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FILM ON THE RADIO: THREE CASES OF FOCALIZATION

Abstract. The article aims to investigate the ways in which cinematic source material can influence the realization of a radio play, with special emphasis on the narratological concept of focalization. The films and audio dramas under discussion are Alfred Hitchcock's film *Strangers on a Train* and its Lux Radio Theater version (both from 1951), *The Blind Man* (2015) audio drama based on the unfilmed script for another Hitchcock movie, and Nigel Kneale's TV horror *The Stone Tape* (1971) with its BBC radio version from 2015. Presented in this order, they exemplify a variety of approaches that audio theatre creators can employ towards source material taken from film, with sound in each case playing an increasingly prominent role in structuring the process of focalization.

Keywords: radio drama; focalization; film; narratology; adaptation

FILM PRZEZ RADIO: TRZY PRZYPADKI FOKALIZACJI

Abstrakt. Cel artykułu to zbadanie sposobu, w jaki filmowy materiał źródłowy wpływa na realizację słuchowiska radiowego z wykorzystaniem narratologicznej koncepcji focalizacji. Materiały źródłowe wybrane do analizy to film Alfreda Hitchcocka *Nieznajomi z pociągu* i jego radiowa wersja powstała w ramach serii Lux Radio Theater (obie realizacje z 1951 roku), słuchowisko *The Blind Man* (2015) oparte na niezrealizowanym scenariuszu tego samego reżysera oraz telewizyjny horror Nigela Kneale'a *The Stone Tape* (1971) wraz z jego wersją radiową powstałą dla radia BBC w roku 2015. Prezentacja wymienionych utworów w tej właśnie kolejności stanowi przykład różnorodnych podejść, jakie twórcy teatru dźwiękowego stosują w odniesieniu do pierwowzorów filmowych, przy czym w każdym kolejnym przypadku dźwięk odgrywa coraz większą rolę w kształtowaniu procesu focalizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: słuchowisko; focalizacja; film; narratologia; adaptacja

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An inherent feature of radio drama¹ is its dual nature, stemming from its reliance on both language/text and sound. This has important implications for the way it can be analyzed and interpreted. Bachura neatly summarizes this duality saying that radio drama “cannot exist either ONLY in its textual form or ONLY in sound”.² However, one should not forget “the point to which all the elements in the production line refer,”³ that is the listener. Therefore, Łastowiecki rightly suggests a “visualist approach” to radio plays. Its roots lie in the notion that words can convey images and these images can be further reinforced with sound which together “undergo transformations in the imagination of the listener” and “[provoke] visualizations.”⁴ In this way, Łastowiecki joins the long-held discussions on tackling the apparent ‘blindness’ of radio drama.⁵ Significantly, already in 1935, movie director Antoni Bohdziewicz, went so far as to call radio drama “a film for the ear” (*film dla ucha*).⁶

In fact, almost since its origin in the 1920s, radio drama has been coming in contact with cinema in various ways. On the one hand, starting from the 1930s, numerous radio shows were adapted into films and TV series.⁷ On the other, “a particularly rich subgenre of audio adaptation”⁸ can be found in radio versions of cinematic works. As Hand notes, the most notable example of this relationship was Lux Radio Theater (1934–1955) and provided live

¹ In this paper I use the terms “radio drama”, “radio play”, “audio drama” and “audio play” interchangeably. The word “radio” does not refer to the requirement for the source of broadcast but merely points to the origins of the genre.

² Joanna Bachura, “Słuchowisko i jego ‘anatomia,’” in *Dwa teatry. Studia z zakresu teorii i interpretacji sztuki słuchowiskowej*, ed. Elżbieta Pleszkun-Olejniczakowa, Joanna Bachura and Agnieszka Pawlik, 147–79 (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2011), 142. All translations from Polish are mine.

³ Richard J. Hand and Mary Traynor, *The Radio Drama Handbook: Audio Drama in Context and Practice* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 34.

⁴ Janusz Łastowiecki, *Specyfika odbioru słuchowiska radiowego* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2019), 31; see 49–60 for more detailed discussion.

⁵ For a concise but comprehensive overview, see Pim Verhulst and Andrea Smith, “Radio Drama and Adaptation Studies,” *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance* 17, no. 2–3 (2024): 116–17.

⁶ Łastowiecki, *Specyfika odbioru*, 37.

⁷ A brief look at the Wikipedia entry devoted to this category clearly testifies to the radio influence on TV and film script writers; see “List of films based on radio series,” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified 22 December 2024, at 12:23 (UTC), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_films_based_on_radio_series.

⁸ Richard Hand, “Radio Adaptation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. Thomas Leitch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 350.

adaptations of then recent film premieres.⁹ This interaction between film and radio drama has continued until today, albeit seemingly not to such a degree.¹⁰

With regard to theoretical approaches, the affinities between audio plays and cinema have given rise to attempts at applying film theory to radio drama, one example being Bachura's "Kategorie filmowe w teatrze radiowym,"¹¹ which focuses on similarities of acoustic design and the editing process of film and radio drama. However, another fruitful point of theoretical intersection might be narratology. While, as Jahn rightly points out, "approaching film from a narratological angle is not a new idea,"¹² using narratology for the investigation of audio plays has a much shorter history. It began with Elke Huwiler's theoretical propositions¹³ and later gained quite a momentum with the publication of two books on audionarratology, the concept "intended to function as an umbrella term for narrative approaches that take into view forms and functions of sound and their relation to narrative structure".¹⁴

Thus, in order to explore the potential of this research direction, this paper aims to delve into the ways in which cinematic source material can influence the realization of a radio play, with special emphasis on the narratological concept of focalization. While in regard to radio drama focalization has been explored to some extent by Lutostański¹⁵ and Bluijs,¹⁶ so far there

⁹ Hand, 350.

¹⁰ An interesting case in point might be the 2020 radio version of the folk horror television series *Children of the Stones* (1977).

¹¹ "Joanna Bachura, "Kategorie filmowe w teatrze radiowym," in Pleszkun-Olejniczakowa, Bachura, and Pawlik, *Dwa teatry*, 217–46.

¹² Manfred Jahn, *A Guide to Narratological Film Analysis* (English Department, University of Cologne, 2021), sect. 1.2, <https://www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/pppf.pdf>; for a brief chronological list of previous studies on film narratology see the same section.

¹³ Elke Huwiler, "Storytelling by Sound: A Theoretical Frame for Audio Drama Analysis," *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media* 3, no. 1 (2005): 45–59; Elke Huwiler, "Radio Drama Adaptations: An Approach towards an Analytical Methodology," *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance* 3, no. 2 (2010): 129–40.

¹⁴ Jarmila Mildorf and Till Kinzel, "Audionarratology: Prolegomena to a Research Paradigm Exploring Sound and Narrative," in *Audionarratology: Interfaces of Sound and Narrative*, edited by Jarmila Mildorf and Till Kinzel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 8, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110472752>. The follow-up publication is Lars Bernaerts and Jarmila Mildorf, eds., *Audionarratology: Lessons from Radio Drama* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2021).

¹⁵ Bartosz Lutostański, "A Narratology of Radio Drama: Voice, Perspective, Space," in *Audionarratology: Interfaces of Sound and Narrative*, ed. Jarmila Mildorf and Till Kinzel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

have been no attempts to look into the transfer of focalization from film to audio drama. As both art forms obviously differ,¹⁷ for the purposes of this discussion, I adopt Niederhoff's general definition of focalization as "a selection or restriction of narrative information in relation to the experience and knowledge of the narrator, the characters or other, more hypothetical entities in the storyworld".¹⁸ To account for the differences, the definition will be further refined in the course of the following analysis.

The discussed films and radio plays are not aimed to present any chronological development in adapting film to radio. Rather, they are supposed to serve as examples of a potential variety of approaches that can be taken towards cinematic source material, with sound in each case playing an increasingly prominent role in focalization. In the order of presentation, these are Alfred Hitchcock's film *Strangers on a Train* and its Lux Radio Theater version (both from 1951), *The Blind Man* (2015) audio drama based on the unfilmed script for another Hitchcock movie, and Nigel Kneale's TV play *The Stone Tape* (1971) with its BBC radio version from 2015.

Strangers on a Train and its audio version are a good starting point since the latter represents a series dedicated to "all-live radio versions of motion pictures starring the original casts (or suitable equivalents)"¹⁹ and as such confirms Hand's observation that Lux Radio Theater's adaptations "reveal interesting aspects of—and even a commentary on—source films".²⁰

Strangers on a Train is itself an adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's novel of the same title from 1950.²¹ The film tells the story of aspiring tennis star Guy Haines, who on a train meets Bruno Anthony, a suave tattler of unspecified occupation. Bruno recognizes Guy as the one who has an extramarital affair with the daughter of a US senator. He reveals to Guy his plan to exchange murders: Bruno could kill Guy's wife Miriam in exchange for Guy

¹⁶ Siebe Bluijs, "Earwitnessing: Focalization in Radio Drama," in *Audionarratology: Lessons from Radio Drama*, ed. Lars Bernaerts and Jarmila Mildorf (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2021).

¹⁷ Following Buijs, "Earwitnessing," 84, one can list here technicalities such as "camera choices (such as tracking shots, pans, close-ups) or editing choices (such as cuts, dissolves, fade-outs)".

¹⁸ Burkhard Niederhoff, "Focalization," in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, last revised September 24, 2013, <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/18.html>.

¹⁹ Hand, "Radio Adaptation," 350.

²⁰ Hand, 351.

²¹ Since Hitchcock made significant changes to the original story (for an overview of these changes see Patrick McGilligan, *Alfred Hitchcock: A Life in Darkness and Light* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), chap. 12, "1950–1953"), and the focus of the discussed adaptation is the movie rather than the book, the links between the novel and the film are excluded from this analysis.

killing Bruno's father. Guy gently dismisses the idea,²² but Bruno proceeds with his project. When Guy refuses to complete the "deal", Bruno attempts to frame Guy in his wife's murder by means of the cigarette lighter Guy left on the train on the day of their meeting. In the final scene, Bruno dies trapped under a merry-go-round that spun out of control and the lighter found in his hand cleans Guy of suspicion.

The transfer from film to radio gave rise to an interesting interplay between the two versions of the story. It could be stated that where tension created by Hitchcock by purely cinematic means (scenes devoid of dialogue and based only on camera work) has been given up in the audio version, another source of suspense appears, which results from a restricted focalization of events and characters.²³ The most significant modification concerns Bruno. In the movie, one can witness how he murders Miriam in the famous scene where her strangling is filmed as a reflection in her broken glasses. Thus, his brutality and determination in executing the plan become unquestionable. In the radio version, the whole murder scene is omitted and it is Bruno who informs Guy about what he did, giving him Miriam's glasses. In this way, there is no way of knowing whether Bruno is telling the truth or perhaps just provoking Guy. What is more, right before this scene, in the radio version there is an extensive conversation between Bruno's parents, an element absent from the movie. Giving the example of reckless driving, Bruno's father remarks on the possibility of putting Bruno "under restraint" if he continues his irresponsible behaviour. In this way, Bruno's mental instability is strongly underlined and the suspense is differently placed. In the movie, the tension is built during the murder scene and later when Guy needs to pretend that the news of Miriam's murder is a surprise to him. In the radio version, the limited focalization gives listeners no hard evidence for the murder and thus the tension moves to the question if it really happened. In effect, the confirmation of the murder has a double impact—Guy's suspicions are confirmed and at the same time Bruno's brutality is exposed.

²² Robin Wood suggests that Guy even finds it attractive: "When Bruno openly suggests that he would like to kill his wife, he merely grins and says, 'That's a morbid thought'; but we sense the tension that underlies it." Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 87.

²³ This runs counter to the view expressed in the brief review of this play from Connie Billips and Arthur Pierce's *Lux Presents Hollywood: A Show-by-Show History of the Lux Radio Theatre and the Lux Video Theatre 1934–1957* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1995) that "the clumsy radio version has none of the impact of the film" (496).

To a lesser, though also significant extent, the omission of certain movie scenes on the radio reinforce Guy's ambivalent behaviour during his first meeting with Bruno. The most notable example concerns the questioning of Guy by the police after Miriam's murder. In the movie, one can see Guy talking to a drunk professor on the train at the time of the crime. In the radio adaptation, one learns about Guy's alibi only from him. In addition, when the professor admits that he does not remember Guy, his alibi looks suspicious not only to the police officers but inevitably to the listener as well. And although the development of events proves Guy's version, this minute detail puts in doubt the man's innocence which is manifested throughout the movie.

As a result, the focalization in the radio version of *Strangers on a Train* emerges both as deficient and supplementary in regard to its cinematic source. On the one hand, crucial movie scenes have been directly omitted. On the other, in a few significant places the radio version capitalizes on this lack of visual equivalents and this leads to an interesting commentary on the nature of suspense as created by Hitchcock. In the film version, the tension usually springs from the viewer's awareness of what Bruno did and the uncertainty about Guy's reaction to it. In the radio version, what is obvious in the movie is called into question. Thus, the characters become even less unambiguous. This restriction of focalization shifts the focus of suspense and reveals contrasts which remain dormant in Hitchcock's film.

In the case of another adaptation of Hitchcock's movie *The Blind Man*, the audio play has no direct cinematic source, since it was produced as "part of *Unmade Movies*, a season of radio adaptations of unproduced screenplays by the major authors of the 20th century".²⁴ The original unfinished script comes from the 1960s, and the work on it was completed by Mark Gatiss, who also directed it for the BBC in 2015. The story is centred on Larry Keating, a blind jazz pianist, who decides to undergo an operation and have a dead man's eyes transplanted as his own. It turns out that the eyes belonged to a murder victim and the image of the murderer has been preserved on their retinas. As a result of an unsuspected turn of events, Larry takes on the role of an amateur investigator. Together with his nurse Jenny they go on a cruise and discover an intricate intrigue involving Linda Whitehead, the widow of the murdered man, and her stepdaughter Sylvia. The final scenes, in a typically Hitchcockian style, take place on a Hawaiian volcano. Victor

²⁴ BBC, "Hitchcock's *The Blind Man*," *Unmade Movies* (podcast series), accessed June 20, 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06l22pr>. All the details of the play's production have been taken from this website. The other authors included Arthur Miller and Harold Pinter.

Farmer, the murderer, gets his punishment by falling into lava and Larry becomes blind again, since due to the pursuit and excessive strain he does not manage to receive his immunosuppressant injection on time and the transplant is rejected.

In the case of *The Blind Man*, what most prominently shows the interplay between radio and film is, as it were, a doubling of focalization represented by the narrator alongside the fully fledged audio scenes. Aspects of each of the focalizations reveal the ways in which *The Blind Man* attempts to recreate the filmic experience while underscoring its rootedness in the sound medium.

The first aspect of the narrator that is worth mentioning is his voice. Actor Peter Serafinowicz imitates the accent, tone and diction of Alfred Hitchcock, whose way of speaking has become the trademark element of the openings and closings of his renowned series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. *The Blind Man* also opens in a typically Hitchcockian fashion, when the narrator briefly retells an “old wives’ tale” about the retina of a dead man preserving the last image it sees. In this way, the listener is instantly placed within the context of Hitchcock’s legacy, which relies on visual rather than sound associations.

The narrator does not stop at introducing the story, but smoothly goes on to present the setting of the first scene. From this moment on, the narrative parts become interwoven with scenes involving dialogue and all other typical audio drama elements. These narrative parts seem to compensate for the lack of camera shots on a few significant levels.²⁵ Firstly, and most fundamentally, the descriptions are matter-of-fact step-by-step directions for a potential camera operator, like in the scene when Larry is spying on Linda Whitehead: “Through a slight parting of the drapes, we see Linda Whitehead holding a telephone receiver to her ear. She listens, smiles, talks into the phone.” However, oftentimes the language of the descriptions enhances this perspective and focuses on the *visual* aspect of a particular scene. An especially telling example is the moment when Larry opens his new eyes for the first time: “At first, it’s too bright, too vivid with colour. Then, it drains almost to sepia. Then back to too much colour. Then finally it comes to rest as normal.”

²⁵ It is worth adding that the imitation of Hitchcock’s voice imbues all narrative parts with an air of directorial authority. In this way, the visual elements they impose on the listeners may be felt as less prone to individual interpretation, which brings the audio story closer to the literalness of film images.

Such strongly visual references are also clearly discernible in the way the narrator postpones and orders the information he shares with the listener. In this way, he focalizes their aural 'gaze'. When there is a need to create sudden suspense, the narrator conceals crucial information from the listener and reveals it at a precisely timed moment. Such an accumulation of 'planned' tension can be noticed during the scene which takes place on a cruise ship in the middle of the night. After Larry's unsuccessful attempt to spy on Linda, the narrator informs the listener that Larry is observed by a mysterious man. He turns out to be a freelance private detective Herman Graubner. After Larry's suspicions are confirmed in the conversation with Graubner and they part, the narrator in an almost indifferent voice first recounts the movements of each character only to disclose that throughout the exchange there was the third silent participant: "Above them, Victor Farmer is standing on the deck, puffing on a cigarette." Thus, the advantage that Larry seems to have gained thanks to the knowledge he acquired is turned against him once listeners learn that he is not the only one.

Additionally, the narrator also aims to present his own interpretation of visual details. This takes place for instance during the scenes in Disneyland. Listeners learn not so much about the appearance of the pianist and his nurse as about the kind of impression they should create in listeners' minds: "Seen for the first time without her uniform, Jenny is more attractive than ever. Larry, without dark glasses, is like an eager blue-eyed boy trying to take in all the astonishing sights." More importantly, closer to the end of the story, the narrator's voice shows signs of his growing involvement in the events and this especially concerns the fate of Jenny and Larry. During the scenes when all the main characters meet on top of the Hawaiian volcano, the narrator speaks in short sentences and his tone suggests that he is both deeply concerned about the good characters and is fully aware that the finale is full of tension (as in the fragment: "Confused and frightened, Mrs Whitehead picks her way across the desolate volcanic landscape").

The focalization provided by the narrator remains in close collaboration with the radiophonic means of expression. It relies on them not only for scene creation and character development. One can distinguish three major ways in which the narrator's focalization interacts with the information provided in fully dramatised audio scenes. The first one might be called reinforced focalization. It is observable in the scenes during which the audio input instantly confirms the narrator's statements. This is especially noticeable right after Larry's operation. For example, the narrator's words: "This

night Larry lies in his hospital room, eyes heavily bandaged” are accompanied by the sound of Larry’s heavy breathing and painful sighing.

The second one might be considered a focalization shift – the most often used method in the play. In this case, the narrator introduces the scene which then develops into an uninterrupted audio drama. A relevant example is the moment when Linda tricks Larry into visiting her room only to call the ship’s police officers and accuse Larry of attempting to steal her jewellery. The narrator explains who enters Linda’s room, but what follows is an interrogation scene in which only through dialogue, utterances, tone of voice, accent and sound effects listeners can deduce that the chief officer is of Italian origin and during the questioning he is enjoying lobster and wine. In such instances, the visual aspects of scenes are left entirely to listeners’ imagination.

The third, most film-like, interaction might be labelled parallel focalization. The effect is that of two camera shots alternating with each other. A significant scene in this respect is the one in which Larry performs a short recital on the cruise ship, with Linda and Victor Farmer in the audience. In his comments between the songs, he indirectly reveals what he knows about the intrigue he has been investigating. While he is speaking, the narrator in detail describes how Farmer, under the table, tries to slowly take out his gun and prepares to shoot the musician. In this case, the audio means of expression are employed to present what can be communicated without any narrative comment (Larry’s tone of voice while he speaks and sings playing the piano), whereas the narrator becomes responsible for the events to which sound equivalents would be quite hard to find. Thus, the juxtaposition of these two focalizations makes the sequence of events more dynamic by offering an impression of cinematic simultaneity.

The last play to be discussed is the audio adaptation of the film *The Stone Tape* (1972). The script was written by Nigel Kneale, “a key figure in British television”,²⁶ whose numerous works for TV, cinema as well as fictional writings “had elements of ... horror, and a dash of science fiction.”²⁷ *The Stone Tape* is no exception. It tells a story of a group of scientists, led by Peter Brock, who come to an old Victorian mansion in order to conduct

²⁶ Derek Johnston, “Introduction. Nigel Kneale and Horror,” in *Nigel Kneale and Horror: Medium, Time, Culture and Genre*, edited by Derek Johnston (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2025), e-book.

²⁷ Andy Murray, “Introduction. Not Rocket Science,” in *Into The Unknown: The Fantastic Life of Nigel Kneale* (London: Headpress, 2017), e-book.

research on a new medium for recording and preserving sound. Very soon, in the room that was supposed to serve storage purposes, computer programmer Jill hears a sequence of deeply disturbing sounds accompanied by a vision of a ghostly image of a woman. The spectre seems to be running up the stairs that lead nowhere. As other researchers also have a similar (though only aural) experience, Brock puts forward a theory that the stones (apparently of Saxon origin) in the room are some kind of a recording medium and may help him discover what he is looking for. As a result, he discards earlier plans and puts all his efforts into exploring this new possibility. However, his attempts to record and replay the mysterious sound are fruitless. Although Jill, motivated by premonitions of impending danger, insists on continuing research, Brock gives it up in fear of losing his funding and forces Jill to take a long leave due to her apparent over-sensitivity to recent events. Before departure, Jill visits the room and is instantly besieged by sounds which force her to run up the stairs and fall to her death while calling Brock to help her. In the final scene, Brock also visits the room and realizes that he can hear Jill screaming for help as if it was the latest recording preserved in the walls.

The radio adaptation, written by Matthew Graham and Peter Strickland, was broadcast by the BBC in 2015. While the core idea remains the same (scientists trying to understand the origins of the mysterious voice), the audio version diverges in a few significant places from the original. Firstly, the primary aim of the research group is inventing a kind sonic drill for the mining industry. Secondly, once Leo, the group leader and equivalent of Brock, learns about Jill's experience with the scream, he becomes almost obsessed with unravelling the nature of the stones. His obsession remains unshaken throughout the play and this becomes especially noticeable in his "sonic" burial of Jill at the end of the story.

The transfer of *The Stone Tape* from television to audio seems natural for two major reasons. Firstly, the plot revolves around an inexplicable aural experience, which makes sound its "intrinsic" element.²⁸ Secondly, as Johnston notes, in terms of Kneale's work as a whole "particular and effective use of sound" was for Kneale "a stylistic preference" and one of its advantages was the sound's potential to "[play] with the imagination of the

²⁸ Phelim O'Neill, "The Stone Tape: Behind the Screams on Radio 4's Fright Night," *The Guardian*, October 29, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/oct/29/the-stone-tape-behind-the-screams-on-radio-4s-fright-night>.

audience”,²⁹ which echoes the oft-mentioned active role of the audio play listener as “*part of the creative act*”.³⁰

Throughout the film, there is a juxtaposition of external and internal focalization. The former refers to reporting of the events as if from the outside—the camera does not seem to represent any concrete viewpoint. The latter is directly linked to Jill, as both camera shots and visual and sound effects aim to reproduce her experience. This juxtaposition is already made clear at the beginning. While trying to park her car in front of the mansion, Jill is forced to escape being crashed by two trucks with research equipment. Jill is the focus of focalization (the camera imitates the movement of her head inside the car, a few times suddenly zooms in on her terrified face and the changing depth of focus seems to reflect Jill’s blurred vision caused by fear). What is more, at the same time “sound is identified as a key ominous aspect” by “the mixing of the familiar, human or animal, with ... stone, something that should be inanimate.”³¹

The sound at this point serves mainly to enhance the atmosphere of menace and only indirectly refers to Jill’s experience. The woman becomes the focalizer in three pivotal scenes: when she first encounters the ghost, when she faints in the storage room after realizing the stones may have preserved sounds of even older victims, and when she dies. In each of these scenes, however, what takes place is a “separation of image and sound”.³² While the camera shows Jill’s behaviour and face expressions, the sound reproduces only what *she* is hearing. In this way, Jill becomes the auditive internal focalizer, foregrounding the indispensability of sound for the narrative.

It is important to notice Kneale’s requirements for the ghostly scream: “A human scream that has lost its humanity, denatured and dead.”³³ As Johnston observes, the dehumanized nature of the scream “[links] it to the technological”,³⁴ but its human origins underscore the tension created by the researchers’ attempts to maintain a rational approach to the scream’s elusiveness.

²⁹ Derek Johnston, “Sonic Haunting in Nigel Kneale’s Ghost Stories,” in *Nigel Kneale and Horror: Medium, Time, Culture and Genre* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2025), e-book.

³⁰ Hand and Traynor, *The Radio Drama Handbook*, 35; emphasis in the original.

³¹ Johnston, “Sonic Haunting.”

³² The phrase comes from Peter Verstraten’s *Film Narratology* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 47, and is used there to analyze a fragment of the film *The Comfort of Strangers*. I am indebted to Verstraten for inspiring me in this part of my own analysis of *The Stone Tape*.

³³ Quoted in Johnston, “Sonic Haunting.”

³⁴ Johnston, “Sonic Haunting.”

It is this elusiveness, emphasized by the inability of technology to capture the scream, that becomes the central element of the audio adaptation. Firstly, the play has been produced using binaural technology, which creates an impression of three dimensionality. Although more immersive, binaural recording remains an equivalent of external focalization: “The sound is as it would be in real life; outside the head and around” the listener, who “remains in a fixed position between the sources of sound.”³⁵ Subsequent scenes, whose ordering is the result of the editing process, move the listener from one audio space to another.

However, this apparent consistency in focalization is disturbed in two ways throughout the play. Firstly, as if to maintain consistency with the film, the listener is allowed to share Jill’s over-sensitivity. The most moving scene in this respect is when Jill is alone in her room and suddenly starts hearing the scream from behind the walls. The muffled scream is repeated multiple times as if it was played in a loop. Its relentlessness is highlighted by Jill’s desperate prayer—a clear sign she finds it very hard to accept the sound as a purely scientific phenomenon. In this instance, focalization seems to be at the same time external (the listener is in the room with Jill) and internal (the sounds the listener hears are only Jill’s experience).

The second instance of “disturbed” focalization concerns the process of interpreting the sounds recorded in the cellar. Initially, the listener can hear both the analyzed sounds and the researchers’ commentary. However, as Leo becomes increasingly more obsessed with the scream, the listener is given an unmediated access to the recordings. The action of the play is suspended and the listener can hear extended recordings of either experimental frequencies or Leo’s audio journal of his attempts to record the scream. In these cases, the role of microphone as focalizer³⁶ is underscored, with the listener invited to posit his own interpretation of audio events.

The juxtaposition of the abovementioned two types of focalization finds its climax at the end of the play. When, just like in the film, Jill visits the cellar for the last time before leaving the mansion, she is haunted by the sounds which force her to go up the unfinished stone stairs and fall to her death. The listener can hear this event twice in quick succession: first, as it is experienced by Jill herself and shortly after, when Leo, summoned by Jill’s shout, comes to the cellar, finds her dead and realizes that he did not

³⁵ Hand and Traynor, *The Radio Drama Handbook*, 136.

³⁶ See, for example, Lutostański, “A Narratology of Radio Drama,” 120.

switch off the equipment. The recording has preserved only Jill's voice. Significantly, the horror of Jill's death that comes from the very absence of the sounds and voices that led to it acquires its full potential only in the mind of the listener, who is the only one to know both audio "versions" of Jill's tragic accident.

In investigating film-to-radio adaptations, focalization seems to offer a useful insight into the ways audio drama can be "acutely visual"³⁷ while maintaining its auditory "creative power".³⁸ The variety of approaches may range from omitting information (as in *Strangers on a Train*) through reinforcing, imposing or manipulating it (as in *The Blind Man*) to bypassing the language input and transferring it into purely auditory expression (as in "The Stone Tape"). It ought to be stressed that the presented overview does not cover other minute nuances in focalization that can be found in the discussed plays. One example could be Larry Keating's quick dive into a pool when for a brief moment the audio replicates underwater sounds as they could be heard directly by the character, which unexpectedly adds another layer of focalization to the story. This, however, only testifies to the still unexplored potential of audio drama art, half-ironically referred to in the last words spoken by Hitchcock/Serafinowicz in *The Blind Man*: "And though this entertainment has been largely concerned with the visual realm, we thank you for listening."

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³⁷ Bonnie M. Miller, "'The Pictures Are Better on Radio': A Visual Analysis of American Radio Drama from the 1920s to the 1950s," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 38, no. 2 (2018): 322.

³⁸ Verhulst and Smith, "Radio Drama," 117.

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