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The Sound as Object: Object-Oriented Sonicity in Samuel Beckett's Nacht und Träume

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the sound as an originary object in Samuel Beckett's play Nacht und Träume the presence or absence of which entails an aesthetic experience. The essay argues that the play's minimalistic soundscape emerges as a dramatic plane that utilizes sound as an object whose engagement with the scene is broken, self-contained and never fully accessible. By drawing on Object Oriented philosophy, especially that of Graham Harman, Ian Bogost and Levi Bryant, the essay explores the binary of sound and silence as extreme poles of such dramatic sonicity whereby through absence, presence, and repetition meaning, be it musical or non-verbal, is formed and then projected through character B as the phantom of a memory. Through an intermittent engagement with sound, music and silence, Beckett refutes the need for a linguistic dominance, and instead presents a non-verbal, sonic system to convey meaning, memories, and even characters. Such a system is irreducibly other when cast across language as the dominant system of signification. The new Beckettian communication system, however, exists within an alien phenomenological void that is independent of linguistic phonicity, where ideation, remembrance and even communication can take place through non-verbal structures of sound and music. The essay concludes by highlighting the strangeness of such sonic reality reserved for non-human.

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1. Introduction

What is it like to be a sound? Although the question resists easy formulation, Samuel Beckett's 1982 teleplay Nacht und Träume performs the response to the question. None of the other works by Beckett strips away speech, narrative progression and causal logic to a level which renders sound as a central ontological event rather than a mere accompaniment. From the opening instructions written as "Softly hummed, male voice, last 7 bars of Schubert's Lied, 'Nacht und Träume'" (Beckett 2010, 305), the play foregrounds a sonic fragment whose appearance, disappearance and return structure the entire work. The Schubert bars isolated from their harmonic context, become an object in their own right; they recur, repeat and withdraw themselves. Instead of merely expressing the dreamer's emotions, these bars confront him with a presence that is neither symbolic nor psychological. The presence is irreducibly other. The short recurrence of the final bars from Schubert's Nacht und Träume, first hummed and later sung with its lyrics, provides a concentrated instance of sound appearing, withdrawing and returning without narrative explanation or stably introduced origin. The same dynamic shapes the teleplay's visual field; the dreamt hands materialize "from dark beyond and above" (Beckett 2010, 305), enact a fleeting gesture, then recede. Within such a structure, sound functions like an object whose engagement with the scene is broken, self-contained and never fully accessible: an object withdrawn from subject-oriented performance. This article examines Beckett's Nacht und Träume as a productive site that accommodates sound as an object independent of subject's agency. To this end, the article utilizes Object-Oriented Ontology as its "epistemic framework" to examine the objecthood of the sound and its unusual sonic behavior cast across Beckettian soundscape (Salami 2025, 1).

2. Conceptual Framework:

2.1. The Sound: Alien, Detached and Withdrawn

Ian Bogost in his Alien Phenomenology argues that all objects "exist no more and no less" than any other, whether muskmelons, universes, or sealcoat (2012, 12). Bogost's notion of "tiny ontology" holds that being is not hierarchical and everything participates equally in existence, be it a singular sound or a fragment of a musical piece. In the context of the play, when Beckett detaches the Schubert fragment from its musical whole and repeats it as a discrete sonic unit, he makes it available as one of Bogost's "units," or in other words, entities that "partake of one another… coalesce together and recede again" (2012, 28). The Schubert bars do exactly the same thing. They coalesce into audibility, withdraw into silence, and then return altered in duration and placement. For Graham Harman, the defining feature of objects is that they "withdraw from direct access" (2018, 7). Even when we perceive an object, we just understand its sensual-perceptible qualities, never appreciating its real ontological features. As such, the

tension between appearance and withdrawal informs the aesthetic experience. Beckett's staging of the Lied makes this tension audible. The dreamer hears the fragment, but his access is partial and mediated; he cannot hold onto it. The musical object withdraws as soon as it appears. What Harman calls the "theatricality of aesthetic experience," in which sensual qualities remain while the real object recedes (2018, 260), is literally seen in the play's structure; the sound persists as trace even after its source has vanished into the dark.

Levi R. Bryant's definition and distinction between "virtual proper being" and "local manifestation" further clarifies this structure. For Bryant, objects, at any given moment, are always more than what they are presented to be (local manifestation), and their virtual dimension (virtual proper being) "withdraws from any of their actualizations" (2011, 53). The Schubert fragment's repetitions are not iterations of the same. They act as separate manifestations of a sonic object whose virtual depth remains inaccessible. Each recurrence of "Holde Träume…" is a new local manifestation, constrained by the play's temporal frame yet carrying the same withdrawn residue that Bryant identifies with the autonomy of objects (Beckett 2010, 305). Such objectile autonomy can also be seen in Timothy Morton's concept of the "strange stranger", where the phenomenological quality of encountering objects is intensified. Objects, Morton writes, are "irreducibly uncanny" and "alien to themselves and to one another" (2020, 75, 128). As such, Beckett's fragmentation of such musical references becomes a strange stranger: it is Schubert, recognizably so, yet estranged by repetition, isolation, and silence. Morton describes withdrawal as "an unspeakable unicity" (2020, 16), and the Lied in the play embodies this quality in how it is not symbolic, not expressive, but simply itself. It is a detached object whose being we can approach only through its fleeting appearances.

To understand how this sonic object is heard, some terms about sound phenomenology need to be studied first. Pierre Schaeffer defines the concept of acousmatic sound as those "one hears without seeing their originated cause" (qtd in Chion 2019, 71). This feature is not just an element in the play, instead it exists in the play's ontological structure. The humming and the sung phrase have no source visible to A or to the audience. They arrive from the dark and return to it. The acousmatic condition intensifies their autonomy by how sound becomes detached from bodies and thus from any stable reference or source. Also, Salomé Voegelin explains that listening is an inventive act, stating it as "the experience of sound as temporal relationship" in which "the object does not precede listening" (Voegelin 2010, 5). This notion explains the dreamer's posture: when A hums, he attempts to recreate an object that remains beyond him. The humming is a phenomenological labor rather than a mere act of nostalgic reminiscence. The dreamer generates a version of the sound in the moment of listening, only to lose the grasp

of it again. Such Beckettian musical whimsicality sympathizes with Brandon LeBelle's perception of the sound as "a dirty (and dirtying) force," emerging from the cracks of appearance (2015, 298). The fragmented dirty force, therefore, contaminates the scene and fills the dark room with a presence that cannot be stabilized. It is both intimate and unreachable; it is a sonic force set to disorient, and dismantle solace. Taken together, the theoretical kaleidoscope reveals Nacht und Träume as a work about the ontology of sound rather than the absence of silence. Beckett stages what OOO and sound phenomenology describe: sound as an object that appears, withdraws, and exceeds the human ability to grasp it. The play becomes an experiment in nonhuman presence entrenched in sonicity and sonic ontology, asking what it means to encounter sound as something more than expression: an autonomous entity.

2.2. Object Oriented Ontology as the Epistemic Framework

Where the previous section established the sonic fragment in Nacht und Träume as an entity that moves beyond symbolic or expressive functions, this section examines how philosophical vocabulary explains these functions. In addition to the notion of an object's withdrawal, the focus now lies on how sound participates in a wider ontological field, and how it acts, translates, perturbs, and composes relations. OOO and sound phenomenology work in tandem to divulge how sound operations, such as its modes of acting and affecting, demand a nonhuman ontology. Bogost's idea of "unit operations" is our first critical lens. Instead of describing objects by what they fundamentally are, Bogost focuses on what they do. "Things do indeed do things," he writes (Bogost 2012, 28), and they do it through encounters in which each "unit attempts to make sense of another" (Ibid). Sound exemplifies this logic precisely because it does not remain confined to one medium. A sonic event interacts with air pressure, walls, bodies, technological surfaces, and hearing apparatuses, entering what Bogost calls a "dense mass of everything" (2012, 22). These interactions are not transmissions, but translations. Bogost emphasizes that "each object has its own approach, its own logic of sense making" (2012, 28), meaning that the event of a sound touching a wall or an ear is a series of discrete interpretive acts. The sonic entity becomes a chain of operations that never reduce to a single and simplified profile. Bryant makes this structure more precise by distinguishing between an object's internal features and the events through which it becomes perceivable. He argues that "qualities are something an object does" (Bryant 2011, 56); therefore, sound can be redefined firmly within the domain of action rather than attributes. A sonic event, in this sense, is not the sound itself, but only one possible local manifestation shaped by environmental conditions and exo-relations. Bryant insists that manifestations are always "highly constrained by the exo-relations an object enters" (2011, 127). Therefore, what we hear is not the sonic object but a conditional result of its encounter with space, pressure, and listening bodies. Bryant's model moves sound beyond the

binary dynamics of appearance and withdrawal; the model becomes a generator of differences, a "difference engine" capable of producing multiple events that are not identical (Bryant 2011, 43). This is necessary for understanding Beckett's play, where sound is continually re-actualized under new temporal and spatial constraints.

Morton extends the withdrawal-appearance dynamics by redefining causality, presenting it as an aesthetic process. "Causality is mysterious," Morton writes, calling it "an open secret" (2020, 17). For Morton, every causal encounter is already aesthetic since it emerges from what he names the Rift, namely, the internal split between an entity's essence and its appearances (2020, 35-36). When a sound interacts with an ear or a room, the resulting effects go beyond mechanical transmissions and act as aesthetic events that arise "from the chōrismos between its essence and its appearance" (Morton 2020, 36). In this sense, sonic events generate meaning by staging this rift as audible tension and not by simply representing something else. Moreover, Morton's statement that "every aesthetic trace…sparkles with absence" (2020, 18) reframes sonic presence not as a mode of objects affecting one another through incomplete contact, but as a metaphysical interactivity shared between audible presences and absences. Where Morton describes causality in metaphysical terms, LaBelle describes its material, spatial, and environmental consequences. Since he describes sound as a contaminating force, he acknowledges its power to create "zones of intensity" that disorganize stable boundaries (LaBelle 2015, 150). For him, sound is not merely a temporal event and it is capable of acting inter-spatial dimensions as well. It "moves from a single source and immediately arrives at multiple destinations", LaBelle posits (2015, xiii), transforming listeners into participants in a shared acoustic plane. This emphasis on sound's environmental agency clarifies why the Schubert bars in Nacht und Träume feel neither interior nor exterior, but a space that is not bound to the body that hears them. Additionally, Voegelin offers a counterpoint by magnifying the interiority that listening produces. If LaBelle shows how sound spreads outward, Voegelin shows how listening folds inward. She writes that in listening "the object does not precede audition" (Voegelin 2010, 5); this shifts attention to how listening constructs a phenomenological field in which the listener becomes entangled and falls into conflict with sonic material. She explains that "the specter of sound" can unsettle "the idea of visual stability" (Voegelin 2010, 12), highlighting sound's capacity to configure subjectivity in a different way. Listening produces a world that is broken, dependent, unstable, and deeply entrenched in the listener's own sensory-motor experience. Voegelin's sonic subject is not a passive receiver but an entity shaped and reshaped by the act of listening. Sound thus becomes a force that generates ephemeral subjectivities, and this is the idea that illuminates the dreamer's repetitive gestures in Beckett's play not as bodily attempts to take part in the sonic object's temporality.

Don Ihde's phenomenological analysis complements such sonic interconnectivity by emphasizing the sound's distinctive relation to time. In contrast to visual objects, Ihde argues, auditory experience cannot be grasped all at once; it unfolds within what he calls "a temporal span or duration" (Idhe 2007, 89). The listener does not merely apprehend a sound but lives through it. Moreover, Ihde warns that describing the temporal mode as linear "would be quite misleading," especially since auditory presence possesses "a multiplicity of auditory events intentionally graded" across time (2007, 90). The sonic object coalesces into a field rather than a point, and Ihde's claim that music presents itself as a "dense embodied presence" (2007, 155). As such, sonic presence becomes a form of duration that complicates the boundaries of perception, demanding auditory training and skills. Far from being a natural sensory mode, listening is reconstructed through medical and telegraphic practices that treated sound as information to be decoded, managed, and categorized. This point of view reveals that sonic fragments have already passed through technical, material, and institutional layers of mediation.

3. Beckett's Sonic Minimalism

Beckett's Nacht und Träume is often described as one of his most silent works; yet, the silence in the play is anything but empty. As Catherine Laws notes, the play is "everything but language: no words are spoken (though a few are sung, in the fragment of Schubert heard at the end of the play)" (2013, 191). The removal of spoken dialogue is the latest step in a long process of reduction through which Beckett strips away narrative and verbal equipment to leave only a minimal set of objects, gestures, and sounds. This minimalist reduction leads to more than abstract interiority alone. As Laws argues elsewhere, Beckett's self-described "unnecessary stain on the silence" belongs to an "aesthetics of failure" in which language and sound are pushed towards their own erasure without ever quite disappearing (2013, 226). Nacht und Träume stages this tension in its most dense form as a drama of almost no words that still cannot do without a voice. The play's script is self-explanatory for this sonic minimalism. It begins with a dark, nearly empty room, "lit only by evening light" from a high window, and a single seated figure, A, whose bowed head and resting hands are the only stable visual anchors (Beckett 2010, 305). Beckett drops the first sonic event onto this serenity: "Softly hummed, male voice, last 7 bars of Schubert's lied 'Nacht und Träume'" (Ibid). Then, light fades, the fragment returns in a shorter form as "Softly sung, with words, last 3 bars…beginning "Holde Träume…'" (Ibid), and A's body slumps further, his head now resting on his hands. After that, the dream structure appears as B, the dreamt self, materializing "on an invisible podium," mirroring A's posture, while disembodied hands emerge from the dark to touch, offer, wipe, and finally cradle his head before both dream and light fade again (Beckett 2010, 305, 306). The whole sequence is then repeated, with two variations. First, the camera moves into a close-

up shot of B, and then, dream actions run "in slower motion" before the viewpoint withdraws and, finally, A himself fades out (Beckett 306).

Enoch Brater emphasizes how such a design privileges apparition over explanation. Nacht und Träume, he claims, "televises a pictorial language dramatizing inference rather than argument" (Brater 1985, 50). A cup, a hand, a cloth are "ripe with referentiality," but the Christian symbolism they might evoke is never confirmed; instead, we are offered "the enchantment of apparition" itself (Brater 1985, 50). For Brater, "all of the significance in Nacht und Träume seems to lie in its being a drama, not in what it is a drama of" (1985, 51). The same situation applies to the soundtrack as much as to the image. "The only 'voice' Beckett needs in Nacht und Träume belongs to music, the concluding bars of a Schubert lied. The rest is silence, where night and dreams take place" (Ibid). Voice is reduced to a single, recurring fragment; everything else such as desire, longing, comfort and failure, must be carried by humming, the slow choreography of hands, and by the structured constant alternation of sound and disappearance. Additionally, Franz Michael Maier's analysis of Beckett's use of Schubert's Nacht und Träume shows how exact this sonic reduction takes place. The teleplay takes bars 21-27 of the Lied, first "hummed in its entirety," and then repeats only its "last, synthetic part (bars 25-27) with the words sung" (Maier 2007, 92). Schubert's own revision of the song, which is adding two half-bars and reducing the melodic range, had already aimed to give "acoustical presence to what the words (only) say" and to point at "the dense thread of subjective experience" (Maier 2007, 91). Beckett responds by taking away the piano accompaniment altogether; Laws addresses the removal, stating that the reduction "uproots the melody," leaving it to "float freely, without grounding" (2013, 208). What remains is "the indication of a very special relation" between composer and dramatist: a shared concept of repetition in which each return is a modification rather than a mere "da capo" (Maier 2007, 98). This shared logic of repetition shapes both sound and image. In the first cycle, the Schubert fragment frames the dream by humming and singing, then precede A's descent into sleep and B's first appearance. In the second, the structure is repeated almost identically, but Beckett introduces a slow zoom toward B and a corresponding indication of the dream sequence. Maier states that this resembles Schubert's own procedures of intensification in which zooming is "a means of intensification" and it is not limited to Nacht und Träume (2007, 98). Yet here, the visual reproach, temporal coordination and relational proximity all work together to increase "affinity," moving from diminished spatial distance to the sense of "sharing a common time and situation" (Ibid).

The sonic minimalism of the play is inseparable from its ambiguity in handling the voice. In Beckett's production, Laws posits, the male voice that hums and sings the fragment is "relatively soft, but nevertheless quite clearly projected, with a good tone and a little vibrato,"

sounding trained and embodied, yet the body on screen remains motionless (2014, 244). Furthermore, Laws argues that the voice's diegetic status is therefore "uncertain" in how it is "embodied in quality," but in relation to the image it is "curiously disembodied" (2013, 201-202). The voice does not act as background music, nor like an external narrator; instead, it "hovers with uncertain agency and origins", Laws suggests (2014, 245). The dreamer seems to be both subject and object of this sound at the same time. He might be humming to himself, or the fragment might be addressed to him from elsewhere, but the play never settles the question. Thus, the voice becomes another disappearing object in the soundscape, intimate, yet permanently ungrounded. This ambiguity extends to the sequence of gestures itself. Laws shows how the cup, cloth and hands carry strong "Eucharistic" and "Veronica" associations with the chalice-like cup and the "cloth that wipes the brow" (2014, 239). However, she insists that Beckett "distils the essentials" of these sources, shifting our attention from doctrinal symbolism to "the act of longing, of imagining and reimagining the comfort of the hands" (2014, 240). The dream presents constantly repeated attempt to conjure relief instead of needing a stable theology. In Nacht und Träume, the Schubert fragment, the hands, and the evening light are all traces without certain origin. Their operations are felt on the room, on B's body, on the viewer, but their source remains withheld. Laws claims that Beckett's later work increasingly turns toward "intense listening to small sounds" and uses music to "summon the virtual company of an absent other" without ever fully delivering consolation and comfort (2013, 198-199). Finally, in the play this virtual company is doubled by how A and B become "two identical, silent listeners" (Laws 2013, 199), and then are both withdrawn. The final fade-out of A suggests a kind of sonic exhaustion; the dream is replayed twice, the fragment sung are twice, the hands' gestures are completed, and yet nothing is fully secured. What remains is the carefully composed object world of the play itself where evening light, two almost identical bodies, a cup, a cloth, and seven bars of Schubert, are all caught in a cycle of appearance and erasure.

3.1. The Sonic Object's Emergence: The Dreamer and the Sound

The first sonic event in Nacht und Träume enters the scene so sudden that gives it the weight of an object rather than a stage cue. The dark room, the faint evening light, and the bowed figure form a visual field, suspended in a state that is almost immobile. Beckett releases the Schubert fragment into this calm by a sonic intrusion that comes forward as something newly present; it is not a mere emotional expression. Its arrival does not explain itself either, it simply occurs. This kind of sudden release in Beckett's late minimalism "engenders an ever more intense awareness of the predicament of immanence" (Laws 2013, 28). The sonic fragment emerges not as symbol or narrative feature but as a moment of raw presence within this untouched field.

Beckett's reduction of speech and gesture makes the fragment's appearance more noticeable because it becomes the first event that interrupts the process and initiates the conditions of the dream. The sonic emergence has the force of something entering from outside the visible frame, like a meteor that sets a dynamic world in motion.

Bogost insists that "phenomena are never merely given; they are constructed through the operations objects perform" (2013, 30). The Schubert bars perform precisely such an effect by carving out a zone of temporal attention, shifting the field of perception, and preparing the transition from waking to dreaming. The fragment, therefore, does something before it means anything: it acts by reorganizing the relation between A's body and the surrounding darkness. Sound becomes a unit whose appearance is already a translation since "encounter is always translation, never access" (Bogost 2012, 64). Instead of the real sound itself, what reaches the dream is the sound translated through his posture, the room's resonance, and the absence of all other acoustic cues. Furthermore, considering manifestation, the fragment's softness, shortness, and isolation are not the sound-object's full reality; in Bryant's terms: "local manifestations are events in which an object's powers are only partially deployed" (2011, 85); therefore, the fragments each become one selected expression conditioned by Beckett's stage directions. The first appearance of the Schubert fragment is provisional, dependent upon the room's stillness and bound to A's bowed listening position. Bryant's claim that "objects respond to the situations in which they are placed, producing effects irreducible to their interiority" (2011, 99) is visibly confirmed; the Schubert fragment responds to Beckett's visual status by emerging as a delicate thread rather than a full melodic line. It is a sonic event shaped by its environment, limited yet full of potential.

The dreamer's encounter with this sound is equally object-like. A's response is minimal in the deepening of his bowed posture, indicating reception. Bryant's states that "what appears is never the being of the object but one of its provisional acts" (2011, 70). Here, A is incapable of grasping the sound or interpreting it. He can simply be affected by its act. Therefore, the encounter is more of a gravitational pull rather than an act of cognition. The sonic object pulls him inward, initiating the dream cycle while never giving him anything about its origin or meaning. This first appearance resonates with Beckett's treatment of music as a mode of perceptual reorientation. Laws notes that he continually "reflects back to us the complexities of music's action in the world" which is "bound up with memory and embodied affect" (2013, 214). The fragment's placement at the threshold of dreaming exemplifies this reaction: it does not belong to the dream nor to the world of waking, hovering between them, to open the play's borderland situation. Thus, the sonic object emerges as a solid event; it is the first manifestation of a being that will recur, withdraw, and transform throughout the teleplay, setting the

ontological rhythm of the play in full locomotion. Yet, what happens when the dreamer tries to touch this sonic event? Being more than expressions, the humming and later singing are attempts to close the distance between a withdrawn sonic unit and the subject who desires it. As such, the play stages what Bogost calls "metaphorism" or a practice in which one entity expressively renders the experience of another without ever coinciding with it. He insists that "metaphorism offers a method for alien phenomenology" by tracing how one object "grasps at the ways objects bask metaphorically in each other's notes" (Bogost 2012, 67). A's humming sympathizes with Bogost's notion of grasp. He does not access Schubert's Lied as it is in itself, but produces a bodily faltering metaphor of it, creating a sonic approximation that tries to inhabit the fragment's notes from the inside. Moreover, this attempt is necessarily indirect. Bogost underlines that any expressive account of another entity's experience is constructed from "distortions" and "caricatures", ie, a series of "metaphorical daisy chains" that become weaker as they move from one object to another (2012, 81-84). In Nacht und Träume, the Schubert fragment has already passed through many such chains, from Schubert's compositional decisions, to its performance, to the memory lodged in the dreamer's body, and finally to the soft humming that opens the play. Each step is a new metaphorism; each object such as composer, singer and dreamer, translates the sonic unit into its own medium and capabilities. Thus, A's humming is an act of speculative and expressive world making, and a local reconstruction of the fragment's being under extremely reduced conditions.

Eventually, this touching can only occur at the level of sensual sound. As discussed before, real objects are always withdraw, and our encounters are necessarily mediated by what Harman calls 'sensual objects' and 'sensual qualities'. In aesthetic experience, a "wedge is driven between an object and its qualities" so the real object vanishes, while its qualities remain on the surface, demanding support from a new real object, ie, the beholder (Harman 2018, 149). Beckett's staging of the Schubert fragment follows exactly this logic. The "real" Schubert-object, which includes historical composition, pianistic texture, performance and practice, never appears. What takes place in the teleplay are only certain sensual qualities such as the contour of the melodic line and its soft dynamics. These qualities no longer belong securely to Schubert's lied; they are transferred to a new real object, the dreaming figure, who must now "carry" them.

The perception can be examined further by Harman's notion of vicarious causation. He states that two real objects never touch directly; instead, they affect one another only through "fictional images" they present to each other (Harman 2018, 163). Therefore, in the play, the relation between the dreamer and the sonic object is doubly mediated; the Schubert fragment reaches him only as a stripped and disembodied vocal line, and his attempt to respond by

humming and bowing his head into the sound is itself another image projected back toward the sound. Thus, the contact between A and the fragment is vicarious, i. e., a real dreamer interacts with the sensual version of the lied that the play constructs for him. His humming counters the image, replying tentatively to the same unstable status. Phenomenologically, looking at it from the side of the listener's body, Voegelin argues that sound "invites the body into experience and reciprocally makes the object physical," in a way that listening becomes the point where objectivity and subjectivity intersect (2010, 14). Similarly, in Nacht und Träume, the dreamer's body is reshaped by the Schubert fragment; the bowed posture, the closing of the eyes, the gradual sinking of the head into the hands all show a bodily reorganization around the sonic event. As the fragment sounds, the room thickens into what Voegelin calls a "sonic room, with sonic walls and a sonic time," an architecture that takes its "permanence" from the listener's dependent hearing (2010, 102); the dream space is built out of the humming and singing as they occur. This, moreover, means that the dreamer's attempt to touch sound is inseparable from the transformation of his own subjectivity. Voegelin describes the sonic subject as "an experiential subject," whose 'I' is produced as fleetingly as the sounds that compose its world (2010, 93). For instance, A's humming is one of those moments in which the subject seems to materialize around a sonic object, only to dissolve again as the fragment fades. The proof of the encounter, as Voegelin remarks, is "on my body," which "bares the invisible after-image of its experience as a sonic sensibility" (2010, 69). In the play, that after-image survives as posture and gesture such as the bowed head, the still hands on the table, and the later upward reach of B's palm. Thus, in this second movement, touch is never a successful contact but a constant expressive attempt at approximation. The humming is a metaphorism directed at a withdrawn sonic unit and the fragment responds only by returning in its own terms. The dreamer becomes the real object that temporarily supports the Schubert qualities, but the sound never coincides with him. Therefore, Listening remains a practice of reaching and a way of being with sound that accepts withdrawal as the first condition of intimacy.

4. Sound's Vanishing and Recurrence

In the later phases of Nacht und Träume, Beckett's sonic design becomes less about what is heard than about how sound exits the scene. The script is structured by disappearances; the evening light fading, the dream image dissolving, the Schubert fragment ceasing, and finally even A himself being withdrawn from view. These gestures of vanishing are the mode in which the sonic object persists. The paradox is solved by Morton's idea of withdrawal being the way each entity is "incapable of being anything else" than itself, irreducibly singular and never exhausted by any description or relation (2010, 16). If we take the Schubert fragment, and any other element in the play as objects, then the play's pattern of appearance and disappearance

stages their withdrawal as a positive ontological feature rather than a lack. Moreover, Morton insists that "sensual things are elegies to the disappearance of objects" (2020, 18) and in the case of this play, each occurrence of the Schubert bars functions exactly as such an elegiac trace. The fragment rises into audibility, touches the room and the bodies in it, and then is cut off, leaving behind a residue that is no longer sound but still a tangible objectile trace of it. When the humming stops and the dream sequence begins, the hands and the cup seem to move inside an after-image of the music, as though the fragment had opened some space for gestures to take place. The following silence is also charged with the absence of the sonic object that has just receded; thus, the fragment's withdrawal is the way its reality is registered in the room rather than a negation of its existence. And as Morton claims, "every event in reality is a kind of inscription in which one object leaves its footprint in another one" (2020, 71); therefore, Nacht und Träume carefully structures these inscriptions, making sound's vanishing one of the primary causal events of the piece. Furthermore, sound is a vibrational actant, and LaBelle describes how seemingly peripheral elements such as acoustic energies, resonances and environmental noise, must be attended to as "actants," calling them bodies of force that condition experience and public life. Sound, in this framework, contaminates and "supplements the fixity of form" (LaBelle 2015, 298).

In Beckett's teleplay, the Schubert fragment cuts into the visual stillness of the room, reorganizing the small architecture of table, hands, head, and window into an acoustic field. When it disappears, instead of collapsing, that field redistributes its energy into the slow movement of the dream hands, the tremor of the viewer's expectation for the music's return, and into the strange stillness of A's resting body. Sound is always "ephemeral and doubtful," and the listener "will never know its truth but can only invent it," producing a knowing that is itself a temporal relationship (Voegelin 2010, 5). In this perspective, listening is not about perceiving a pre-given object from a distance; instead, "the auditory is generated in the listening practice," so that "in listening I am in sound", Voegelin claims (2010, 5). When the humming voice in the teleplay falls silent, the listener's involvement is reconfigured. Silence becomes what Voegelin elsewhere calls an "experiential field," a space in which aesthetic judgement emerges out of the fragility and dependency of perception (2010, 99). The viewer-listener must now sustain the footprint of the Schubert fragment within the body; the sound as acted on the body and now the vanishing of the fragment in relocates the sonic object from the space of the room into the embodied memory of the spectator. At the same time, the play uses silence to construct a sonic room as a materiality that is "invisible but produces space and time as a space and time for me" (Voegelin 2010, 102). The repeated fading of light, dream, and A, mark the edges of this room, and between the cycles, nothing new is added in terms of musical material;

what changes is our experience of its disappearance. The second time, after the slowed dream and the closer framing of B, the withdrawal of sound and image is felt more intensely as a suspension that Morton defines as "the persistence of things," the way an object maintains the Rift between essence and appearance (2020, 159). Here, the Schubert fragment persists precisely through its controlled vanishing, converting into trace, resonance, and bodily after-image. Therefore, Sound in Nacht und Träume appears, acts, and withdraws, and is capable of leaving behind footprints in bodies, architectures, and memory. Morton's aesthetic traces, LaBelle's dirty actants, and Voegelin's sonic life-world all work together here rendering sound's vanishing as the very mode through which it creates causal force. The ontology of sound that emerges from Beckett's play is an ontology of disappearing objects that are most powerfully present in the moment they slip away.

The second dream cycle in Nacht und Träume is an ontological experiment in how an object is revisited. When Beckett instructs the camera to "move in slowly to close-up of B, losing A" (2010, 306), and to replay the entire sequence in "slower motion" (ibid), he transforms the dream's sonic-visual object into a new manifestation of itself; what appears to be the same is already altered and what returns is difference. Bryant states, a substance is always "split between its virtual proper being and its local manifestations" (2011, 71). Also, an object is never equivalent to any one of its appearances because "the substantiality of objects is never to be equated with the qualities they produce" (Bryant 2011, 43). The play's first cycle is one manifestation and the second is another. The gestures of cup, cloth, and hands come back as new events produced by the same virtual structure under changed exo-relations such as closer framing, slower time, and the erasure of A's body from the shot. In this sense, is the revelation of the object's multiplicity. Bryant writes that objects "harbor hidden volcanic powers irreducible to any of their manifestations" (2011, 72). When Beckett slows the dream, he activates those hidden capacities so the touch lasts longer, the dream object becomes heavier, and the Schubert fragment resonates differently because it is now heard over an intensified visual field; the return exposes what the earlier manifestation concealed. The second cycle overlays the first like a palimpsest, revealing that the earlier dream already carried a residue of disappearance. The dream returns with the aura of something missing, withdrawn, inaccessible, and secret. Additionally, Laws argues that "repetition is fundamentally musical in quality" and, following Schopenhauer, comprehension requires that "we must hear it twice" (2013, 209). Yet in this play, hearing twice magnifies ambiguity because the unaccompanied voice in Nacht und Träume "floats freely, without grounding" (Laws 2013, 208). When this free floating fragment reappears during the slowed cycle, its groundlessness becomes even more noticeable; temporal

dilation makes its origin and agency more uncertain. In other words, the voice returns, but it returns as if from further away.

If recurrence in traditional narrative reaffirms cause and effect, here it dissolves them. Morton describes that causality always takes place "in front of objects," and not behind them (2020, 67). The slowed cycle embodies this when the dream sequence is not caused by the music, the music is not caused by the dreamer, and the camera's intensification does not explain the gestures. Instead, these relations unfold in an aesthetic field where causality is suspended in nonlinear, nonlocal, and "illusion-like" situation (Morton 2020, 76). The repetition does not unveil causal depth but multiplies the ambiguities and cuts off the direct access between objects, distancing object-subject and object-object relations (Shahi 2024, 392). For example, B can't access the hands that touch him, A can't access the dream image B, and we can't access the origin of the hum or the sung fragment. The slowed cycle sharpens this inaccessibility by isolating B in a close-up frame, to see more without knowing more. The recurrence is, paradoxically, an act of more withdrawal. The effect is also musical. Laws posits that Beckett uses repetition to create "a meditative quality" (2013, 208), but then sabotages that meditation through ambiguity, refusing "unalloyed sentimentality" (ibid 202). The slowed cycle invites absorption, then denies resolution. The dreamer lowers his head again onto the joined hands, the hands cradle him again, but the meaning does not take form. Instead, the second cycle asserts the autonomy of the sonic-visual object; it repeats to insist that this object is more than what it shows. Thus, recurrence in Nacht und Träume is ontological differentiation. This happens because every return is a new translation and "there is no transportation without transformation" (Bryant 2011, 114). Following Morton, every aesthetic footprint carries the shimmer of absence and According to Laws, the da capo form enacts musical comprehension while breaking narrative stability. Therefore, the slowed cycle is the moment in which the play states its deepest ontology as an object world in which recurrence is never identity, and in which the sonic object, returning for the second time, becomes most fully itself by not being the same.

5. Conclusion

To ask what it is like to be a sound is to ask how an entity made of vibration, duration, and disappearance, can behave like something with its own interior logic. Beckett's Nacht und Träume gives one of the clearest theatrical examples for this question. The Schubert fragment does not function as expression, symbol, or even a psychological status. Instead, it behaves as something that arrives, acts, alters a field, and withdraws. In doing so, it resembles the kind of object whose inner life remains a blur even as its effects become unmistakable. The fragment's first entrance is an emergence that opens a world around itself, bringing the dream into motion. By entering without visible cause and by returning in a subtly altered form, the sound

demonstrates autonomy; its recurrence reads as differentiation by each return shows what a sonic object can do when placed under new conditions. The fragment acts to reshapes the temporal environment of the play, yet it gives no account of itself. This model brings sound closer to the sort of alien phenomenology that is usually reserved for nonhuman objects. The sonic entity is simply present on its own terms; it touches the dreamer through its rhythm, pacing, and other sonic features; and if it recedes, the withdrawal is a feature of its being. The play invites the audience to live such strangeness, experiencing an atopic sound, namely, one that belongs to no originary place or subject. If sound is an object rather than a vehicle of meaning, then repetition is less a rhetorical agent than an ontological activity. Silence, therefore, functions as a field of possibilities rather than impossibilities and absence. And, eventually in this play, the dreamer becomes one participant among others in a shared horizon with distributed and partial agencies that are never fully revealed.

The question with which we began cannot be answered directly. Sound has no interior that we can enter and it doesn't possess a consciousness that we can inhabit. Yet Beckett allows us to observe how a sound behaves when freed from narrative purpose and how it moves to alter other beings, and how it returns changed. What it is like to be a sound may finally be an existence defined by appearance and fading, delicacy of traces, and the ability to shape a world before withdrawing again.

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