

Film, Vidéo, High Definition:

Beckett Re-visioned through Rogosin, Lipman, Douglas and Friedkin

Pim Verhulst

Introduction

In the restored version of Beckett's *Film*, undertaken by Ross Lipman for *Notfilm* (2015), the Woolworth Building is more clearly visible than in the low-quality versions that circulated on VHS, DVD or the internet. Together with the deleted street scene that was shot at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge, long thought lost but also rediscovered and cleaned up by Lipman, *Film* is re-situated explicitly in New York as the result of this high definition transfer, undercutting Beckett's insistence on near total abstraction. Not far from that location, Lionel Rogosin shot *On the Bowery* in 1956, which Beckett saw multiple times. Chronicling the lives of poverty-stricken men and women on 'skid row' in the aftermath of the Prohibition and Great Depression caused by the 1929 Wall Street Crash, it shows striking similarities with the realistic backstory for O that Beckett developed in the drafts of *Film* but suppressed. We can observe the opposite trend in Canadian visual artist Stan Douglas's *Vidéo* (2007), an installation piece that reworks *Film* and mixes it in with Orson Welles's 1962 screen adaptation of Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial*. Douglas not only relocates the setting to the outskirts of Paris, or *cit *, he also moves the focus from Beckett's existential crisis of (self-)perception to contemporary political issues such as the surveillance state, ethnic profiling and institutionalised racism. On this count *Vidéo*, in turn, resonates with William Friedkin's neo-noir police thriller *The French Connection* (1971), in which porkpie-hatted and racially-bigoted Jimmy 'Popeye' Doyle chases the French heroine smuggler Alain Charnier and his goons around the city of New York. My article thus probes how *Film* is re-visioned through adaptation as well as new video formats like HD, but also by aesthetic forms or genres ranging from documentary film, Hollywood blockbuster cinema and installation art to jazz. By scrutinising a double intertextual engagement – Rogosin for Beckett, Friedkin for Douglas – I suggest that *Vidéo* re-historicises and re-politicises *Film*, undoing its tendencies towards abstraction.

Lionel Rogosin's *On the Bowery* (1956)
and Ross Lipman's *Notfilm* (2015)

During the pre-production meetings for *Film*, cameraman Boris Kaufman asked Beckett what kind of street he had in mind. After director Alan Schneider intervened jokingly, 'A nice Jewish street', Beckett responded: 'Well, I thought of a long, a very long street, unbroken, with no interjections, unbroken street with no intersections'. 'Brooklyn Heights, you mean?', Kaufman tried, to which Beckett answered: 'I don't know what you're talking about'. 'He doesn't know New York at all', Schneider came to his aid, 'We're gonna go and look, we're gonna go and look on Monday' (qtd. in Ardoin, 2014, 296). A few other alternatives were offered – 'three or four different places in the Village', 'three or four downtown', 'Queens', 'Commerce Street', 'Minetta Lane', 'Cherry Lane', 'a flophouse on Third Avenue' (300, 301, 324) – but it was, in fact, Beckett who eventually spotted the location, Schneider having failed to find a suitable one (Schneider, 1986, 358). As Richard Seaver recalls:

One day in lower Manhattan, Beckett's eyes brightened as we came in sight of a dilapidated old wall hard by the Brooklyn Bridge. He nodded and indicated that this is where the opening sequence should be shot, no question. The wall, part of a building slated for demolition, was pure Beckett: sagging, uneven, its cement flaking and crumbling. (2012, 320)

Although this was Beckett's first – and last – visit to the city, to say he did not know New York at all is somewhat inaccurate and misleading.

After telling Aidan Higgins on 7 February 1960 that he had just seen American director Lionel Rogosin's anti-Apartheid documentary film *Come Back, Africa* (1959) – 'Shot more or less clandestinely. Wonderful end? Forget the man's name. Rogosin? (2014, 297) – Beckett became more acquainted with his other work later that same year, writing to Barbara Bray on 17 November: 'last night [...] saw a superb film – *On the Bowery* ("Come Back Africa man" with Russian name), shall go again this evening if I can keep out of the pubs' (374). Invoking Rogosin's protagonist, Ray Salyer, who has trouble staying out of bars, Beckett did watch the film again, informing Schneider on 9 December: 'Have seen nothing but Rogosin's marvellous ON THE BOWERY, went two nights running and want to go

again' (383). It is unclear exactly how many times he went back, but the film had clearly made an impression. As these scattered references in letters reveal, Beckett was indirectly familiar with New York before arriving on the scene, knowing all along that it would be the backdrop for his script. This has led Anthony Paraskeva to surmise that, while Beckett was scouting the city for *Film*, he 'may have recalled a location in a docufiction he saw, Lionel Rogosin's *On the Bowery* (1956), a film also shot near the Brooklyn Bridge' (2017, 56).

Building on Paraskeva's observation about their shared space, I want to draw attention to a thematic correlation between the two. Ray's backstory, as he tells it over drinks to Gorman Hendricks – a name that resurfaces in the radio play *The Old Tune* (1960) – closely aligns with O's in Beckett's *Film*. Being the son of a Methodist preacher, Ray had a religious upbringing, like that of the boy in O's second childhood photograph, 'kneeling on a cushion, in attitude of prayer, hands clasped, head bowed, eyes closed' (2009, 108). An upstanding citizen from a young age on, he received a medal for saving one of his friends from drowning, comparable to O's scholarly success as shown in the photograph taken on 'Graduation day. Academic gown. Mortar-board under arm. On a platform, receiving scroll from Rector' (108). Ray then worked as a carpenter before enlisting in the US Army to serve during World War II, which resembles the photograph of O 'Bareheaded. Uniform. Bigger moustache. Smiling. Holding little girl in his arms' posing in front of a timber house (109). These snapshots documenting bourgeois life, including one of O 'Teaching a dog to beg' or holding his 'Arm round fiancée' (108), contrast markedly with the last photograph in the Manila folder, depicting the protagonist as we see him on the screen, all alone: 'Wearing hat and overcoat. Patch over left eye. Cleanshaven. Grim expression' (109). After the war, Ray, too, turned his back on family life, to work the railroads and other odd jobs before arriving in New York city, where we follow him roaming the streets after the opening credits of *On the Bowery*.

Hunting for jobs during the day, a lack of purpose and a place to stay drive Ray back to the bars in the evenings, where he squanders on booze what little money he has managed to earn. After passing out and getting robbed in the street, he tries the Mission one night, where he is treated to a free bath, a shave, a hot meal and a sermon. Yet he flees the premises as soon as everyone beds down for the night on newspapers, to rejoin his drinking buddies across the street. Towards the end of the film, he is handed some money by Gorman – which is actually Ray's, because the man stole his suitcase, sold his clothes and pawned his pocket watch – to clean himself up, find a job, head out of town and start over in Chicago. Taking another glance at the Bowery, leaning against a lamppost, Ray walks out of the picture frame,

at which point the camera cuts to the iconic Third Avenue El overhead railroad, now demolished. As this is the same shot the film opened with, it implies that Ray is not going anywhere but staying firmly put, like Digi and Gogo at the end of each act in *Waiting for Godot*. Both his and O's actions are thus motivated psychologically by a story of social decline, possibly related to war trauma.

In *Film*, this characterisation is much more implicit than in Rogosin's *On the Bowery*. However, Beckett's drafts for the script were 'surprisingly "realistic", much of their 'specific spatiotemporal anchoring' being 'reduced in the revision process' (Beloborodova, 2019, 237). After deciding not to set the action in 1913 (308), as he originally planned, Beckett noted that O was '25 in 14 / 50 in 39' (247), in each case retaining 'the World War I period' (Gontarski, 1985, 106) as an anchoring point. This is further obscured in the published version to '25 years. Newly enlisted' (Beckett, 2009, 109). Since O is said to be '30 years. Looking over 40' in the next photograph, this situates the moment it was taken around 1919, making him roughly forty – looking well over fifty – in the film, now set 'about 1929' (98). The same tension between concealing and revealing character motivation for O still marks Beckett's 'Notes': 'It may be supposed it is his mother's room, which he has not visited for many years and is now to occupy momentarily, to look after the pets, until she comes out of the hospital' – even though this supposedly 'has no bearing on the film and need not be elucidated' (107). For S. E. Gontarski, this proves that *Film* is not merely an example of 'Beckett's characteristic struggle against a realistic, psychological, and in this case maudlin plot, but a struggle against a realistic medium' (1985, 104). Gontarski is referring to the 'naturalistic films of Eisenstein and Pudovkin', with *Film* being 'finally closer in technique to New Wave films', but its 'seamy setting' (104), as he calls it, signals that Beckett may also be working against the realist trappings of docufilm, notably Rogosin's *On the Bowery*, set in the grimy underbelly of New York city.

This indebtedness is visually most apparent from another instance of deleted material, the opening street scene before the action moves indoors, still part of the published script. In his meetings with the crew, Beckett insisted that he wanted 'a kind of absolute street, absolute exterior, absolute transition, if there is such a thing, and an absolute interior. I mean, abstract almost' (qtd. in Ardoin, 2014, 310). Since 'we have a considerable degree of non-realism in the street by the way we're treating it', he added, 'the whole set, the whole appearance of the thing is going to be extremely unreal' (311). While making the documentary *Notfilm* (2015), Ross Lipman rediscovered the footage – deemed unusable because of strobing – in a cupboard of Barney Rosset's kitchen. For Paraskeva, 'what is

striking about the newly restored scene is how it clearly indicates the reality of the film's setting in New York', due to the 'real buildings, a real street, advertisements for "Freezing and Cold Storage" and office space in the arches of the Brooklyn Bridge' (2017, 55–6). This recognisability is heightened by the production photos of Steve Schapiro – selectively included for the 1972 Grove Press edition of *Film*, but available in their entirety on the DVD and Blu-Ray versions of *Notfilm* – variously taken in Frankfort Street and Pearl Street, revealing more of the city. The deleted footage's (optional) restoration as part of *Film* is a non-authorial act of curation, but the fact that Beckett rejected it on technical rather than aesthetic grounds confirms that he was prepared to accept some degree of realism for the execution of his original idea. Even though the cut amounts to yet another instance of authorial abstraction, severing more ties with Rogosin's *On the Bowery* and docufilm, the result is not completely abstracted.

Some two minutes into *Film*, another unscripted element can be seen: the pinnacle of a skyscraper towering over a lower building. It is heavily blurred in the low-resolution transfers on VHS, DVD or YouTube that Beckettians have become familiar with since the film's original screening on celluloid at the Venice Film Festival (see Figure 1). This overlays New York with what Celia Graham-Dixon (2023) conceptualises as a 'spectral materiality', so that the format actually continues the authorial process of abstraction. In Lipman's high-definition restoration, however, it stands out clearly again as the Woolworth Building (see Figure 2), effectively re-materialising the city, as it would have originally appeared to audiences, restoring the potential link with Rogosin. Completed by Cass Gilbert in 1913 – coincidentally the original setting of *Film* in the manuscript – at 241 metres and 50 floors, it overtook the now scrapped Singer Building (205 metres and 41 floors) and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Tower (210 metres and 49 floors), which until then had stood as the two tallest structures in the world.



Figure 1: Low-resolution transfers of *Film*



Figure 2: Lipman's high-resolution restoration

For a film set in 1929 – which has been linked to historical events like the Stock Market Crash and the Great Depression, Beckett's first year in Paris (Gontarski, 1985, 106), the advent of the 'talkies' or the first Academy Awards ceremony, where Charlie Chaplin received an honorary award (Ardoin, 2014, 310) – it is apt that the Woolworth Building should make an appearance just as it was about to be overtaken by a new style of skyscraper. As Gail Fenske points out, 'Woolworth fully understood the visual logic of consumption' (2008, 27), the new 'landmark headquarters' for his expanding chain of five- and ten-cent stores serving as a 'giant signboard' that helped him reach 'a far broader audience than a main street's sidewalk crowds' (29). He picked the location for his tower on one of Broadway's main intersections with the purpose of maximising its visibility, not just from all over Manhattan but its neighbouring boroughs too.

Unlike the modernist flaneur that the Woolworth Building sought to attract, eager to be spotted strolling the streets of the metropolis at leisure, we find O frantically stumbling

along seedy back alleys in dead zones of urban space, anxious to escape the public eye. Avoiding the sidewalk, clinging to bare brick walls, O is entirely antithetical to the ideal of consumerism; as one whose sole desire is to cease to exist, he is the archetypical anti-consumer. *On the Bowery* showcases the same kind of eye-catching advertising as the deleted opening sequence of *Film*. Shots of sidewalks with attractive-looking neon signs and painted billboards confront Ray with a spectacle of continuous allure. He is only protected from it when keeping off the main street, avoiding Gorman, who tries to pull him back in. When the two men eventually do run into each other and their gazes meet, it does not trigger the existential dread of *Film*. The camera is also candidly noticed and peered into by the unprofessional actors, who are all real-life homeless people living on 'skid row', bearing looks of amusement or curiosity rather than horror on their faces. This casual awareness and acknowledgement of the recording device, not uncommon in docufilm, becomes the governing principle of *Film*, based on Bishop Berkeley's philosophical concept that to be is to be perceived: '*Esse est percipi*' (Beckett, 2009, 97).

By the mid-1960s, the Woolworth Building had lost its appeal. The tourists stayed away from it, long surpassed as the tallest structure, and its terracotta face, vulnerable to deterioration by the elements, was under repair the whole year round. After the company considered selling the tower, it was given National Historic Landmark status by the National Park Service in 1966, officially labeling it a relic the year after *Film's* release. The skyscraper's dulled appearance in the background symbolises this faded glory. In Fenske's words, its 'contradictory architectural hybrid of fanciful Gothic ornamental features – tracery, tourelles, gables, gargoyles, and finials – and audacious steel-framed engineering calls attention to the jarring discontinuities, startling proximities, as well as unpredictability of the modern urban experience' (2008, 4). Travelling to France and sharing a fascination with Paris, Woolworth and Gilbert took inspiration for their design from the city's opulent department stores, opera house, Norte Dame cathedral and Eiffel Tower (35–8). Their landmark thus gestured towards a past that had never quite existed in the way they eclectically recreated it. In much the same way, *Film* revived cinematic history in an anachronistic sense – that is, as silenced film, 'entirely silent except for the "ssh!" in part one' (Beckett, 2009, 97), even though film historians like Rick Altman (2004) have pointed out that silent film was never actually silent. In this sense, the architectural structure again serves as a fitting visual metaphor for Beckett's foray into the medium.

His New York trip to shoot *Film* is even anticipated in Rogosin's *On the Bowery*. When Gorman retrieves from his 'hotel' – which is actually a flophouse – the suitcase that he

lifted from a passed-out drunken Ray in the street the other night, the sticker on the adjacent item of luggage reads ‘Paris – Cherbourg’, a common seaport for big ocean liners to depart from in the 1950s. This connection with France is what Canadian visual artist Stan Douglas draws out in his creative reworking of *Film*.

Stan Douglas’s *Vidéo* (2007)
and William Friedkin’s *The French Connection* (1971)

Although it is entirely without speech, the French title of Douglas’s piece already hints that we no longer find ourselves in the New York setting of the original, but in Beckett’s adopted home country. Like *Film*, however, *Vidéo* is not set in the heart of the metropolis but on its outskirts, marked by the high-rises that were constructed in the *banlieus* of Paris to address the post-war housing crisis. This shift in location may have simply been prompted by the fact that the piece was commissioned by the Centre Pompidou for Beckett’s centenary. In what follows, however, I would like to present an intertextual analysis that mirrors the notion of an Irish-born author, living in France, writing a film script set in New York. This geographical constellation we also encounter in William Friedkin’s *The French Connection* (1971). At first sight, its plot has little to do with *Film*, but I intend to show that Douglas is interacting with a wider context of popular art, including music as well as Hollywood cinema, to reflect on both the form and the content of Beckett’s work in ways that exploit the aesthetic affordances of installation art. In order to do so, I will start by offering an alternative interpretation for the title of the essay that Douglas wrote for his *Samuel Beckett: Teleplays* exhibition catalogue in 1988.

‘Goodbye Pork-Pie Hat’, which invokes Buster Keaton’s signature headgear, also refers to an instrumental song by African American jazz artist Charles Mingus. He wrote it to honour saxophone player Lester Young, who passed away two months before the track was recorded in 1959. Like Keaton, Young was notorious for not just wearing but rolling his own porkpie hats, even sharing his method, complete with photo spread, in an issue of the popular magazine *Our World*. In the interview, Young states he can only find the unusually broad-brimmed kind he likes in so-called ‘Negro districts’, adding: ‘You can’t get the right type in a “gray” [white] – neighborhood’ (‘How to’, 1949, 43). By detaching the porkpie from the famous Hollywood actor and associating it instead with Young, Douglas is already paving the

way for his response to *Film with Vidéo* some twenty years later. As Conor Carville analyses in his contribution to this special issue, Douglas criticises Adorno for interpreting Beckett's work as an expression of 'modernist nostalgia' for a 'melancholic identity', one that is always 'gendered male, classed bourgeois, and of European descent' (Douglas, 1988, 17). Beckett is exonerated, in Douglas's opinion, because he 'admits that the limits of his culture are not the limits of possibility' (11), and he 'has been able to delineate (or at least allow others to imagine) the shape of an activity of meaning which, for our culture and its institutions, is still dismissed or marginalised as non-meaning' (16–17). The Black Canadian artist takes up this invitation by reimagining *Film* as an experience that is female, working class and African-European.

By reclaiming the porkpie hat for African American culture, Douglas duly reminds us that it was adopted – and adapted – by the Black music scene of the 1950s, once its popularity had waned after the Second World War and before Beckett reintroduced it in 1965 as a homage to Keaton's prewar acting career. Equally important to keep in mind is that the porkpie made its reappearance on the big screen in the early 1970s, only a few years after *Film* was released, in Friedkin's *The French Connection*, where it epitomises precisely those issues that Douglas raises in his later essay. The actor Gene Hackman dons a dark-coloured porkpie hat, often with a black greatcoat, for his role as NYPD police officer Jimmy 'Popeye' Doyle, who, as the name suggests, is of Irish descent. In order to track down the drug lord Alain Charnier, who uses the minister of culture's vehicle to smuggle shipments of heroin from France into the US via New York's harbour, Doyle first works his way down the usual list of cultural clichés and prejudices: roughing up African Americans in dive bars and spying on Italian Americans doing business with Jewish Americans in restaurants. A reactionary bigot, one of Doyle's racial slurs – 'never trust a negro' – was edited out of the version that streamed on Disney+ in the US (Stolworthy, 2023). When Douglas removes Keaton's porkpie hat from *Vidéo*, he may also be throwing into relief the racism that the cultural symbol had since attracted through later popular films such as *The French Connection*, a box-office hit seen by millions, like Keaton's movies in their day, contrary to the niche audience of *Film*.

Apart from the prominent place of Doyle's porkpie hat in *The French Connection*, also its setting and use of camera resonate with *Film*. Some of the early scenes are set in France, but Friedkin predominantly registers the harsh realities of pre-gentrification New York street life. Different from Beckett, he generously features its ever-expanding skyline as a photogenic backdrop for the narrative – even shooting around the corner of *Film*'s location.

Friedkin often does so in the form of furtive glimpses, as if they were taken surreptitiously from a moving car or behind an obstacle. Part of the reason for this approach is that the crew did not always have a permit to film in the city, so the camera had to be concealed. Because the actors were unaware of its exact position in these scenes, they would occasionally look into the lens. This gives *The French Connection* a documentary aesthetic, not that different from Rogosin's *On the Bowery*. Friedkin, however, took inspiration from Costa-Gavras's political thriller *Z* (1969), about the assassination of Greek politician Grigoris Lambrakis, as he clarifies in the audio commentary:

It was a fiction film but it was made like it was actually happening. Like the camera didn't know what was going to happen next. And that is induced technique. It looks like he happened upon the scene and captured what was going on as you would do in a documentary. (1971 [2009])

Observation being crucial to the plot, this is an effective choice, since Doyle and his partners have to remain undetected while shadowing Charnier. From the moment they exceed his 'angle of immunity', in Beckett's words (2009, 98), their cover is blown and the pursuit begins.

Perhaps the most striking visual parallel with Friedkin's film occurs at the end of *Vidéo*, when the protagonist is taken to a parking lot. Here she is offered a handgun by one of her two henchmen, at which point the camera cuts away to the building we saw at the start and a gunshot is fired – the only sound in the whole film, counterpointing Beckett's 'shhh'. This ending is usually taken to mirror Welles' *The Trial* (Bal, 2008, 70), as part of the analogies that Douglas consciously evokes. Whereas K interiorises his guilt and accepts his cold-blooded execution by stabbing in Kafka's novel (Robertson, 2009, xii), Welles has him run off. This prompts the two captors to throw a bomb after him, which K picks up, ready to lob it back at his assailants, but we are only shown the smoke of the explosion. *The French Connection* also concludes with a moment of uncertainty, after Doyle and his partner pin down the perpetrators to an abandoned warehouse on the outskirts of town. After he accidentally shoots one of the FBI agents assisting them on the case, Doyle leaps forward in pursuit of Charnier. The camera lingers behind, as if reluctant to follow him down that path of folly. After Doyle disappears into the dark, the sound of a gunshot rings, the screen turns black and the credits roll. For a few seconds, the audience is held in suspense, but the end

titles reveal what has happened to the characters, informing us that ‘Alain Charnier was never caught’.

Contrary to Douglas, Friedkin merely entertains a lack of resolve. He follows his source material – Robin Moore’s 1969 non-fiction book of the same name – or perhaps he gave in to studio pressure, Hollywood often resisting open endings. It is interesting to note that the sequel – *French Connection II* (1975), directed not by Friedkin but John Frankenheimer – gives the narrative full closure and lets Doyle have his revenge. Leaving behind New York and following Charnier to France, he finally guns him down in the finale of a speedboat sequence. As Doyle pursues the drug lord on foot and then on water, the camera switches from third- to first-person perspectives, the former relaying an objective point of view, the latter a subjective one, as seen through Doyle’s eyes. It is wobbly, out of focus and stained with red blotches around the edges, which gives it an oversaturated Polaroid look that represents the protagonist’s rage and fatigue, still recovering from an involuntarily administered drug overdose. This visual style resembles O’s ‘diseased’ first-person perspective in *Film*, as Beckett described it during the production meetings (qtd. in Ardoin, 2014, 263), and for which – after a number of alternatives, including optical filters (Beloborodova, 2019, 298, 300) – a finely meshed gauze was eventually used.

In addition to being reiterated in the murky picture quality of *Vidéo*, as a common trait shared between *Film* and *French Connection II*, this impaired visibility can also be understood in light of Douglas’s intertextual practice. One remark he made during an interview with Diana Thater is particularly intriguing in this regard:

If a tradition becomes transparent, works of art will only reinforce convention – becoming merely aesthetic, merely beautiful, and no longer meaningful. [...] I’m often asked how I can expect people to know all of the references in a work – I can’t – that’s why there are supplementary texts, catalogues, etc. The work is seductively simple on one level, and fairly complex on another. But it’s usually shown in a museum, not in a market place or on TV, so I hope audiences will at least be a little bit interested in figuring it out. (qtd. in Watson, Thater and Clover, 1998, 21)

If *Film* and *The Trial* fall into the ‘transparent’ as well as ‘seductively simple’ category of the ‘tradition’ that Douglas invokes, then *The French Connection* and its sequel potentially belong to the more opaque layer of inferences that turn *Vidéo* into a more ‘complex’ work of art.

Adding still further complexity is the music that Douglas uses at the end. After the gun is fired and we return to the shot of the apartment building before the screen blacks out, what Mieke Bal calls ‘disco music’ (2008, 69, 87) blares from the loudspeakers. More accurately, it is the soundtrack typical of Blaxploitation films, a 1970s subgenre that sought to address the underrepresentation of Black actors or their relegation to minor roles in Hollywood. Spurred on by the civil rights, Black Power and the Black Panther movements of the 1960s, an African American protagonist, often female, overcomes oppression by the law enforcement system or slavery. The genre soon became controversial, as it perpetuated white stereotypes about Black culture. If the ‘merry music’, to borrow from Bal once more (70), intimates a positive outcome in which the protagonist shoots one of the guards instead of herself – but then what about the second one? – its fraught cultural connotations deepen the ambiguity, since each of her choices necessitates violence. This conundrum, as Douglas comments, is deliberate:

When I was invited to do a project for the Beckett show at the Pompidou Centre in 2007, I was really less interested in Beckett than I was in the *banlieue* riots of 2005.

Since then, I’ve realized that there has been a continuum from the Parisian riots, through the Tottenham riots of 2011, to the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement. People realized they had no representation in government or in the power structures, and this crazy fury was the result. The only utterance they could make was a violent one. (qtd. in Sánchez, 2017, 327–8)

Signifying a more politically-charged homage to Beckett’s trademark ‘perhaps’, as well as his fondness for the oppositional pair ‘on’/‘no’ central to later prose works such as *Worstward Ho*, Douglas’s piece also gestures towards the cyclical nature of installation art, intertextuality and creative reworking at large, itself driven by the ‘remediation’ of older expressive forms in new ones with different affordances (see Bolter and Grusin, 1998).

As the music plays at the close of *Vidéo*, we can make out the red dot of a surveillance camera rotating from left to right. Reminiscent of ‘the luminous eye burning up as the machine runs on in silence and the light goes down’ at the end of *Krapp*, which Beckett chanced upon in London (Beckett, 1998, 59), it teasingly insinuates there is CCTV footage of who shot who, but we are denied access to this recording. Coming back full circle to his ‘Goodbye Pork-Pie Hat’ essay and its connection to Young, Douglas may be pointing to another installation of his, *Hors-Champs* (1994), which translates roughly into ‘out of camera

range'. Made for an earlier exhibition of his at the Centre Pompidou, it shams a historic recording of Albert Ayler's jazz composition *Spirits Rejoice* (1965), from the same year as *Film*. By recycling motifs from such revolutionary anthems as *La Marseillaise* and *The Star-Spangled Banner*, much like Douglas repurposes films and superimposes Paris onto New York in *Vidéo*, Ayler 'tried to redeem the melody of' what is 'a violently racist and nationalistic lyric', in an attempt at 'finding a place for himself and his history in the music' (Douglas qtd. in Watson, Thater and Clover, 1998, 12).

Conclusion

Finding a place for Beckett's work in contemporary culture, Douglas playfully shuns resolution while presenting us with another kind of revolution – perhaps that of history repeating itself – as the camera circles on its axis before the piece loops back to the beginning and starts all over again. At the same time, this image serves as a reminder that *Vidéo* is an adaptation, if not an appropriation, of *Film*, theorised by Linda Hutcheon as 'repetition without replication' (2006, 7) – which for Douglas also signifies the key principle of installation: 'Even when you're seeing the same film loop again and again your perception of it changes, because you have changed even though it has remained the same' (qtd. in Watson, Thater and Clover, 1998, 19). With the human spectator, the social context in which the work is seen evolves, increasingly towards a non-human or automated viewership. After CCTV systems were more widely adopted in the 1960s, the potential dangers of the surveillance state they helped to create have become more pertinent, particularly now that 'AI-powered facial recognition will lead to increased racial profiling' (see Johnson and Johnson, 2023). By thus assimilating *Film* into a creative dialogue with present-day aesthetic forms and technologies, including jazz music and Hollywood chase movies, Douglas re-historicises and re-politicises the work. In doing so, he reinstates what was lost in Beckett's own artistic response to Lionel Rogosin's *On the Bowery* and docufiction film, further brought out by Lipman in his recent restoration for *Notfilm*. As a result, *Vidéo* turns the philosophical perception of the self as double in *Film*, ontologically impossible to shake, into the socio-political perception of the other as Other, morally imperative to break.

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