Alan Schneider's short is the only one out of the six on the programme where the author of the script is given a separate credit: 'written by Samuel Beckett, directed by Alan Schneider'.¹³ Oddly, the listing also adds, again only for *Film*, the names of the editor and the director of cinematography, as if it were necessary to insist upon the fact that this really was a work of cinema. The difficulty of situating *Film* aesthetically thus seems to have given rise to a certain uneasiness which is expressed in this divergence from usual practices.

The presentation of the film in these publications is of course less striking when one considers that Beckett was more famous than Schneider, who was himself better known as a theatre director, that the author of the script was present on the set and that Schneider himself later wrote, in 1969, that Beckett was 'the real director'.¹⁴ However, this uncertainty surrounding authorial attribution is never stated explicitly and becomes apparent only in this unusual manner of referring to the work: *Film*, then, was generally presented when it first appeared as a *written* film. It may therefore be said that it was seen from the very outset as a literary work, even down to the manner in which basic information relating to it was presented in film reviews. With hindsight, the few lines on *Film* which appeared, in April 1965, in the aptly titled *Movie*, seem to prefigure the destiny of the short film in what thus becomes a rather striking metaphor: 'As far as production is concerned, the New York scene is zero. There was some publicity recently concerning a Beckett film starring Buster Keaton. Some footage was taken, but there is no trace of a finished film.'¹⁵ Nothing is happening in New York, and *Film* has categorically not become a film – it seems to have been doomed to come to naught in the universe of cinema.

The uncertainty surrounding the film's attribution not only concerns the director and the author of the script but also extends to the lead actor. This can be seen in American reviews from the very moment that *Film* was first shown publicly in a cinema theatre. At the third New York film festival, on 14 September 1965, a special evening was dedicated to the films of two actors, Buster Keaton and Bette Davis. *Film* was shown 'sandwiched in between two Keaton shorts, a standard one he'd made some years earlier and a new railroad commercial he'd just completed',¹⁶ complained Schneider of the evening's screenings. The review of the evening published in the *New York Times* rated the other two shorts favourably in comparison to *Film*, which was, according to the critic, 'a miserable and morbid exercise' and 'a cruel bit of obvious symbolism'.¹⁷ Cruel no doubt because the hero and the film's theme did not correspond to the expectations of the critic, who notes almost with horror that the character 'even rejects himself'; yet cruel too, according to the *New York Times*, because poor Keaton is not treated with the respect due to him. Indeed, Keaton is spoken of by the author of the review as if the actor had been dragged into a venture unworthy of this hero of the cinema: 'It is a cruel bit of obvious symbolism in which to involve an old star who has given a lot of pleasure to millions of people, and who has since admitted that he didn't know what "Film" was all about.'¹⁸ According to Schneider, another American critic told the director 'how stupid we were to keep Keaton's back to the camera until the end'.¹⁹ It is clear, then, that script and film are appropriated through the iconic personality of the artistic field in question. If, for lovers of literature, as we shall see, *Film* is a Beckett, for film-lovers, *Film* was often, from the moment it was released, a Keaton movie – bearing the stamp of the man with a hat.

Or at least it should have been. Schneider is indeed not entirely wrong, but unfortunately not entirely right, either, when he states that 'already the film was becoming Keaton's and not Beckett's'.²⁰ This remark is valid only if it is taken to refer to the fact that, in the field of cinema, the film is often perceived in relation to its lead actor and not, as Schneider would have preferred, to the author of the script. Nevertheless, the review in the *New York Times* and other pieces of criticism show the extent to which *Film* is regarded not as a film by the 'real' Keaton but as a film by a Keaton exploited by a literary author ('Beckett, the absurdist') who does not know

enough about the world of cinema, and whose lack of knowledge is supposedly apparent in the way that the short film misuses one of the stars of the golden age of silent cinema. *Film* is thus often featured as a failed Keaton, spoiled by a literary author.

By 1984, when *Film* was finally released in France, the critics' tone has changed, but they do not seem to have changed their tune. To be sure, now certain critics were unrestrained in their praise; the short was released in France twenty years after it was made, when Beckett's stature and renown were even greater than they had been in 1965. 'This is one of the most beautiful nightmares that the seventh art has ever given us' declared *Télérama* without a hint of irony, before proceeding to invoke Bergman and Fellini.²¹ However, for the French critics of 1984 too, the cinematic aspect of *Film* is often reduced to the on-screen presence of Buster Keaton. Critics might admire both Keaton and Beckett – despite the fact that this is a 'film d'amateur', as *L'Humanité* put it.²² Yet even when both are praised, it is Keaton who nevertheless comes out on top, playing a role which, according to the critic in *L'Humanité*, 'draws all its power from the autobiographical elements which it may be seen to contain' – elements from Keaton's, not Beckett's, autobiography. This surprising reading of the film as an autobiographical document on Keaton (to my knowledge this is the only example of such an interpretation) shows the extent to which *Film* is seen in relation to its lead actor, even if the author of the script is lauded in the same breath in this article. More often, however, it is a case of Keaton taking the limelight *in spite of* Beckett. '[Keaton] wrests the script from its author's hands, just like that, by being there, seen. That is what cinema is' wrote *Le Quotidien de Paris*.²³ This, it would seem, was the price paid by *Film* to become a work of cinema: by wresting its script from the grasp of the literary field.

In *Le Monde*, the review of *Film* describes the short as an 'involuntary homage to the director-star of *The General*'.²⁴ Once again, then, it is Keaton who turns *Film* into a work of cinema, in spite of Beckett; the critic from *Le Monde* goes on to pay highly ambiguous tribute to the script, 'a specimen of an "experimental" cinema *avant la lettre* which seems to have preserved the notion of *mise en scène*, of the transformation of literary material'.²⁵ Beckett the film-maker, then, but also (too much so, perhaps?) the man of the theatre and man of letters.

The locus of *Film* in research databases

Let us now consider some figures regarding the further reception of *Film*. As of the end of 2008, a search of the most widely used bibliographic databases yielded a total of around fifty articles dealing specifically with the script of *Film* or on the film itself in at least one of its two versions. Forty-two of these texts feature on the literature-oriented MLA database; seven short texts, some of them very short, have been logged on the International Film Archive Database (FIAP),²⁶ two of which were published in the journal *Literature/Film Quarterly* and so also feature in the MLA bibliography, as this journal – sometimes criticised for this reason in cinema research – focuses on the links between literature and cinema. Some of the remaining five articles on the FIAP database are simply reviews rather than research articles, such as the article discussing the remake by David Clark commissioned in 1979 by the British Film Institute (BFI). It can therefore quite confidently be stated that around 10 percent of the total number of commentaries on *Film* featuring in the major research bibliographies belong to a category other than literary studies. In terms of the number of pages, the percentage is even lower, given that the reviews logged on the FIAP database are very short in comparison to literary research articles. It should also be noted that the bibliographies consulted returned only a very small proportion of the monographs or collections of texts which contain paragraphs or chapters on *Film*. These are quite numerous and in general belong to the category of studies on Beckett aimed at a 'literary' audience.²⁷ Without delving further into bibliometric matters, it can be fairly safely stated that fewer than 5 per cent of the pages written on *Film* are to be found in sources that are not literary in orientation. This is surely a rather low score for a work of cinema.

Yet, one might object, is this not a fate reserved for all scripts published by authors with a literary reputation, even when the texts in question have made their way on to celluloid, as is the case for *Film*? And is this not due, among other reasons, to the fact that literature departments (English, French, general, comparative) are at present, in the research institution that is the university, more numerous than cinema departments? Let us attempt to reply to these objections by briefly citing some comparable examples of 'literary' films from the same period. For *India Song* (1973), there

are around 35 entries on the MLA bibliography and about the same number in the FIAF database. This is a far more equitable distribution for a work which is none the less explicitly situated in the literary and theatrical domain in addition to that of cinema, given that its genre identity is defined in the subtitle to Duras's text as 'texte théâtre film'.

The reason for this difference does not seem to lie in the fact that Duras made a considerable number of films, or that *India Song* is a full-length feature, as the following example demonstrates. The only film written and directed by Jean Genet, *Un chant d'amour*, was similarly made by a literary author with no standing in cinema circles, with a team of collaborators generally lacking experience in this field. The result, a remarkable short produced in 1950, for decades had a very restricted circulation, featuring neither on the festival circuit nor on commercial screens. However, the number of entries for *Un chant d'amour* in the FIAF bibliography is higher than for *Film*. Beckett's, Schneider's and Keaton's *Film* thus appears to be an extreme case: from an institutional point of view (or in any case from the point of view of university research), it is to a very great extent a 'literary' work.

Editions

It is interesting to note that editorial policy has tended to validate this approach. The French version of *Film* features in a collection of theatre texts entitled *Comédie et actes divers*, which also contains two radio plays and a television play. This diversity of media is not in any way hinted at either on the book's cover or in its list of contents, where the accent is placed rather on 'comédie' and 'actes' – French terms which evoke the theatre even more unequivocally than the English words 'comedy' and 'acts'. In English-language editions the situation is not much different. The text was published in Britain for the first time in 1967, three years after the film was shot and two years after it was shown at the New York and Venice film festivals (the French edition came eight years after Schneider had filmed his version in 1964).²⁸ As with the French edition, it appeared in a collection of texts written for different media: theatre, television and cinema. *Eh Joe and Other Writings* is the somewhat uninformative title of this collection, published in London, which none the less insists on the 'written' aspect of these

texts, thereby situating them primarily in the sphere of literary art rather than that of the moving image which, while it clearly makes wide use of writing, only rarely brings its contribution into prominence, and sometimes openly rejects it. There is no mention on the book's title page of such terms as screenplay, script or scenario.²⁹ In New York, a year after its London publication, *Film* was presented not as a 'writing' but simply a 'dramatic' text featuring in the collection *Cascando and Other Short Dramatic Pieces*. It should be pointed out, then, that the script and the film became separate entities in the public domain only some time after the screenings of *Film* at international festivals. There was an interval between screening and publication of two years in the United Kingdom, three in the United States and seven in France: when the first critical reviews of the work appeared, *Film* was available only on celluloid. *Film* thus only became a printed text once it had already been forcibly excluded from the cinematic field.

After first being published in collections of texts which to some extent erase its cinematic orientation, *Film* was published separately, and this time identified as cinema script, in an edition which also featured stills from Schneider's film. This edition was published in 1969 by Grove Press, whose director, Barney Rosset, had been behind the cinema project, having commissioned the script which was then filmed by his own production company, Evergreen Theatre. It is therefore hardly surprising that this edition presents *Film* very clearly as being a cinematic work, the title page reading 'Complete Scenario / Illustrations / Productions Shots'. This presentation of the text of *Film* would, however, remain an exception. The standard edition of the script has, since 1986, been the one found in the *Complete Dramatic Works*, which would quickly establish itself as the text's most widely available and commonly cited edition. *Film*, then, has been positioned first and foremost as a theatre text, both in French and English. It thus tends to be presented as a work of literature, in accordance with the traditional view of the literary triad (narrative, poetry, drama).

The text of the script

Let us now consider for a moment the actual wording of the literary text that *Film* has become. It is striking, in this context, to note that *Film* is not a work in which words occupy a privileged position,

in terms either of form or of content. *Film* is, after all, the script to a 'silent' film. The text of *Film* describes a sequence of moving images, with almost no sound, in which the act of looking is the principal theme, alongside the image itself. This is already being emphasised in the simple scene where the central character looks at photographs taken over the course of his life – photographs he then destroys after contemplating them, just as the camera will later destroy this same character as it focuses upon him as a double of itself. We have already noted, moreover, that *Film* enters into a dialogue with cinema theory. Overall, the text turns towards the cinematic sphere and does not seem particularly geared towards engaging with the art of language.

This distance in relation to literature becomes visible also when one considers the difference, in terms of aesthetic effect, between the text of the script and the majority of Beckett's other texts that are usually taken to constitute his fictional body of work, whether narrative or dramatic texts in the widest sense. As a sample, two brief passages from the script are transcribed below.

The film is divided into three parts. 1. The street (about eight minutes). 2. The stairs (about five minutes). 3. The room (about seventeen minutes).

3. The room

Here we assume problem of dual perception solved and enter O's perception (8).³⁰

It must be said that it would be difficult to pick out these sentences, as they stand here, as being in any way particularly Beckettian, and they are equally unlikely to be identified as especially literary. They obviously constitute 'stage' directions, but it should be noted that these often possess their own linguistic aesthetic in Beckett's work. In comparable texts, such as the stage directions in Beckett's television plays, the repetitive and drily technical character of these indications is often quite striking as a linguistic phenomenon in its own right such as, for example, in *Nacht und Träume*. In the script of *Film*, however, the words themselves are not in any way foregrounded and seem devoid of any aesthetic function. The function of the sentences quoted above and others like them is not to produce a literary effect, such as defamiliarisation (the *ostranenie*, 'distancing' of the formalists). Instead, it is the *images* described in

these terms which must fulfil an aesthetic function on the screen: the five-minute sequence in the stairwell, or the double perception of O ('object') and E ('eye'). Beckett's first text for the screen, then, is aesthetically not comparable in every respect with his other texts which consist only of directions (without dialogue), whether these were written for the stage (*Actes sans paroles*) or for the screen. These other texts without dialogue are formulated in a more terse and striking manner and seem to be addressed less exclusively to theatre and cinema practitioners.

Another element which brings out the distance between the fictional texts published by Beckett and his only published cinematic text is the presence of a first-person entity which manifestly corresponds to the author himself. *Film* is thus something of a *hapax legomenon* within the Beckettian oeuvre: a unique and remarkable exception in a body of work where the 'I' is constantly brought into question, constantly denied – *Pas Moi* – both in the author's novels and in his plays. In *Film* the 'I' occurs in passing, is used without comment, unproblematically and, so to speak, spontaneously, as if in everyday conversation. This unquestioned 'I' does moreover appear to refer to the actual person who wrote the text, the author of the script, Samuel Beckett, who asks the production team to find a technical solution to the problem of the double perception of O and E: 'This poses a problem of images which I cannot solve without technical help. See below, note 8'.³¹ *Film* is thus, to my knowledge, the only text in the body of fictional work published under Beckett's name in which an 'I' clearly indicates, without any comment or obviously intended literary effect, the author of the text. It should be noted that neither *Actes sans paroles* nor the texts of Beckett's television plays, with or without dialogue, feature this appearance of the authorial 'I'.

Interestingly, it has been contended that all Beckett's plays from *Play* onwards are 'extraliterary'. This argument is presented in an article on *Ghost Trio*, a screenplay for television which, according to the author of the article, 'is among S[amuel] B[eckett]'s "unreadable" late works, part of a postliterary phenomenon that began with *Play* in 1963'.³² 'Postliterary' perhaps offers little improvement over 'extraliterary' (which is used as a synonym two sentences later) in this context; but, if the contention were to be examined, it would become clear that not all the 'late works' can be called 'extraliterary' in the same sense. If the 'late' works are taken to mean only

the (late) texts for stage and screen, it would seem that *A Piece of Monologue* or *That Time* cannot be said extraliterary in the same sense as *Film*, which goes much further in this sense than the other late plays. In fact, it may no longer seem pertinent, in the case of *Film*, to call the script 'extraliterary', except perhaps if one were seeking exclusively to highlight its special status with regard to the majority of Beckett's work. It is indeed rather uncommon to define cinema scripts as 'extraliterary', since that designation manifestly rests on an assumed centrality of literature in the cultural field and by the same token presupposes that the absence of scripts from the literary domain needs to be underlined, commented upon or perhaps even contested.

As far as both the formal characteristics of the text of the script and its content are concerned, then, *Film* is not inscribed primarily within the literary sphere; it was not conceived of in terms of the production of an aesthetic effect through its specific features as a linguistic artefact. The text itself is not the aesthetic medium targeted here; the script was clearly written as a 'semifinished product' to be used in the elaboration of a final artefact belonging to the aesthetic sphere of cinema. Yet the text's currency has become limited almost exclusively to the literary 'market'. A strange fate, then, for this cinema script written by an author who would become a Nobel literature laureate; a script which would see its cinematic nature erased through a sort of undeclared act of literary irredentism and through an excommunication on the part of the cinema which, in contrast, was sometimes loudly declared as such.

Film's slide towards literature (along with its erasure as a work of cinema) is a result on the one hand of conditions that are particular to this work but undoubtedly also, on the other, of the rivalry and protectionism that have often marked relations between the moving image and literature. Beckett was obviously a well-known literary author before his text was filmed or the script of *Film* was published, and his reputation following *Film* remained that of a literary author. Nor did he ever, unlike other French authors of the time who wrote cinema scripts, such as Duras or Robbe-Grillet, officially direct a film for the big screen. *Film* is also a short, and as such belongs to a relatively obscure sector of the cinematic sphere. The script was, furthermore, filmed by a director from a theatre background who had little experience behind the camera, and made by an inexperienced production company whose origins

lay in the literary world. These factors undeniably go some way to explaining the 'literaturisation' of *Film*. However, they can by no means account entirely for what became of the script and the first film which was made from it. When one concentrates solely on the material quoted here, other elements are obliterated which might be argued to mark out a very different trajectory for *Film* – if only the fact that it was shot by a veteran director of cinematography, Boris Kaufman, the brother of Dziga Vertov, famous Soviet filmmaker and theoretician and director of *A Man with a Movie Camera*. It took the tense and complicated relations between literature – that art of the word which none the less frequently engages in complex ways with images – and cinema – that art of the moving image which none the less frequently engages so closely with words – and it took a perception of Beckett as an iconic 'literary' author (and authority), and therefore a divisive figure in these now simmering, now open hostilities, to situate *Film* to such an overwhelming degree in the literary field, and to so irrevocably expel it from the field of cinema. *Film*, then, will always simply 'have gone on giving up [. . .], not being there' as the *Texts for Nothing* have it,³³ and as such it throws an exceptionally revealing light on the difficult nature of the relations between literature and emerging media in the twentieth century.

Notes

- 1 Kamilla Elliott, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 17.
- 2 See for instance W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Showing seeing: a critique of visual culture', in Mirzoeff, Nicholas (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 91.
- 3 See Matthijs Engelberts, 'Film and Film: Beckett and early film theory', in Linda Ben-Zvi and Angela Moorjani (eds), *Beckett at 100: Revolving It All* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 152–76, and, for a French version, 'Film et Film: Beckett et les premières théories cinématographiques', in *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui: Présence de Samuel Beckett / Presence of Samuel Beckett*, ed. Sjef Houppermans, 17 (2006), 331–50.
- 4 These reviews in newspapers and magazines do not usually feature on the databases referred to in the section on research databases in the present chapter.
- 5 Jean-André Fieschi and André Téchiné, 'Film de Samuel Beckett et

- Alan Schneider (U.S.A.)', *Cahiers du Cinéma* (Dossier 'Venise 65'), 171 (October 1965), 48–9.
- 6 Boris Kaufman had previously worked with, among others, Jean Vigo and Elia Kazan and had won an Oscar ('best cinematography') in 1955 for *On the Waterfront*. The cameraman on *Film* was Joe Coffey.
 - 7 Andrew Sarris, 'New York', *Movie*, 12 (April 1965), 41.
 - 8 A project consisting of three films, with scripts commissioned from Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter.
 - 9 'Project One', *Sight & Sound*, 34:2 (Spring 1965), 61–2.
 - 10 Fieschi and Téchiné, 'Film de Samuel Beckett', 49.
 - 11 J.-L. C. [unsigned review], 'Retour à Tours ou Vanité du portrait', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 177 (April 1965), 17–19.
 - 12 Bosley Crowther, 'Bette Davis and Keaton Movies Are Shown', *New York Times* (15 September 1965), 41:1.
 - 13 A. H. Weiler, 'Now cinema!', *New York Times* (9 April 1968), 56:1.
 - 14 Alan Schneider, 'On directing *Film*', in Samuel Beckett, *Film* (New York: Grove, 1969), p. 63.
 - 15 Sarris, 'New York', 41.
 - 16 Schneider, 'On directing *Film*', pp. 90–3. The first Keaton short of the evening was in fact made forty years before the festival, *Seven Chances* (1925).
 - 17 Crowther 'Bette Davis and Keaton movies are shown', 41.
 - 18 *Ibid.*
 - 19 Schneider, 'On directing *Film*', p. 93.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, p. 90. See also Jonathan Bignell (ed), *Writing and Cinema* (Harlow: Longman, 1999)
 - 21 B.G. [unsigned review], 'Film: Godot ne viendra plus', *Télérama*, 1782 (7 March 1984).
 - 22 Jean Roy, 'Film', *L'Humanité* (14 March 1984).
 - 23 A.H. [unsigned review], 'Film: Keaton joue Beckett', in *Le Quotidien de Paris* (7 March 1984).
 - 24 L.M. [unsigned review], 'Film, d'Alan Schneider et *L'Enfant invisible* d'André Lindon', *Le Monde* (21 March 1984).
 - 25 *Ibid.*
 - 26 Databases last accessed on 31 December 2008. Only those articles dealing with *Film* have been included (articles on the series 'Beckett on film' (2000), for instance, have been left out). For the MLA count, only articles and books published by literary journals and publishers have been included (since some entries in MLA pertain to film or media studies).
 - 27 The fact that the vast majority of commentaries on *Film* have appeared in journals, reviews and books with a literary orientation does not imply that none of these texts addresses its cinematic or media aspects.

Scholars such as Enoch Brater and Linda Ben-Zvi, and more recently Eckart Voigts-Virchow and especially Jonathan Bignell, have written on *Film* and on Beckett's television plays from the point of view of media or cinema studies; however, these texts remain closely linked to the literary arena, owing in part to the circulation of the books and journals in which they have been published (this is of course also true of the present chapter).

- 28 Samuel Beckett, *Comédie et actes divers* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1966). This edition does not yet include *Film*, which had not yet appeared in English; the French translation of the script would feature in the revised 1972 edition.
- 29 Two notes, one of them at the beginning of the book, none the less refer to the text as the project for a cinematic work. Samuel Beckett, *Eh Joe and Other Writings* (London: Faber, 1966), pp. 7 and 30.
- 30 Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986, 1990, 2006), pp. 323 and 326. The parenthetical '8' refers to one of the explanatory (and uncharacteristic) notes at the end of the text that also appears in the next quote from Beckett's film script.
- 31 Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 323.
- 32 C.J. Ackerley and S.E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 225.
- 33 See also John Pilling, Chapter 1 above.